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**A REPORT ON THE STATE  
OF ASIAN AMERICANS  
IN NEW JERSEY**

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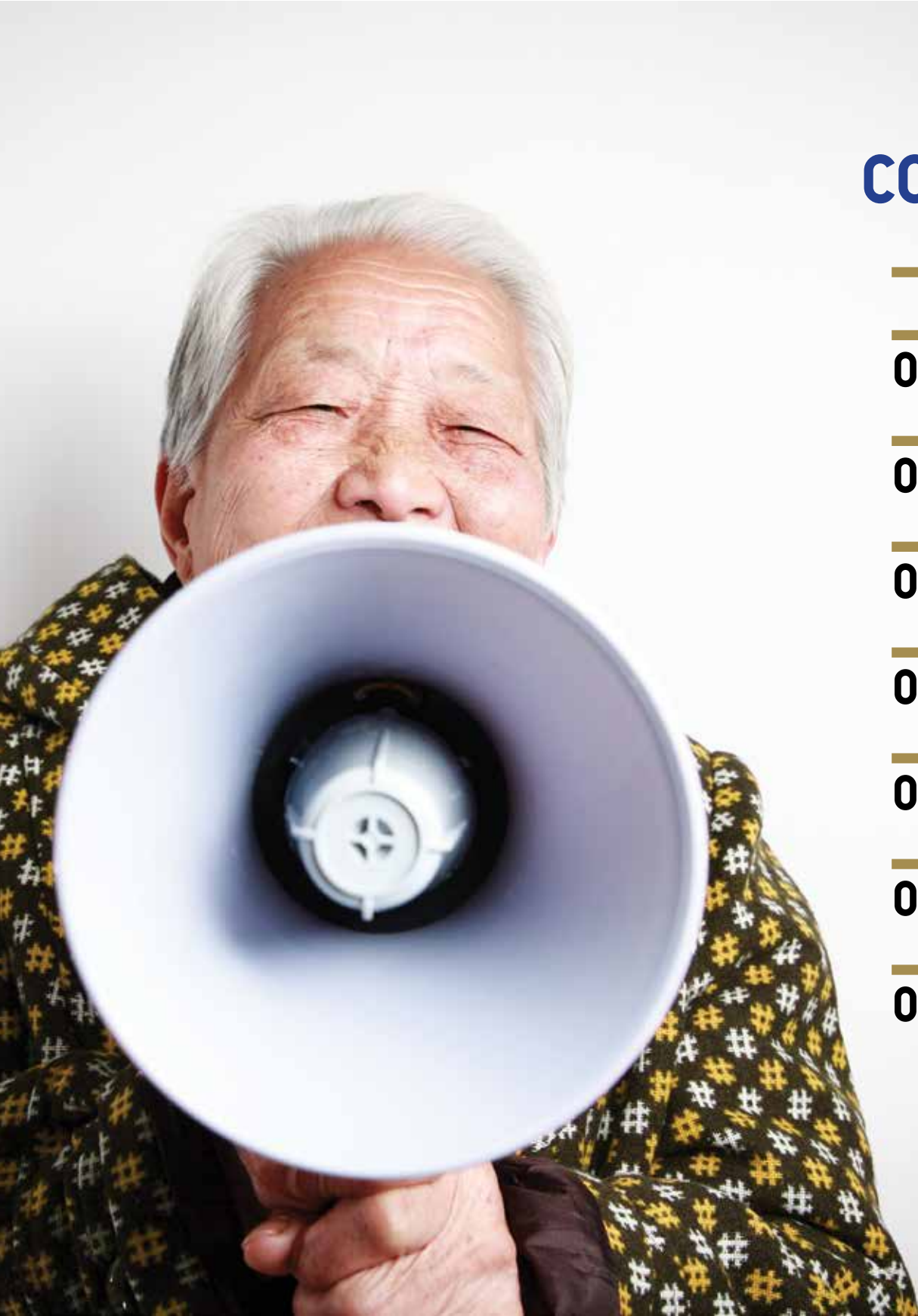
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Jersey Promise is a nonpartisan, nonprofit policy, education and advocacy organization. For more information, please contact us:



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# FOREWARD

## BY THE FOUNDERS OF JERSEY PROMISE

If you are one of the many New Jerseyans who saw the popular movie *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), you would never know that 26%<sup>1</sup> of Asian American households in NJ struggle day-to-day to survive. We are the fastest growing racial group in the Garden State, exceeding 10% (941,057<sup>2</sup>) of the state population, with growing significance in many different spheres of NJ life, yet, we are the least understood and least studied community among the general population, policymakers and civic leaders. Misconceptions and stereotypes of the Asian American community are prevalent in mainstream media and culture, in our public schools and court rooms, on the factory floor and shipyards and the numerous Main Streets that make up the 565 municipalities of our state.

As a result of the formal legal restrictions placed on Asian immigration until the mid-1960s, only in the past couple decades are Asian Americans becoming a critical mass in metropolitan areas around the country. A large majority (2/3rds<sup>3</sup>) of Asian Americans in NJ are immigrants. Therefore, Asian Americans are often more self-contained or inward-looking as compared to other racial groups. We are focused on our own lives and families trying to make it in NJ, as was the case for the many countless immigrants arriving to these shores before us. Our communities are often misunderstood and misrepresented. We write this report, in part, to share our story and our experiences as New Jerseyans and Americans.

There is a perception that many of us are doing well and social demographer William Petersen even coined the term “model minority” in the mid-1960s, but we think this myth has largely worked against Asian Americans and we will debunk this myth in this report. The reality is that Asian Americans have the largest income inequality of any racial group and as result,

an estimated 26% of Asian American households live below the Asset Limited, Income Constrained Employed (ALICE) threshold and struggle day-to-day to survive.

Many Asian Americans feel that our struggles are invisible, that our work and contributions are ignored or minimized, and that we are scapegoated and used as a racial wedge to divide different communities of color. We are used by the conservative right to dismantle affirmative action policies, although these policies for the most part have benefited Asian Americans, while at the same time, progressives don't trust us as being people-of-color enough. We are often left out of the White – Black/Brown debate.

In fact, Asian Americans played a key part in the development of our civil rights laws and the critical legal cases that determined equal protection in the United States. Our immigration pattern is turning out to be like many other immigrant groups before us -- from Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. With enough time for acculturation, we become mainstream Americans while at the same time, we leave our mark and change the character of Jersey and American culture.

As the national conversation veers dangerously toward more tribalism and increasing polarization, and as hate crimes are on the rise, it is imperative to build understanding and bring disparate communities in NJ together. We need to take notice of the rapidly changing demographics of the state that will lead NJ to be the first state in the northeast United States to be majority-minority and our public schools are on the cutting edge of these changes with an enrollment of 56% students-of-color in the 2017-18 academic year.

Hence, Jersey Promise was established and incorporated in 2018 as a nonpartisan, nonprofit policy, education and advocacy

organization. Our mission is to serve the Asian American community, especially for lower-income and disadvantaged populations, and build understanding among all of NJ's diverse communities. We seek to raise awareness of the Asian American community in NJ, launch original research, organize civic education programs and to advocate for specific policies that would not only serve the Asian American community, but lift up all communities who are struggling and to build a stronger New Jersey.

We like to say we are “advocating for Asian Americans and New Jersey.” As the name Jersey Promise suggests, we strive to reach our full potential as a diverse state and to bring the wonderful mosaic of our communities together.

For us, it starts by telling the story of who we are as Asian Americans, a widely diverse, heterogeneous community. In sharing our story, we take an evidence-based approach, so we have assembled some of the latest available research about the Asian American community in NJ and nationwide to present public policy recommendations to advance the causes of the Asian American community. We have also included the findings of our own original survey to give you a sense of how Asian Americans are living their lives in NJ today.

We hope the stories, studies and history enrich your understanding as we work together to improve life for all New Jerseyans.

Respectfully,

**Ronald Chen**  
**Jun Choi**  
**Dr. Khyati Joshi**  
**Richard Sun**

May 2019

<sup>1</sup> ALICE: A study of Financial Hardship in New Jersey (2018). United Way ALICE Project. [https://www.dropbox.com/s/h3huycfbak512t2/18\\_UW\\_ALICE\\_Report\\_NJ\\_Update\\_10.19.18\\_Lowres.pdf?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/h3huycfbak512t2/18_UW_ALICE_Report_NJ_Update_10.19.18_Lowres.pdf?dl=0)  
<sup>2</sup> Census 2017, American Community Survey (ACS) 1 Year.  
<sup>3</sup> Census 2015, ACS.

# WHERE WE LIVE

Map of Total Asian American Population  
by Municipality (2017)

# 941,057

ASIAN AMERICANS IN NEW JERSEY



# 384,072

INDIAN

# 168,323

CHINESE

# 136,721

FILIPINO/A

# 104,899

KOREAN

# 31,431

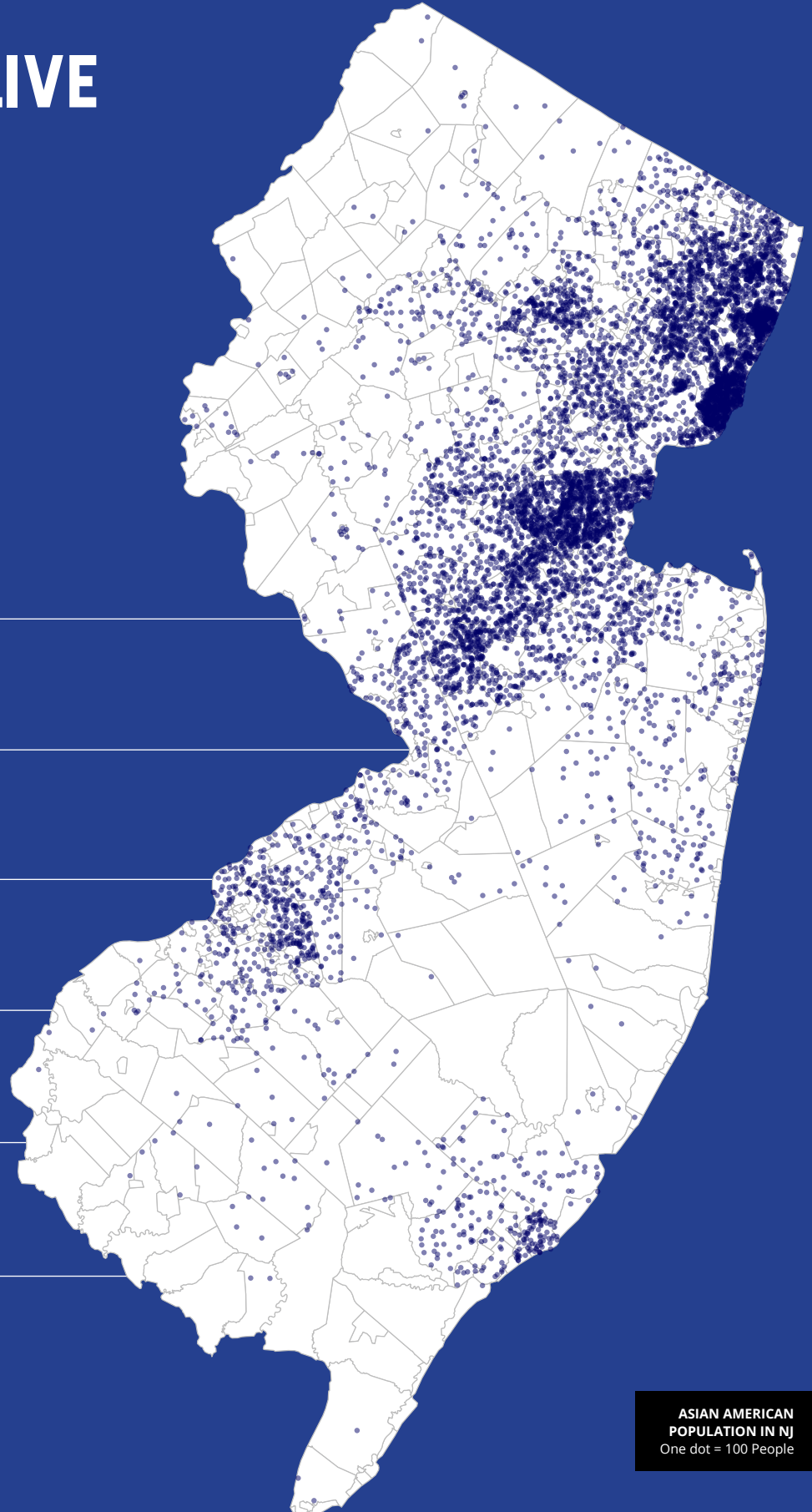
PAKISTANI

# 26,400

VIETNAMESE

# 21,115

JAPANESE



ASIAN AMERICAN  
POPULATION IN NJ  
One dot = 100 People



**01**

**INTRODUCTION:  
BACKGROUND  
AND HISTORY  
DR. KHYATI Y. JOSHI**



## ASIAN AMERICANS IN NEW JERSEY

New Jerseyans of Asian descent represent 10.4%<sup>1</sup> (941,057) of the state's total population and are the fastest growing racial group today. Only two states, California and Hawaii, have a larger Asian American population as a percentage of their total population. In fact, more than half (56%) the Asian American population in the nation is concentrated in just five states— California, Hawaii, New Jersey, Texas and Washington.<sup>2</sup>

The Census Bureau's category of Asian Americans includes people of Indian, Chinese, Filipino/a, Korean, Pakistani, Vietnamese, Japanese, Bangladeshi, Taiwanese, Thai, Sri Lankan, Indonesian, Nepalese, Cambodian and Laotian descent, among others. The Asian American category also includes biracial and multiracial Americans.<sup>3</sup> Along with the diversity of cultures, Asian Americans have vastly different migration histories, numerous religious traditions and a wide spectrum of socio-economic classes.

Asian Americans live in all 21 counties and in every part of the state. They are largely concentrated in the northern-central counties of Middlesex (24% of the total county population is Asian American), Bergen (16%), Hudson (15%), Somerset, Mercer and Morris.

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<sup>1</sup> Census 2017, American Community Survey (ACS) 1 Year.  
<sup>2</sup> Ramakrishnan, Karthick, and Farah Z. Ahmad (2014). *State of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Series: A multifaceted portrait of a growing population*, Center for American Progress. <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/AAPIRReport-INTRO.pdf>  
<sup>3</sup> More than any other racial group, Asian Americans have the highest rates of bi-racial and multi-racial households. According to Pew Research Center, 29% of Asian Americans nationwide are marrying non-Asian Americans.

Indian Americans (384,072) are the largest Asian American ethnic group and the largest immigrant ethnic group moving to NJ. Almost two-thirds of the Indian American community reside in Middlesex (130,458), Hudson (48,450), Bergen (39,187) and Somerset (30,864) counties with large concentrations in Edison, Jersey City, Woodbridge and South Brunswick. Oak Tree Road in Edison/Woodbridge (Iselin), and Newark Avenue in Jersey City are well known destinations for their Indian ethnic shops and restaurants. Indian American families throughout the northeast and beyond travel long distances to visit the specialty shops in these dynamic cultural centers.

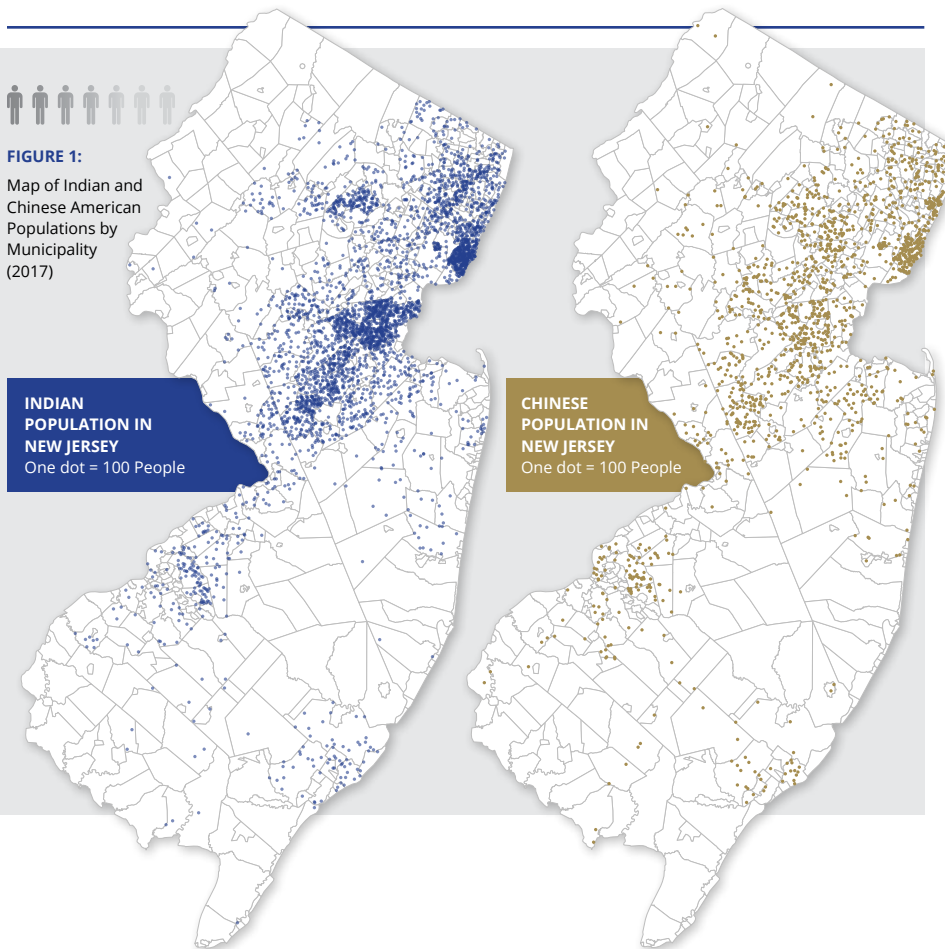


India Day Parade on Oak Tree Road. Photo Credit: Indian Business Association

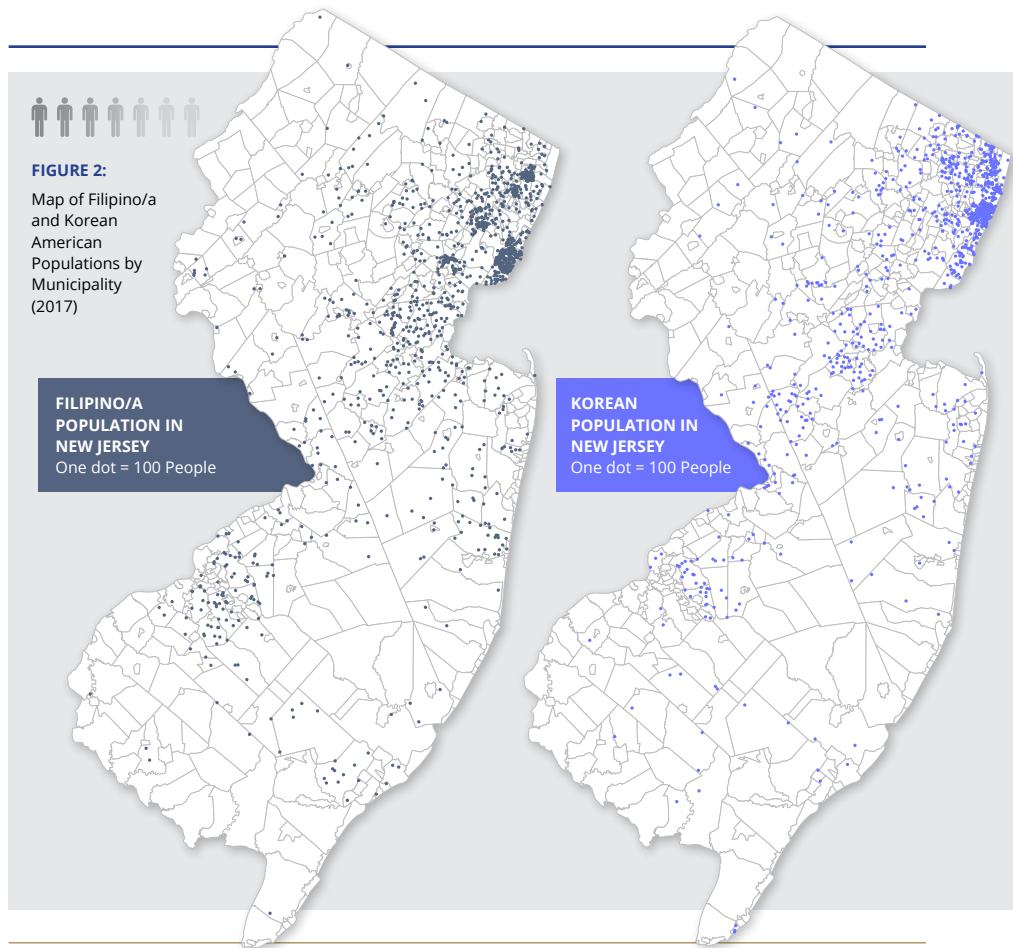
Chinese Americans (168,323) are the second largest Asian American ethnic group, largely residing in Middlesex (30,628), followed by Bergen (23,190) and Hudson (18,253) counties with significant populations in Somerset,

Morris and Monmouth counties. Chinese Americans live in towns such as Edison, East Brunswick, Parsippany-Troy Hills and West Windsor Township in large numbers. The

Chinese and Taiwanese American communities have built large Chinese language schools in all these population centers to promote their language and culture among their children.







**TABLE 3:** Asian American Population by the Largest Ethnic Subgroups by County (2017)

Asian Population by Selected Groups by County: New Jersey, 2017							
County	Indian	Chinese	Filipino/a	Korean	Pakistani	Vietnamese	Japanese
Atlantic	7,150	4,487	3,571	1,219	1,468	4,167	447
Bergen	39,187	23,190	24,537	59,018	3,830	1,283	7,378
Burlington	11,118	3,627	4,558	2,990	1,489	782	1,296
Camden	9,488	5,756	5,464	3,227	1,066	4,919	597
Cape May	145	208	310	270	0	124	98
Cumberland	741	817	528	291	23	46	340
Essex	15,434	11,228	10,475	3,133	1,128	1,397	1,269
Gloucester	2,464	1,785	2,959	832	529	658	455
Hudson	48,450	18,253	24,049	5,755	4,225	2,508	2,435
Hunterdon	1,902	1,594	821	417	113	125	92
Mercer	21,145	11,039	3,115	3,714	810	382	1,238
Middlesex	130,458	30,628	17,293	7,539	10,558	3,898	1,327
Monmouth	12,980	11,864	6,468	2,857	916	990	486
Morris	25,739	13,140	6,280	3,974	2,020	1,575	921
Ocean	3,239	2,016	4,944	1,580	257	660	405
Passaic	12,195	3,196	4,930	2,483	731	526	504
Salem	161	182	128	249	36	0	80
Somerset	30,864	15,976	5,535	2,581	1,505	1,166	746
Sussex	948	793	1,080	461	126	41	80
Union	9,172	7,933	8,679	1,887	436	996	815
Warren	1,092	611	997	422	165	157	106
<b>New Jersey</b>	<b>384,072</b>	<b>168,323</b>	<b>136,721</b>	<b>104,899</b>	<b>31,431</b>	<b>26,400</b>	<b>21,115</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 Census of Population and Housing

Filipino/a Americans (136,721) are the third largest Asian American ethnic group. They live primarily in Bergen (24,537), Hudson (24,049) and Middlesex (17,293) counties and in city/towns such as Jersey City, Bergenfield Borough, Union and Belleville townships. Filipino/a Americans have the longest history in the US and NJ of any Asian American ethnic group.

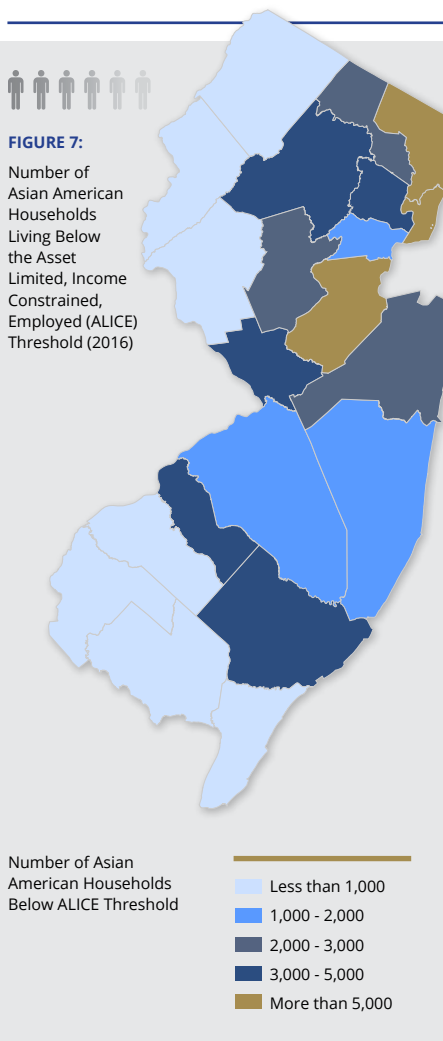
Korean Americans (104,899) are the fourth largest group. The majority of the state's Korean American population lives in Bergen (59,018) County in city/towns such as Palisades Park, Fort Lee, Ridgefield and Leonia. The center of Korean American immigrant life are their families and their churches or places of worship. Large Christian churches of various denominations—Presbyterian, Methodist, Evangelical, Roman Catholic and others—serve as a their social and community center.

Pakistani (31,431), Vietnamese (26,400) and Japanese (21,115) Americans make up the fifth, sixth and seventh largest groups. Middlesex (10,558) and Hudson (4,225) counties are home to the largest Pakistani American communities, while Camden (4,919) and Atlantic (4,167) counties host the largest Vietnamese American populations. Japanese Americans primarily reside in Bergen, Hudson and other northern counties. Table 3 provides a more detailed breakdown of the Asian American ethnic subgroups by county.

**FIGURE 4:** Rapid Growth of the Asian American Population in NJ by Decade

Year	Asian American Population	Total NJ Population
1960	8,778	6,066,782
1970	23,333	7,168,164
1980	103,848	7,364,823
1990	272,521	7,730,188
2000	483,605	8,414,350
2010	728,769	8,791,894
2017	941,057	9,005,644

High rates of immigration from Asia to NJ account for much of the rapid growth since 1970. Since about 2011, immigrants from Asia have consistently exceeded the number of immigrants from Latin America and other Spanish speaking nations (see Figure 5).



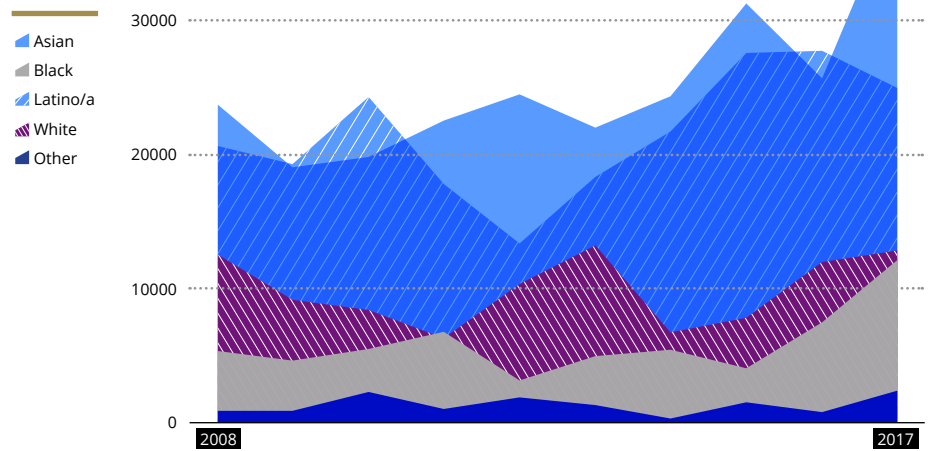
**FIGURE 7:** Number of Asian American Households Living Below the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) Threshold (2016)

Number of Asian American Households Below ALICE Threshold

- Less than 1,000
- 1,000 - 2,000
- 2,000 - 3,000
- 3,000 - 5,000
- More than 5,000

**FIGURE 5:** New Immigrants to NJ by Race (2008-2017)

**New Immigrants (Arrived within 1 Year) by Race**



As a result, two-thirds of Asian Americans in NJ are immigrants. Another important characteristic of the community is that 36% have limited English proficiency (See Figure 6), while 46% speak an Asian language very well. English proficiency correlates to employment and earnings, educational achievement and access to quality health care. As a comparison, 14% of Latino/a Americans reported speaking English less than very well and 7% not at all in 2014 nationwide. Among Asian American seniors, the percentage of whom are limited English proficient is substantially higher.

**FIGURE 6:** Limited English Proficient (LEP) Population in NJ (2017)<sup>4</sup>

	% Asian American
Speaks a language other than English very well	46%
Speaks English less than very well	36%

**ASIAN AMERICANS FACE THE GREATEST INCOME INEQUALITY**

Asian Americans, along with the general population, face growing income inequality. In fact, Asian Americans have the highest income inequality of any racial group in NJ and nationwide.<sup>5</sup> While they do earn the

highest median household income (\$82,096), that masks the growing inequality between the lowest and highest income groups where 26% of all Asian American households lived below the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) threshold of \$74,748<sup>6</sup> for a family of four in 2016. ALICE is a measure of financial hardship developed by the United Way and provides a more realistic estimate of who is struggling in our communities than the federal poverty rate. Certain subgroups such as Hmong, Cambodian and Laotian Americans face significantly higher rates of economic hardship. Also, when taking into account that the average NJ Asian American household tends to be larger (3.62 persons<sup>7</sup>) than the average NJ White American household (3.08), the median household income figure suggests Asian American households are not doing as well as they appear. Lastly, when educational attainment is factored in, Asian Americans are earning less than White Americans by as much as 22% for college educated males.<sup>8</sup>

Asian Americans also face the greatest wealth inequality of any racial group. Asian American households at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile (top 10 percent) had 168 times the wealth of the bottom 20<sup>th</sup> percentile nationwide in 2010-2013.<sup>9</sup> The median income for Asian Americans in the bottom half of the income distribution was \$18,270 in 2010-2013, significantly lower than the \$42,238 figure for White Americans.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Census ACS, Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), 1 Year 2017. AAPI Data.

<sup>5</sup> Pew Research. Income Inequality in the US is Rising Most Rapidly Among Asians (2018). <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/07/12/income-inequality-in-the-u-s-is-rising-most-rapidly-among-asians/>

<sup>6</sup> ALICE: A Study of Financial Hardship in New Jersey (2018). United Way ALICE Project. [https://www.dropbox.com/s/h3huycfbak512t2/18\\_UW\\_ALICE\\_Report\\_NJ\\_Update\\_10.19.18\\_Lowres.pdf?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/h3huycfbak512t2/18_UW_ALICE_Report_NJ_Update_10.19.18_Lowres.pdf?dl=0)

<sup>7</sup> Census ACS 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Racial Wealth Snapshot: Asian Americans. *Racial Wealth Snapshot: Asian Americans | Prosperity Now*, prosperitynow.org/blog/racial-wealth-snapshot-asian-americans

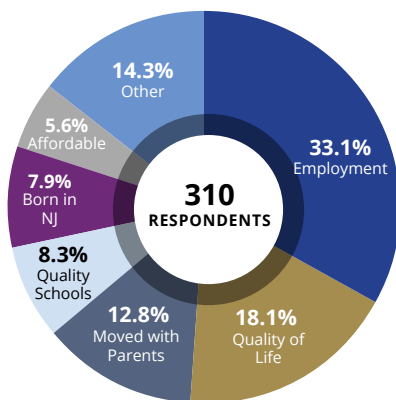
<sup>9</sup> Weller, C. & Thompson, J. (2016). *Wealth Inequality Among Asian Americans Greater than Among Whites*. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2016/12/20/295359/wealth-inequality-among-asian-americans-greater-than-among-whites/>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid 9.

According to Jersey Promise’s survey<sup>11</sup> conducted in March to April, 2019, 310 adult Asian Americans responded that they moved to NJ for the following reasons: employment (32%), quality of life (18%) and they moved to NJ with parents (13%).

### JERSEY PROMISE SURVEY

Why Asian Americans moved to NJ



## CENSUS DEFINITION OF ASIAN AMERICANS

The US Census classification system considers "Asian American" to be a standard racial category in statistical tabulations and is an official designation that includes the following ethnic groups: Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Pakistani, Vietnamese, Japanese, Bangladeshi, Taiwanese, Thai, Sri Lankan, Indonesian, Nepalese, Cambodian, Laotian, Burmese, Malaysian, Mongolian, Hmong, Bhutanese, and Other Asian. In the racial classification used by the U.S. Census Bureau in 1980 and 1990, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (includes Guamanian or Chamorron and Samoan among others) were categorized as belonging to the same group as Asian Americans, hence the term: "Asian and Pacific Islander" Americans or "APIs." Census 2000 reclassified Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders into a separate category. Many however, adopt the term Asian American and Pacific Islander or "AAPI" to describe the combined categories. For the purposes of this report, we simplify the terminology by describing AAPIs as "Asian American."

## HISTORY OF ASIAN IMMIGRATION

Asian immigration to the US began in the 1700s when the Filipinos entered New Orleans, escaping Spanish galleons in the Caribbean. The better-known Asian migration to the West Coast began in the late 1840s when laborers arrived to work during the gold rush to work in the vineyards and helping to build the Transcontinental Railroad. Chinese, Indian, Korean and Japanese families landed on Angel Island,<sup>12</sup> the island in San Francisco Bay that served as an immigration station processing immigrants from many different nations.

Hostility against Asian laborers began soon after they arrived. The large number of immigrants stirred native (White Anglo Saxon Protestant) sentiment. Asians were referred to as "coolies" and considered immoral, as they were mostly non-Christian. Organizations such as the Immigration Restriction League and the Know Nothing Party lobbied government officials to restrict and limit immigration. For example, the

Asiatic Exclusion League questioned what would become of the U.S. "if this horde of fanatics should be received in our midst?"<sup>13</sup> Scientific racism established the categories of 'Mongoloid,' 'Negroid,' and 'Caucasoid;' this pseudoscience propagated and refined the notion of white superiority. Mainstream society was worried about the "yellow peril" contaminating the US population and culture. This nativist sentiment existed at all levels of society, from newspaper cartoons and stories to government policy.

Ultimately, the nativist lobbying efforts succeeded. The US Congress passed the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, restricting the immigration of Chinese laborers. This legislation was the first time in US history that a group of people was prohibited from entering because of national origin. The law was renewed 10 years later, and then, in 1902, was renewed indefinitely. Scientific racism along with the nativist organizations' lobbying efforts led to the passage of the Immigration Act of 1917 which barred immigration from most of Asia, excluding Japan. There would no longer be Koreans,

<sup>11</sup> Survey methodology: Jersey Promise conducted an online and in-person (for Limited English Proficient and lower-income populations) survey from March 6 to April 30, 2019 among Asian American adults who live or work full-time in NJ. 103 responses were gathered in-person with the assistance of a translator. The remaining 207 completed the online survey. The survey only provides directional information regarding the community as Jersey Promise does not deem this survey to be scientific due to sampling challenges.

<sup>12</sup> Lee, Erika, and Judy Yung. *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> See South Asian American Digital Archive: <https://www.saada.org/item/20101217-157> and Takaki, Ronald. *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1988.



the “space race” after the launch of Sputnik in 1957, and by President Kennedy’s setting “the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the Earth,” the US wanted engineers, astrophysicists, and others who could help establish the US space program. The US was both building the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and supporting a vigorous and expanding private defense technology industry. Second, the US had recently emerged from the Korean War and was becoming embroiled in the Vietnam conflict, while also dramatically expanding the US medical system through the creation of Medicare for the elderly and Medicaid for the poor. As a result, the US had a massive need, civilian and military, for doctors, nurses, and other health care workers.

Thus, the doors opened to immigration from Asia, based on “state selection”.<sup>18</sup> The US was looking for immigrants with a specific professional profile. Those who were allowed to emigrate were people with advanced degrees and the social capital and family economic and educational backgrounds that came with those degrees. This immigration policy partly explains the high average educational levels among Asian Americans today. Asian immigrants occupying these professional spaces resulted in some economic success. As a result, *US News and World Report* helped popularize the concept “model minority,” borrowing from the term social demographer William Petersen coined in the mid-1960s.<sup>19</sup>

This stereotype of the “model minority” continues to plague Asian American communities today. The Asian American example is held up as a wedge in race relations, with some asking: “Why can’t you do well like them?” By ignoring the different history of African, Latino/a, and other people of color, this stereotype has harmed Asian Americans’ ability to build cross-racial alliances. It propagates the idea that there are “good” and “bad” racial minorities, and also the false connection between race and educational or economic achievement. Asian Americans are seen as White or nearly White by some, even though they have faced discrimination, exclusion,

Indians, Chinese, Malay, and other Asians entering the US. Finally, the Immigration Act of 1924 sealed the fate of Asians wanting to emigrate to the US. The doors would not open again until 1965 with a few exceptions. “America must be kept American,” said President Coolidge as he signed the bill into law.<sup>14</sup>

When the Philippines became a US territory following the Spanish-American war in 1898, Filipinos were classified as US nationals but not US citizens. Without naturalization rights, they were unaffected by the exclusionary laws surrounding Asian immigration. When the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 gave the Philippines independence, it also reclassified Filipinos as ‘aliens’ for immigration purposes, restricting immigration to 50 Filipino/a persons per year.<sup>15</sup> They were also no longer permitted to own land or businesses.

Between 1924 and 1950, 90% of immigrants were Europeans or Canadian.<sup>16</sup> From 2008-2017, the most recent Census figures available, most immigrants to NJ come from Asia especially India, China, South and West Asia (see Table 8). In fact, India sent more immigrants to NJ than the next three nations including all of South America (except Colombia and Brazil) combined.

**TABLE 8:** Top Sending Countries to NJ (2008-17)<sup>17</sup>

Origin	No of Immigrants
India	105,593
China	32,645
Dominican Republic	32,128
Other South America*	24,724
Other Western Asia**	23,018
Mexico	18,630
Colombia	14,917
Philippines	13,492
Korea	12,637

\* Includes all South American countries except Colombia and Brazil

\*\* Includes all South and West Asian countries except India

The US opened its doors to immigration from all countries around the globe with the passage of the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act of 1965. But the 1965 Act didn’t open America’s doors to ALL would-be immigrants. Instead “preferences” determined the immigration opportunity to members of specific professions based upon national need. In the 1960s, those preferences were guided by two particular concerns. Spurred by the perception of falling behind the Soviets in

<sup>14</sup> Ngai, Mae M. “Legacies of Exclusion: Illegal Chinese immigration during the Cold War Years.” *Journal of American Ethnic History* (1998): 3-35.

<sup>15</sup> Erika Lee and Judy Yung, *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Marcelo M Suárez-Orozco, Carola Suárez-Orozco, and Desirée Qin-Hilliard, *The New Immigration: An Interdisciplinary Reader* (Psychology Press, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Census PUMS / ACS 2008-2017.

<sup>18</sup> Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> William Petersen, “Success Story: Japanese American Style”, *New York Times Magazine*, January 9, 1966



members have come to the US under this Act. Then the Refugee Act of 1980 created the Office of Refugee Resettlement, which sets the number of refugee admissions at 50,000 per year (unless in case of an emergency). The office was charged with providing resources for placement and training, ESL courses and other services for the settlement process.<sup>20</sup>

## CITIZENSHIP

Who can be an American citizen? Before answering the question, it's important to understand that race has been a factor in US life since before the founding in 1776 and had a role in determining who could become a citizen since the 1790 Naturalization Act which declared only free White men could be citizens. Relying on pseudo-racial science, Asians were not categorized as White and were identified as "aliens ineligible for citizenship."

and violence throughout US history and continue to face these challenges today. The model minority myth, in particular, places obstacles on newer immigrants with more varied educational backgrounds and less social capital.

US policy favoring professionals was abandoned in the 1970s, replaced by a "family unification" policy in the 1980s and later by other preferences, such as for high tech workers in the late 1990s. One major piece of legislation was the Immigration Act of 1990, which allocated visas for family reunification, H-1B highly skilled temporary workers, H-2B seasonal non-agricultural workers and Temporary Protection Status (TPS) was awarded to nationals of countries suffering from armed conflicts or natural disasters, which has been in the news recently concerning the revocation of the TPS for Nepalese, who arrived after the devastating earthquake in 2015. Also part of this immigration act was the the immigrant investor (EB-5) visa program which grants lawful permanent residence to foreign nationals who invest \$500,000 or \$1 million in US businesses and create or preserve at least ten American jobs.

The result is that newer Asian American immigrants exhibit much more class diversity than before. Many immigrants and their children lack the economic means or social capital that created the "model minority" standard, yet many are still held to that standard in schools and in the workplace.

Not all Asian Americans migration histories are about immigration, or voluntary migration to the U.S. US foreign policy in Southeast Asia led to refugees arriving to the US from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. As refugees, they were forced to flee their homelands because of persecution and trauma. Upon arrival, many arrived with both psychological and physical wounds. The first refugees arrived after the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam established in 1979 the Orderly Departure Program, permitting 5,000 Vietnamese to come annually to the United States. In 1987, the passage of the Amerasian Homecoming Act. As a result, over 30,000 children (and their immediate family members) of American military and civilian personnel stationed in Vietnam during the conflict arrived in the US. About 75,000 Amerasians and family



<sup>20</sup> Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (Simon and Schuster, 2015).



Just as Asian Americans have been part of the US immigration narrative, they have had a pivotal role in the US history of naturalization and citizenship. Many Asians petitioned the courts seeking naturalized citizenship. Between 1878 and 1952, Filipino/a, Indian, Chinese, and Japanese all attempted to become US citizens; altogether there were fifty-two racial pre-requisite cases.<sup>21</sup> Two citizenship cases decided by the US Supreme Court: *Ozawa v. United States*, 260 U.S. 178 (1922) and *United States v Bhagat Singh Thind*, 261 U.S. 204 (1923) reinforced racial parameters on citizenship.

Takao Ozawa was born in Japan, moved to the territory of Hawaii, and later lived in California. He graduated from high school in Berkeley, California, and was a student at the University of California for three years. He had children, all born in the United States. He had lived in the United States continuously for twenty years when he applied in 1914 for naturalization, the process of becoming a US citizen. In his brief, Mr. Ozawa argued that the family spoke English at home and attended American churches. Nevertheless, the US government opposed his application to become a citizen on the grounds that he was not "White." The US Supreme Court agreed with the government: Ozawa was not eligible to become a citizen, using the "scientific" argument that as someone who clearly was part of the Mongoloid race, he was not White.<sup>22</sup>

By the time the US Supreme Court heard the case *U.S. v Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923), many Indians had naturalized and become US citizens on a case-by-case basis. Mr. Thind served in the United States Army during World War I, and later Thind remained in the U.S., earned his Ph.D. theology and English literature from the University of California at Berkeley, and delivered lectures in metaphysics. Nevertheless, in the court proceedings, the lawyers for the US attacked Thind's "meltability" by defining Hinduism as an alien and barbaric system and not fit for membership in the "civilization of white men."<sup>23</sup> The Thind decision recognized the "fact" that Indians were "scientifically" classified as Caucasians but concluded that Indians were in fact "nonwhite" in popular US understanding. As nonwhites, Indians in the United States were ineligible for the privileges of White status, such as the acquisition of citizenship, and with it the right to own land. As a consequence of the *Thind* verdict, South Asian Americans were divested of citizenship. The Courts also made a leap in racial logic to apply this rule of ineligibility to people of Korean, Thai, Vietnamese and Indonesian heritage and to other Asian persons who represented discrete ethnic groups, and, in contemporary anthropological terms, different racial groups.

The Court's acknowledgement that eastern and southern Europeans would fit in well in this country and its insistence that Asians wouldn't, rendered double meaning to assimilation. For Europeans, assimilation was a matter of socialization, and citizenship its ultimate reward. Asians, no matter how committed to American ideals or practiced in American customs, remained racially unassimilable and unalterably foreign.<sup>24</sup>

## HISTORY OF ASIAN AMERICANS IN NEW JERSEY

“ Joseph Bernardo Landsman, aged 21, born Manila, occupation Cook, resident of New Jersey, enlisted on March 31, 1865, for 3 years. Received bounty of \$100.”<sup>25</sup> ”

Unknown to many, a large number of Filipino American immigrants signed up to fight in the US Civil War in the Army and Navy.

In the 1880s, Bengali Muslim peddlers began arriving in New York – passing through immigration at Castle Gardens on the Southern tip of Manhattan, and then Ellis Island after its facilities opened in 1892.<sup>26</sup> These men did not stay in New York, nor did they follow the patterns of migration that became common after 1965, when many immigrants moved on to the cities of the North and Midwest. Instead, they headed for New Jersey's beach boardwalk towns – Asbury Park, Atlantic City, Long Branch – and then turned southward to New Orleans. The first mention of Bengali peddlers in the United States, dating from 1891, places them in just such a tourist site – in the New Jersey seaside resorts of Atlantic City and Asbury Park.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Before this act, Filipinos were classified as US nationals, but not US citizens, and while they were allowed to migrate relatively freely, they were denied naturalization rights within the US, unless they were citizens by birth in the mainland US.

<sup>22</sup> Lopez, Ian Haney. *White by law: The legal construction of race*. NYU Press, 1997.

<sup>23</sup> Although Thind was a Sikh, at the time, Indians in the United States and in Canada were commonly called Hindoos (Hindus) irrespective of their faith.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid* 8.

<sup>25</sup> Muster Rolls for USS Conemaugh; Naval Rendezvous Reports, the National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>26</sup> Bald, Vivek. *Bengali Harlem and the lost histories of South Asian America*. Harvard University Press, 2013

<sup>27</sup> Bald, Vivek. "Selling the East in the American South: Bengali Muslim Peddlers in New Orleans and Beyond, 1880-1920," in *Asian Americans in Dixie: Race and Migration in the South*, ed. Khyati Y. Joshi and Jigna Desai (2013).

“Oriental” items like silks, embroidered cloth and small trinkets and curios were accessible and affordable markers of the good life, and the demand for them in Atlantic City and Asbury Park was significant enough that both resorts not only featured permanent “Oriental gift shops” along their boardwalks but became fertile ground for individual fancy goods peddlers from “the East.” The number of Bengali peddlers was large enough to warrant a mention far off in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, which published an item describing the “very interesting” “dark-skinned Hindoo peddlers” who had come to “infest the seaside resorts of the Jersey coast in summer.”<sup>28</sup>

While the addresses of the “Hindoo peddlers” stayed relatively constant over time, suggesting that at least a small number of Indian men stayed in New Jersey year-round, most of the peddlers were as transient as the resorts’ other seasonal workers. Shipping records show that some members of this network made regular trips out of the US each year, most likely to renew stocks of goods and/or shepherd younger traders through from India into the US.

It is a little known fact that Newark had a thriving Chinatown, which was the largest enclave of Chinese Americans on the East Coast between World War I and World War II. Most residents originally came from the same three villages in south Guangdong Province, near the modern Hong Kong. Located on Mulberry St. between the current federal courthouse and the Prudential Arena, it was unusual among other Chinese communities in the U.S. in that there were many married couples. Chinese men had been admitted to the U.S. as laborers but rarely women. Thus, there were also children, i.e. natural born U.S. citizens, born in the community, which therefore catered to families. By 1920, there were approximately 3000 people living in Newark’s Chinatown, which had developed into a bustling and economically vibrant neighborhood. However, in the 1930s, raids by police and the INS (now ICE) enforcing the Chinese Exclusion Act and opium laws decimated the community. In 1933 alone, 700 families left Chinatown. With the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, and realizing the damage to Newark’s



Muslim Center of Greater Princeton. Photo Credit: Azra Baig

infrastructure that had been wrought by this misguided policy, attempts were made to reverse the decline, but to no avail. By 2004, only one family from the original residents remained, and with the redevelopment of the area triggered by the construction of the arena, there remains almost no physical evidence of its existence.<sup>29</sup>

Seabrook Farms in Cumberland County was home to many Japanese Americans following World War II. Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, the US government began to detain people of Japanese descent across the nation. Internment camps eventually sprang up across the American South and West. When the war finally began to wind down, thousands of other detainees were offered freedom as well as employment. All they had to do was relocate to a fertile stretch of farmland in South Jersey. By December 1944, 817 internees had been released to Seabrook Farms. The total number would exceed 2,500, although many returned to California after the war’s end.<sup>30</sup>

The Cumberland County-based agricultural firm—which still produces 150 million pounds of frozen vegetables a year, according to its website<sup>31</sup>—had started recruiting detained Japanese Americans as early as January 1944, while the war still raged. The war had not only created new agricultural demands, it had also

removed many able-bodied men from the labor pool. By the end of 1944, nearly a thousand Japanese American detainees were working in Cumberland County. Those numbers swelled to 2,500 former detainees right after the war ended. The company became one of the military’s top food suppliers. Seabrook Farms had convinced the Roosevelt administration to release some detainees who met certain strict requirements including a job offer and a willingness to sign a loyalty oath. While Japanese Americans were now free, they still faced hardships at Seabrook Farms. Twelve-hour days and six-day workweeks were the norm. Pay could be as low as 30 cents an hour -- and even less for women. There was also the discriminatory requirement that American-born citizens of Japanese descent had to sign a document to prove their loyalty to the country.

Indeed, despite the harsh memories of the camps and the demanding agricultural labor, many Seabrook employees liked the area enough to stay there and raise families in the postwar years. By one estimate, this section of New Jersey had the highest concentration of Japanese Americans in the country in the late 1940s.<sup>32</sup>

After the immigration reforms of the 1960s, NJ saw a significant rise in the Asian American population. Ethnic enclaves formed and eventually ethnoburbs developed. The three

<sup>28</sup> *Chicago Daily Tribune*, “Hindoos in America,” Jul 19, 1891, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Yolande Skeete-Laessig, *When Newark Had a Chinatown: My Personal Journey* (Dorrance 2016).

<sup>30</sup> Reeves, Richard. “Infamy: The Shocking Story of the Japanese-American Internment in World War II”, Henry Holt and Co.

<sup>31</sup> Seabrook Farms. <http://www.seabrookfarms.com>

<sup>32</sup> Tom Deignan (2015). “Held in WWII internment camps, one group of Japanese-Americans found an escape in South Jersey”, NJ.com, Opinion. [https://www.nj.com/opinion/2015/06/held\\_in\\_wwii\\_internment\\_camps\\_one\\_group\\_of\\_japanes.html](https://www.nj.com/opinion/2015/06/held_in_wwii_internment_camps_one_group_of_japanes.html)



Photo Credit: BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Temple

largest Asian American groups in New Jersey in 1980 were Indian (19,500), Filipino/a (18,200), and Korean (10,700) Americans. The majority of them lived in Bergen County, two thousand in the small Hudson River community of Fort Lee. In 1980, Japanese Americans were Fort Lee's third largest "ethnic" group, after Italian and Russian Americans.

Soon, Indian Americans began to settle in other parts of the state including Edison and Jersey City. Chinese Americans chose Edison and then the West Windsor/Princeton area. The Filipino/a American community grew in Jersey City, Piscataway and South Bergen, and Korean Americans settled in Palisades Park, Fort Lee and throughout Bergen County.

In 1980, 40% of employed Asian immigrants in New Jersey were classified as managers and professionals, compared to a quarter of the state's workforce. As a result, Asian American families had the highest average income of any group in New Jersey, immigrant or native. Filipino/a and Indian Americans had the highest household incomes of all ethnic groups in New Jersey, including native Whites.<sup>33</sup>

However, not all Asian Americans were affluent or suburban. In 1980, 6.1% of Asian American families lived below the federal poverty line, close to the state average of 7.5%.<sup>34</sup> For these Asian Americans, adjustment to life in the US was more difficult, and they were more likely to live in central cities. Jersey City housed the state's largest Asian American population (8,000) at the time.<sup>35</sup>

Today, nearly 90% of Asian Americans in NJ are of Indian, Chinese /Taiwanese, Filipino/a or Korean descent. Here is a description of each of them:

### INDIAN AMERICANS

The largest Asian American ethnic group, Indian Americans, have tremendous linguistic diversity. The top Indian languages spoken in NJ are Gujarati, Hindi and Telegu, amongst others.<sup>36</sup> In 2017, the estimates show that they comprised 384,072 of the state population. As of 2000, Indian Americans had already established large clusters, particularly in the Edison/Iselin, West Windsor/Plainsboro and Jersey City areas. They have created a large and dynamic network of cultural, religious, educational and economic organizations. Indian shops, supermarkets, grocery stores, and restaurants draw them and their families from the entire northeast corridor, including New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Connecticut, Massachusetts and even as far away as Canada. In Edison, the India Day Parade on Oak Tree Road attracts tens of thousands of visitors and Bollywood stars in mid-August every year.

Indian Americans settling in the Edison area are from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds from unskilled workers to the professional class. Many Indian Americans are entrepreneurs with a strong presence in the pharmaceutical, information technology, retail, health care and hotel industries.

### CHINESE / TAIWANESE AMERICANS

After India, the most number of new immigrants to NJ are from China. In fact, the New York City metro region has the largest concentration of Chinese Americans in the US. The Philadelphia metro area, which includes parts of NJ, is not far behind with the 10th largest concentration in the US.<sup>37</sup> In the Garden State, Chinese Americans are concentrated in towns such as Edison, West Windsor / Princeton and Parsippany-Troy Hills. In each of these communities, Chinese immigrants have built a strong network of Chinese language and cultural schools like the Huaxia Chinese School and the Chinese American Cultural Association that teach both simplified and traditional forms of Chinese. Since the 1990s, with a growing Chinese American population, these schools have become strong nodes in organizing the Chinese American community regardless of city or province of origin within China or year of immigration.

Another trend in the creation of community and social networks, is the emergence of WeChat, a multi-purpose messaging and social media platform. WeChat is widely used by Chinese Americans for discussion and information sharing. Colloquially, the saying is "If you are Chinese, you are on WeChat." It has become an important tool in organizing, activism and civic engagement efforts in the



Newark Ave., Jersey City

<sup>33</sup> Census 1980

<sup>34</sup> Census 1980

<sup>35</sup> Census 1980

<sup>36</sup> Cedar Lake Ventures. Languages in New Jersey. <https://statisticalatlas.com/state/New-Jersey/Languages>

<sup>37</sup> Census ACS of Metropolitan Statistical Areas, 2011-2015.



community. For example, in a school board race in Middlesex County, the use of WeChat was instrumental in campaign organizing and GOTV efforts.

Like other Asian American communities, Chinese Americans are found on the socioeconomic class spectrum. Many Chinese Americans in NJ are educated professionals who work for large multinational corporations in finance and insurance, pharmaceutical, health care, information technology and wholesale trade. They have formed active professional networks such as the Sino American Pharmaceutical Association (SAPA). A growing number of Chinese Americans are lower income and work in small businesses like restaurants, groceries, bakeries, construction and salons.

There are many active social and cultural associations bringing together people from different regions of China and Taiwan as well as college alumni networks. For example, the Fujian Association has over 1,000 members. Athletic associations, like Flying Fox, are gaining popularity organizing skiing trips, sports events, summer camps, dragon boat race and triathlons.

There are a sizable number of Chinese adoptees living with NJ families of all backgrounds.

## FILIPINO/A AMERICANS

Filipino/a Americans have had the longest history of any Asian American ethnic group in NJ, however, most immigrated to NJ post 1965. In the 1970s and 80s, more than half of Filipino immigrants were health care or other highly trained professionals, in contrast to established working-class Filipino/a American populations in other parts of the US.<sup>38</sup> Large numbers settled in Jersey City, Bergenfield Borough, Union, Piscataway, Belleville and Cherry Hill townships.

The largest number of Filipino/a Americans live in Jersey City. In fact, a street in one of the Filipino enclaves in Jersey City is named Manila Avenue, which displays a memorial dedicated to the Filipino American veterans of the Vietnam War. On the last Sunday of June every year, Jersey City hosts the Philippine American Friendship Day Parade.

Bergenfield, a working-class town with a large concentration of Filipino/a Americans, has become Bergen County's Little Manila and community leaders in the surrounding area host their annual Filipino American Festival in New Overpeck Park. In South Jersey, the concentration of Filipino/a Americans in the Cherry Hill area grew to support a community-owned Philippine Community Center, and established public memorials dedicated to Dr. Jose Rizal and the Bataan Death March. The annual Philippine Independence Day Fiesta is celebrated at the site of these memorials.

Filipino/a Americans are multilingual with Tagalog being the largest non-English language spoken. They are primarily Christian, especially Roman Catholic, followed by Protestant, unaffiliateds and Buddhists. The Philippine American Medical Society of NJ, and the Philippine Nurses Association of NJ are long-standing organized bodies with a strong presence, established to foster the well-being of the community.

Interracial or ethnic marriage is common among Filipino/a Americans partially due to the long history in the US. According to one estimate by Pew Research Center, 48% of Filipino/a Americans nationwide are married to non-Asian Americans.<sup>39</sup>

## KOREAN AMERICANS

New York and Los Angeles metro regions became the two largest destinations for South Korean immigrants seeking better



PAFCOM Filipino Parade and Festival in Jersey City. Photo Credit: Philippine American Friendship Community

opportunities following the devastating Korean War that concluded in 1953 (though a formal truce was never signed). In 1990, the majority (59%) of Korean Americans in the New York City metropolitan area was heavily concentrated in Korean enclaves in Queens—Woodside, Flushing and Elmhurst. As more of them became established, Korean immigrants gradually moved to the suburban communities of NJ, especially Bergen County.<sup>40</sup> They were particularly attracted to the good public schools, easy access to New York and quality of life.

When they re-migrated to Bergen County neighborhoods from Queens, they started new waves of Korean immigration from South Korea. The relocation of many branches of



Broad Ave., Palisades Park

<sup>38</sup> Naylor, Larry L., ed. *Cultural diversity in the United States*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997.

<sup>39</sup> Pew Research Center (2015). <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/fact-sheet/asian-americans-filipinos-in-the-u-s/>

<sup>40</sup> Min, Pyong Gap. "A four-decade literature on Korean Americans: A review and a comprehensive bibliography." *Koreans in North America: Their Experiences in the Twenty-First Century* (2012): 195. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/fdu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1664191>.

**+** Profile

Don't judge a book by its cover. Asian Americans are hard to slot into neat categories. When Victoria meets new people, they may think she is a Latina American or Filipina American or mixed-race American.

But Victoria is a Jersey Girl, a third generation Japanese descendent born in Peru. Her first language is Spanish, followed by English, and she does not speak any Japanese at all. Her favorite foods are ceviche and sushi. She is married to a Peruvian American man. And she is sending her daughters to a Japanese school on the weekends, to learn the language she lost in transit.

Victoria's great-grandparents were farmers in Okinawa, Japan in the early 1900s. They moved from Okinawa to Lima, Peru as part of a Peruvian/Japanese joint government initiative intended to teach specialized farming techniques to the Peruvian people. Gradually they settled down and formed close-knit communities of Okinawan emigres.

But World War II brought many complications. As a US ally, Peru started sending their Japanese residents to internment camps in the US, taking over their land and belongings. Victoria's grandparents hid in friends' homes to avoid deportation to the US. They survived that turmoil, but others followed.

In the mid 1980s, the country faced severe upheaval including terrorist activity. Life became dangerous. Victoria's grandmother and uncle had already emigrated, and after a violent incident in the bodega her father ran in Peru, the rest of the family followed. They first settled in Queens, where her father worked in a restaurant and her mother as a seamstress in a factory. Twelve people shared a two-bedroom apartment. Life was very hard. As a result, when a friend offered her mother a job in NJ, they gladly moved, found a better life and have never looked back.

Victoria now works for a Fortune 500 company and has an entrepreneurial spirit. She raises her two daughters as Jersey Girls who are proud of their heritage.

South Korean multinational corporations, which grew rapidly in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, also contributed to the increase in the Korean American population. Finally, the development of suburban Korean enclaves in Fort Lee and Palisades Park in Bergen County since the late 1980s further attracted more Korean immigrants both from New York City and directly from South Korea.

Today, the centers of Korean American immigrant life are their families and churches or places of worship. Numerous churches in Bergen County and throughout the state of many denominations -- Presbyterian, Methodist, evangelical and others -- populate areas where Korean Americans have settled. A sizable Korean American community has also formed in the Cherry Hill area in the Philadelphia suburbs as well.

Korean American immigrants have high rates of entrepreneurship and many operate small businesses including drycleaners, nail salons and other main street businesses. They have formed active Korean American associations throughout the state. There are also a sizable number of Korean adoptees living with NJ families of all backgrounds supported by organizations like Also-Known-As.

**RACIAL AMBIGUITY AND EXCLUSION**

Today in the world of both public policy and popular culture, there is a lack of information about the Asian American experience and a great deal of confusion about the racial categorization of Asian Americans. There are two reasons for this: 1) the historical racial ambiguity of Asian Americans and 2) the dominant Black-White racial paradigm. In the dominant discourse there is often the question: are Asian Americans racial minorities or people-of-color? The answer is yes to both descriptions.

Historically, although Asian groups were categorized as non-White—such as Takao Ozawa—there was often confusion if certain groups could be white, such as Bhagat Singh Thind. Indeed, several Indians at the time did manage to convince the courts they were white and therefore eligible for

citizenship. In cases of segregation, Chinese were considered “colored”, as their students attended segregated schools, which was confirmed by the 1927 case of *Gong Lum v. Rice*, when the US Supreme Court upheld the lower courts' ruling that Chinese Americans were indeed “colored.” Historically the racial anchors have been White and Black. Chinese, Filipino, Indians and others were not White and were not Black, and therefore have occupied a liminal space in US Society. This racial ambiguity, over the years, resulted in the racism and xenophobia encountered by Asian American communities.<sup>41</sup>

This ambiguity is the reason that perceptions of Asians have ricocheted between the racial stereotypes of coolies and the model minority. Historically, xenophobic, nativist, and White supremacist sentiments have tended to fuel policies aimed at excluding immigrants of color from citizenship, and during recurring periods have led to vigilantism, mob violence, incarceration and mass deportation.

Residents of the Garden State have not always welcomed the rapid growth of the Asian American population, both in numbers and in terms of making their mark on NJ through entrepreneurship and civic engagement. From the beginning, Asian American communities have faced harassment and racism that have often involved violence. This evolution of racism included stereotyping cultural traits to targeting businesses and to police harassment of community members.

One of the first incidents to gain national attention, at least in Asian communities, was the infamous Dot-buster attacks in the summer of 1987. The name “Dot Busters” refers to the red *bindi* – the “dot” – that some South Asian women wear on their foreheads. This gang in Jersey City, predominantly Latino, published a letter in a local newspaper stating that they would “go to any extreme to get Indians to move out of Jersey City.” Calling Indian Americans “a weak race physically and mentally,” the Dot Busters exploded. They threw eggs, verbally harassed, physically intimidated and initiated violence against Indian American women in public places, and vandalized Indian-owned businesses.

41 Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History*.

In July of 1987, the Dot Busters used bricks to bludgeon Navroze Mody, a South Asian American man. The attack left Mody in a coma, and he later died. During the attack, his killers taunted him with the epithets "Hindu" and "baldy." (The slur "baldy," directed at South Asian Americans, is a reference to Indian independence leader Mohandas Gandhi, who was bald.) Most of the attackers served short sentences in juvenile facilities, and three became police officers in Jersey City. By the late 1980s, when the Dot Buster attacks occurred, there were about 15,000 Indian American immigrants in Jersey City and Indian Americans owned approximately one in three Jersey City businesses.

Indians and Pakistanis were not alone in being targeted in NJ are not alone in being targeted. In the 1990s, Korean Americans were victims of racism and xenophobia, not because of violence, but by public policies and municipal codes. Korean Americans owned approximately 95% of the businesses in Palisades Park, which at times resulted in increased tensions and court fights over local laws, including the banning foreign-language store signs (which was rescinded) and mandating closing hours for bars, restaurants and karaoke studios. Everything came to a head when a sign, "Go Home" was spray-painted on the front window of a computer store owned by the President of the Palisades Park Chamber of Commerce, a Korean American. Ultimately the town passed an ordinance requiring the closing all retail service by 9pm and other establishments by 3am (which included the diner in town, for which the town council had originally made an exception.)<sup>42</sup> Of note is the Mayor's comment: "In my opinion, this is all about business, not about prejudice," and he went on to add that race "played no part in the passage of the law."

As Asian American communities have continued to grow and expand, the incidents of racism and xenophobia continue to increase. As recently as last year, the first Asian American Attorney General, Gurbir Grewal, who is Sikh American and wears a turban, was made fun of for his name by "shock jocks" on the local radio station 101.5, not the first time they made racist comments about elected or appointed Asian Americans.

In November 2018, NJ also elected its first Asian American Congressman from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional District -- Congressman Andy Kim -- who encountered racist flyers featuring a photo with several whole fish on ice. The caption read "There's something Real Fishy about Andy Kim." Those words appeared in a type font called "Chop Suey," often associated with Chinese food stores or Asian films. Although Kim grew up in the district, became a Rhodes Scholar and served as a national security official for some of America's leading generals and diplomats, the flyer reinforced his opponent's message that "Kim is not one of us."<sup>43</sup>

Finally, the rise of hate crimes is a disturbing trend, not just for Asian Americans, but for all New Jerseyans. The FBI reported 495 incidents in 2017 for the state, a 75% increase from the previous year and the 5<sup>th</sup> highest rate among all states in the nation.<sup>44</sup> For Asian Americans, violence against South Asian, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu American communities is a major concern.<sup>45</sup> Of all national single-bias incidents, 58.1% were motivated by race/ethnicity/ancestry bias and 22% were motivated by religious bias.<sup>46</sup> Jersey Promise is concerned about the under-reporting of hate crimes by NJ law enforcement.

## THE FUTURE

These examples from recent history serve to remind us that much work lies ahead in better understanding the rich and colorful history of Asian Americans in NJ. Jersey Promise's goal is to shine the spotlight on the communities and we aim to provide insights in order to better inform policy and broader actions that help to build bridges between groups. We firmly believe that building relationships of trust and confidence with groups beyond the Asian American community are paramount to improving the condition of Asian Americans.

Next, we will look more carefully at each policy area: family and social issues, public education, economic opportunity, health care, immigration and justice, and civic participation. We conclude each policy area with recommendations, some that could be accomplished with community partnerships and others that require state

and/or local policy changes. To implement these policy recommendations, we seek to build broad partnerships with communities of all backgrounds.

We hope you will find this report not only helps raise the awareness of the Asian American community, but helps build understanding among all of NJ's diverse communities. We hope to take the next step, together, to build a more inclusive and fair Garden State.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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<sup>42</sup> Rodriguez, Robyn Magalit. *In Lady Liberty's Shadow: The Politics of Race and Immigration in New Jersey*. Rutgers University Press, 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Duhart, Bill (2018). *Racist Font Used in Attack Ad Against Korean American Candidate*. NJ Advance Media. [https://www.nj.com/camden/2018/09/gop\\_dismisses\\_claim\\_of\\_shameful\\_racist\\_attack\\_in\\_n.html](https://www.nj.com/camden/2018/09/gop_dismisses_claim_of_shameful_racist_attack_in_n.html)

<sup>44</sup> US Department of Justice, FBI Uniform Crime Report (2017). <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2017/tables/table-12.xls>

<sup>45</sup> South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT, 2018). *Communities on Fire*. <http://saalt.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Communities-on-Fire.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> US Department of Justice, FBI Uniform Crime Report (2017). <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2017/topic-pages/incidents-and-offenses>



# 02

**FAMILY AND  
SOCIAL ISSUES**  
MANEESHA KELKAR



As with other immigrant groups, Asians came to the US with distinct values and belief systems that continue to influence their experiences. This section explores the ways in which these values have brought success but also challenges to their acculturation in their new homeland.

As mentioned in the introduction, although Asian immigration truly opened up only after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, today Asian Americans are the fastest growing immigrant group in NJ as well as in the US as a whole. The journey in public perception from a “despised minority” pre-1965 to a “model minority”<sup>1</sup> post-1965 has clouded much nuance in the history of Asian American migration to the US. This section examines those generalities in some detail.

## **In Asian American culture, family is intertwined with individual identity and marriage is heavily promoted.**

Asian cultures are often termed ‘collectivist,’ when examining the family as part of the individual’s identity. The family as a unit is prioritized over the individual, and the older generation is revered. As a result, deviance from family norms is often unacceptable. Moreover, marriage is perceived as the way to preserve the family structure, and hence, strongly encouraged. In a nationwide study by the Pew Research Center in 2012, more than half of Asian American respondents (54%) said that having a successful marriage was very important, as compared to only a third (34%) of all Americans. Similarly, Asian Americans are more likely to be married (59% vs. 51%) and their children are more likely to be raised by married parents (80% vs. 63%).<sup>2</sup> In NJ, 8% of Asian American children lived in single parent families, as compared to White (18%), Latino/a (48%) and African Americans (64%).<sup>3</sup>

A greater inclination to marry can, however, have detrimental effects, especially when rapidly changing immigrant family experiences and intergenerational conflict are considered. Subsequent sections analyze some of these harmful outcomes.

<sup>1</sup> Lee, Erika. *The making of Asian America: A history*. Simon and Schuster, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center (2013). *The Rise of Asian Americans*.

<sup>3</sup> NJ Kids Count (2015). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED585532.pdf>

## The Asian American focus on education and personal effort may leave little room for individual differences.

The strong cultural focus on education has a long tradition in many Asian nations. Moreover, because post-1965 immigration policy in the US favored education and professional skills, Asian American immigrants who entered the US and NJ during that period were indeed highly educated and attempted to continue that tradition in future generations. Like most new immigrants, they also emphasized hard work, or effort, as the key to success in their new homeland. As a College Board/National Journal survey of 1,272 adults age 18 and older showed, “Asian Americans are more likely to believe that academic achievement results from greater effort, rather than greater skill”<sup>4</sup>. These attitudes have resulted in positive educational and career outcomes for a large part of the Asian American community.

However, their educational achievement causes Asian Americans to propagate this “success frame” for their children, which includes attaining high grades and attending a brand-name university followed by a prestigious profession. In the Indian American community, for example, it means excelling in competitions like the Scripps Spelling Bee that an Indian American student has won for the last 10 years. However, “the notion of Asian American success creates an ‘achievement paradox’ in which Asian Americans who do not fit the success frame feel like failures or racial outliers.”<sup>5</sup> There needs to be understanding among educators about the normal variation among Asian American students in order to tailor education to all of them.



## Asian American values observed by new immigrants often cause inter-generational conflict.

Asian American culture tends to reinforce values in children such as obedience, discipline, modesty, respect for elders (including teachers), and self-control, that may not align with the way their peers behave in school, causing difficulties in acculturation. Although these are generally observed cultural markers, there is a large variation in Asian American sub-groups: immigrants who arrive with a range of backgrounds, from war-torn to stable political climates, from economic need to comfortable middle-class circumstances. Those who face the multiple barriers of low income, Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and cultural differences may need much more help than others.<sup>6</sup> It is important for schools and teachers to not lump all Asian American

children into one category, but rather to treat each individual according to his or her own abilities and circumstances without relying on stereotypes of high academic performance on the one hand, and docility and obedience on the other.

The need for maintaining the traditions is so great among new immigrants that they often pressure their children to do the same. An Indian teacher in the Edison school district, where Indian/South Asian Americans are the majority ethnic group, talked about frequent, extended student absences for reasons like religious holidays, even though these negatively impact schoolwork. Economic adversity creates additional barriers. The teacher also shared that girls often miss school to take care of younger siblings when needed, and that LEP parents routinely depend on older siblings to interpret during a younger child's parent-teacher conference. While these anecdotal findings point to difficulties immigrants face, they also indicate gaps between immigrant needs and available services.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/research/asian-american-success-and-the-pitfalls-of-generalization/>

<sup>5</sup> Lee, Jennifer, and Min, Zhou. *The Asian American Achievement Paradox*. Russell Sage Foundation, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Lee, Esther Yao. “Working Effectively with Asian Immigrant Parents.” *Phi Delta Kappan* 70, no. 3 (1988): 223-25.

## Family and educational achievement may conceal mental health problems, substance abuse and non-acceptance of differences in sexual orientation and gender identity.

The focus on family and education places undue pressure on children of Asian American immigrants to follow a prescribed path, diversion from which results in censure. The resulting issues are often swept under the rug to maintain the image of the peaceful family. Children growing up in what is often a significantly different culture require immigrant parents to familiarize themselves with new modes of behavior. Immigrants must leave behind their long-established customs, mores and ways of life to adapt to a whole new cultural identity. The depression, anxiety, alienation and stress that often follow are some of the intangible costs of immigration. Meanwhile, several generations of immigrants often live under the same roof. Balancing old and new cultures during this intergenerational living frequently results in discord. Mental health problems, substance abuse, and non-acceptance of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) people as well as different lifestyles are some of the unspoken outcomes of this dissonance. According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 37% of Asian American adults, or approximately 7.7 million people nationwide, report poor mental health status<sup>7</sup>.

A growing body of scholarship has documented the psychological disparities experienced by LGBTQ Asian Americans. The Asian American Psychological Association states that "LGBTQ Asian Americans may struggle with an array



of psychological concerns, including suicidal ideation, psychological distress, risky sexual behaviors and substance abuse problems."<sup>8</sup> According to the Center for American Progress, an estimated 25% of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) LGBTQ individuals experience psychological distress at rates higher than any other group - LGBTQ or straight - and at rates more than four times higher than their straight AAPI counterparts<sup>9</sup>.

A few resources have emerged to address mental health among Asian Americans in NJ. NAMI NJ (National Alliance on Mental Illness, NJ) has two culturally specific programs called SAMHAJ (South Asian Mental Health Awareness in Jersey) and CAMHOP (Chinese American Mental Health Outreach Program). In 2015, South Asian Alcoholics Anonymous was founded in NJ. This group uses a culturally sensitive approach, addressing the cultural taboo against acknowledging alcohol use disorder<sup>10</sup>. Another innovative program - Desi Rainbow Parents and Allies - has recently been formed, with the goal to destigmatize the South Asian American LGBTQ community by creating a network of parents of LGBTQ youth who create a supportive environment for their children. This innovative group is primarily supported by API Rainbow Parents of PFLAG NYC. They also work closely with the National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (NQAPIA), a national network of Asian American LGBTQ organizations. Clearly, there is a great need for culturally sensitive services for Asian Americans with these issues.

## Behind the façade of the high achieving "model minority" lies the invisible Asian American population.

The visible achievement of the Asian American community hides the significant number of the undocumented and the substantial problem of poverty in certain Asian American populations. According to the National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development (National CAPACD), NJ ranks 9th in the US with 59,591 Asian Americans living in poverty<sup>11</sup>.

According to AAPI Data, of the 1.7 million Asian American undocumented people in the US, 115,680 live in NJ. This means 12.3%, or almost 1 out of 8 Asian Americans in NJ is undocumented, and 1 out of 5 undocumented people in NJ is Asian American. India (26%) and China (22%) account for the largest proportion of undocumented people, followed by the Philippines (14%) and South Korea (10%).<sup>12</sup> As a result, DACA, or Deferred Arrival for Childhood Arrivals, affects Asian American immigrants. However, due to the cultural stigma attached to being undocumented, the larger Asian American immigrant population does not acknowledge the undocumented amongst them. Of the 120,000 Asian Americans in the US thought to be eligible for DACA, only 16,000 have applied.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/news/2018/10/10/459200/4-ways-improve-access-mental-health-services-asian-american-communities/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://aapaonline.org/divisions/division-on-lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer-and-questioning/>

<sup>9</sup> [https://aapi.org/sites/default/files/publication/files/lgbtq\\_aapi\\_funding\\_infographic\\_-\\_aapi.pdf](https://aapi.org/sites/default/files/publication/files/lgbtq_aapi_funding_infographic_-_aapi.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.thefix.com/south-asian-aa-welcomes-community-new-jersey>

<sup>11</sup> National CAPACD, AAPI Poverty Profiles. <http://www.nationalcapacd.org/aapi-poverty-profiles/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://aapidata.com/blog/asian-undoc-1in7/>

<sup>13</sup> Huang, Nancy. "Good immigrant, bad immigrant: What the repeal of DACA means for undocumented Asian Americans". *Hyphen* (2017); <https://hyphenmagazine.com/blog/2017/10/good-immigrant-bad-immigrant-what-repeal-daca-means-undocumented-asian-americans>



themselves isolated and exposed to mental health problems with nowhere to turn.

Economic necessity combined with cultural isolation also make women more vulnerable to exploitation. Language barriers prevent knowledge of minimum wage regulations and worker protections, often pushing women into extremely low-paying jobs. The poor wages and health hazards faced by Vietnamese, Korean and Nepalese nail salon workers are a case in point. They are forced to work in poorly ventilated spaces, enduring toxic fumes from chemicals like solvents, emollients, glues and hardeners in a largely unregulated industry. As the *New York Times* reported, “Some of the chemicals in nail products are known to cause cancer; others have been linked to abnormal fetal development, miscarriages and other harm to reproductive health.”<sup>17</sup>

Women face unique challenges that are often exacerbated by unintended consequences of immigration policies and practices.<sup>18</sup> For instance, the holder of the H1B visa described above, more often male, can sponsor his spouse on a derivative visa called H4 that does not allow the holder to work, get a social security number, open a bank account or even get a driver’s license without additional steps, thus placing severe constraints on the ability of women to lead normal lives. In addition, if a woman on a dependent visa finds herself in a situation of domestic violence, she has almost no recourse. The way immigration works thus places women in vulnerable situations where they can be further exploited. Clearly, the voices of women need to be placed front and center in policy discussions relevant to their communities.

Gender-based violence is as prevalent in the Asian American community as in mainstream USA, but is far more difficult to address due to the taboos surrounding family values and societal issues, as well as because of the complications created by immigration. As a result, Asian American women often fall through the cracks of the social service system. In response to this issue, Manavi was founded in 1985 in NJ, to provide culturally sensitive services—shelter, counseling, legal assistance, language interpretation, job search and community outreach—to South

## Women’s struggles are often unspoken and unheard in the larger Asian American conversation.

Many Asian American immigrants enter the US through a temporary professional visa called H1B. Since 2001, nationwide, more than half of H1B visas (50.5%) have gone to Indians, almost one in ten (9.7%) to Chinese, 3% to Filipino/a, and 2.8% to South Korean workers. In 2013, New Jersey was the second largest recipient of H1B visas (14%), accounting for 35,984 Asian workers.<sup>14</sup>

The holder of the H1B visa can sponsor his/her spouse and children on a derivative visa called H4. The family stays on the H4 visas until they get Permanent Residence status, or Green Cards. However, since 2017, Indian and Chinese H1B visa holders (and hence their families) are facing significant delays in obtaining Green Cards. The unintended consequence is that their children are ageing out of the process. If children on H4 visas turn 21 years old before getting a Green Card, they have to return to their home countries, often after growing up in the US. These children are being called the ‘H4 Dreamers.’<sup>15</sup> National conversations about DACA and the Dream Act need to include this substantial section of the Asian American population.

Asian American women participate in the US workforce in large numbers. According to the 2010 Census, over 60% of Asian American women work outside the home. They are represented in the professional and managerial fields, in low-paid service jobs, as well as in the informal sector as caregivers, domestic workers and garment workers. “[Women] are a pivotal part of the country’s economic engine and deserve to be treated equitably and humanely.”<sup>16</sup>

Immigrant women in the Asian American community often struggle with the differences in social structure in their new home country. The need to adapt to changing social expectations frequently leads to emotional turmoil and distress. Having left behind the traditional supports of family and community in their natal countries, women often find

<sup>14</sup> “The Rise of Asian Americans”, Pew Research Center, Updated Edition, 2013

<sup>15</sup> “The children of H1B visa holders are growing up – and still waiting for green cards”, PRI’s The World. <https://interactive.pri.org/2018/02/h1b-children/index.html>

<sup>16</sup> Turning the Page on U.S. Immigration Policy: Immigration and Asian American Women and Families; NAPAWF Report, November 2014

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/11/nyregion/nail-salon-workers-in-nyc-face-hazardous-chemicals.html>

<sup>18</sup> Kelkar, Maneesha. “South Asian immigration in the United States: A gendered perspective.” *Asian American Policy Review* 22 (2012): 55-61.



Asian American women affected by domestic violence, as well as cultural sensitivity training for mainstream advocates. However, Manavi is able to adequately serve mainly the South Asian American community. Other Asian American domestic violence survivors need to reach out to New York-based organizations such as Korean American Family Service Center (Korean), Garden of Hope (Chinese) and Womankind (Pan Asian) that provide services to NJ residents as needed.

The New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence (NJCEDV) reported that in 2018 various statewide service agencies provided domestic violence services to a total of 13,263 women. Of these, 549 women were recorded as Asian American. Manavi reported serving 196 South Asian American women in 2018. These deceptively low statistics for Asian American women suggests that domestic violence in Asian American communities may be largely underreported. Social pressure to maintain the marriage and family regardless of adverse situations, taboos against public airing of what are considered 'insider' or family issues, differences in help-seeking behavior, fear of being ostracized by the community, and language and cultural barriers prevent Asian American women from reporting domestic violence. Research on the Korean American community considered the deep dependence on clergy for assistance with domestic violence, reporting that "developing a collaborative working relationship between Korean clergy and domestic violence advocates, as well as providing training to Korean clergy targeting their knowledge, beliefs/attitudes, and skills is critical for promoting safety of battered Korean immigrant women."<sup>19</sup>

The additional barriers placed on women by recent immigration, namely limited English proficiency, isolation, legal status and financial dependence make it very difficult for Asian American women to navigate such situations successfully.<sup>20</sup> Cultural taboos prevent sexual assault survivors from seeking assistance.

The lack of culturally specific NJ-based organizations serving East Asian Americans often keeps abused women trapped in violent



marriages. The capacity of New York-based organizations, like KAFSC and Womankind, to serve women in NJ, as well as NJ-based Manavi, are severely constrained by a lack of resources. We need to do more.

Additionally, women who are economically vulnerable may fall prey to trafficking and may not know where to turn. Human trafficking is the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor. The top risk factor identified for human trafficking is recent migration.

From 2007 to 2017, the National Human Trafficking Hotline, operated by Polaris, the premier anti-trafficking organization in the US, received reports of 45,308 cases of human trafficking in the US.<sup>21</sup> Of these, 34,700 or three out of four were for sex trafficking.<sup>22</sup>

In 2017 alone, hotlines operated by the Polaris Project reported 8,759 human trafficking cases affecting 10,615 individual victims.<sup>23</sup> Further analysis by the Asian Pacific Islander Institute on Gender-Based Violence (APIDV) shows that of these, 71% were sex trafficking cases and

15% were labor trafficking cases; 85% of the individual victims were female and 14% were male. Of the 3,636 survivors whose race/ethnicity was known, the second largest group was Asian, at 27%.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, Asian people are at great risk for being trafficked.

Trafficking is a significant issue in NJ. According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, since 2007, there have been 1,113 cases of trafficking of 3,160 victims in NJ.<sup>25</sup> NJ ranks 9<sup>th</sup> among states for trafficking cases, and the city of Newark ranks 27<sup>th</sup> among the top 100 cities in the US for the number of trafficking cases per capita.<sup>26</sup>

A report by Polaris, "Hidden in Plain Sight," estimates that over 9,000 illicit massage parlors operate all over the US, and the majority of women working in these are trafficked.<sup>27</sup> Another study by Polaris points out that women trafficked into the massage parlor trade are "virtually all from South Korea or China, speak limited English and are in dire economic straits."<sup>28</sup> Clearly, there is a great need for culturally competent victim advocates.

<sup>19</sup> Choi, Y. Joon. "Determinants of clergy behaviors promoting safety of battered Korean immigrant women." *Violence against women* 21, no. 3 (2015): 394-415. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801214568029>  
<sup>20</sup> Abraham, Margaret. *Speaking the Unspeakable: Marital violence among South Asian immigrants in the United States*. Rutgers University Press, 2000.  
<sup>21</sup> <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/states>  
<sup>22</sup> <https://polarisproject.org/human-trafficking/sex-trafficking>  
<sup>23</sup> <http://polarisproject.org/sites/default/files/2017NHTHStats%20%281%29.pdf>  
<sup>24</sup> <https://www.api-gbv.org/about-gbv/types-of-gbv/trafficking/>  
<sup>25</sup> <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/state/new-jersey>  
<sup>26</sup> <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/sites/default/files/100%20Most%20Populous%20Cities%20Report.pdf>  
<sup>27</sup> <http://polarisproject.org/sites/default/files/Polaris%20-%20Beneficial%20Ownership%20-%20April%202018.pdf>  
<sup>28</sup> <https://polarisproject.org/news/press-releases/new-report-details-human-trafficking-massage-parlors>

## The ageing Asian American population composed of distinct groups that will need tailored services is growing.

For those who can afford them, planned retirement ‘affinity’ communities are emerging all over NJ to cater to specific ethnic groups, among them, Asian Americans. However, large numbers of senior citizens lack housing, or the means to support themselves in old age. According to a study by the Urban Institute, “many Asian American seniors have limited access to the social safety net despite growing poverty rates. Asian American seniors, especially foreign-born seniors, are likely to receive much fewer Social Security benefits because they tend to earn less and over fewer years during their working years in the United States.”<sup>29</sup>

We can classify Indian/South Asian American seniors in particular into two groups: those who came to the US immediately after the Immigration Act of 1965 and who are now ageing, and those who emigrated as older adults, typically through family-based visas. “The two groups of South Asian American seniors differ from each other significantly in terms of needs and access to resources.”<sup>30</sup> The first group is more likely to be English proficient, have spent several decades earning and building assets and are more acculturated. The second group is more likely to be Limited English Proficient (LEP), dependent on the family member who facilitated their immigration, and thus more displaced, feeling a greater sense of loneliness and dislocation. The burden on caregivers for this group is also more complex because these seniors are often unable to access basic medical or social services and transportation without family support. Family caregivers, who are juggling filial obligation, children and jobs, are subject to greater levels of stress and mental health disorders due to this situation. Although both

groups will need assistance, the latter will likely need a greater number of services.

Limited English proficiency makes Asian American seniors more vulnerable “to fraud, scams and predatory alternative financial products and services.”<sup>31</sup> It also prevents them from fully utilizing the services that the NJ Department of Human Services - Division on Aging provides, such as adult day care, Alzheimer’s services, exercise programs, nutrition programs and many other supports.

The old age dependency ratio measures the number of people above the age of 65 years as a proportion of those aged 15 to 65 years. In effect, it is a tool to estimate the size of the working population that will be required to take care of the ageing. Across Europe, this ratio has been increasing, i.e., a smaller workforce is poised to take care of a growing old population, an issue of mounting concern. In 2017, the old age dependency ratio in the European Union was 29.9%, i.e., a few more than three working age persons supported each person

above 65 years.<sup>32</sup> In the US, that ratio in 2017 stood much lower, at 23.5%.<sup>33</sup> Immigration, by adding more people of working age to the US, is the primary reason that the US is in a far better place than Europe as it supports its ageing population. As the state with the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest percentage of Asian Americans in the US, NJ stands to benefit from Asian American immigrants in this respect.

NJ Asian American Population by Age

Age	Population	Percent
0-17	186,342	21.1%
18-30	149,467	16.9%
31-45	243,130	27.5%
46-65	215,107	24.3%
Over 65	91,185	10.3%

Source: Census PUMS/ACS 2017



<sup>29</sup> Tran, Victoria. “Urban Wire: Poverty, Vulnerability and the Safety Net,” Urban Institute.  
<sup>30</sup> Ofel-Ayisi, Dale & Rao, Aruna (2014). “Culturally Competent Care for Seniors and their Families: Addressing Behavioral Health & Psychosocial Challenges.” New Jersey Statewide Network for Cultural Competence Conference, September 12.  
<sup>31</sup> National CAPACD Report. “Findings on Financial Security for AAPI Seniors and their Families.” [http://www.nationalcapacd.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Findings\\_on\\_Financial\\_Security\\_.pdf](http://www.nationalcapacd.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Findings_on_Financial_Security_.pdf)  
<sup>32</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20180508-1>  
<sup>33</sup> <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/SPPOPDPNDOLUSA>

## Profile

Seema accompanied her husband to NJ on a dependent visa, looking forward to a promising new life. Although her husband had always treated her disparagingly, after the move his behavior became physically violent, the violence escalating with each passing day. Hitting and flinging her against the walls of the house became an everyday occurrence.

Seema had an education but was not fluent in English. Her family and community thousands of miles away and no friends in her new country, she had no idea where to go for help. She did not drive and her husband did not include her name on their bank account. She was dependent and completely isolated.

One night, a neighbor heard loud noises and called the police. Seema's husband was arrested and Seema, brutally beaten, was taken to the hospital, where she was advised to call Manavi.

Even after her physical injuries had healed in the comfort of Ashiana, Manavi's safe home, Seema suffered from debilitating headaches and nightmares, waking up frequently, her heart pounding. She slowly began to heal in the culturally familiar communal space of Ashiana, in the company of other women who had faced similar circumstances.

Despite the attempt of Manavi advocates to get a permanent restraining order against her husband, inadequate language interpretation in the court doomed their efforts.

Undeterred, Seema reached out to Manavi's legal clinic, and with the help of a pro-bono attorney, was able to temporarily adjust her immigration status. She stayed at Ashiana for over a year, attending ESL (English as a Second Language) and vocational training classes. She then found a job and moved into independent living.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand the hiring and training of staff proficient in multiple languages and cultures in state and local government agencies, especially in departments where Asian American and other immigrant communities are frequent constituencies, such as Department of Health, Department of Human Services (especially Division on Ageing Services), Department of Children and Families, etc.
- Require/encourage nonprofit recipients of NJ state funding to hire staff proficient in multiple languages and cultures in order to more directly engage Asian American individuals and communities in need
- Provide increased funding for cultural competency training for service providers, schools, senior services, hospitals, elderly nursing programs, home health aide services, government agencies, etc.
- Provide funding for translation of social service and other materials into Asian languages
- Provide funding to domestic violence organizations for outreach to Asian American places of worship and other community-based organizations to assist battered Asian American women
- Provide increased funding for Asian American organizations providing culturally sensitive services to victims of domestic and sexual violence, trafficking, child/youth services, and senior services
- Enact laws restricting the use of harmful chemicals in the nail salon industry where workers are largely Vietnamese, Korean and Nepalese women (similar to laws passed in NY and California)
- Provide access to Asian American seniors for other services such as translation/interpretation, transportation to medical and other appointments
- Establish outreach programs at NJ Department of Human Services to reach out to Asian American communities and help them access mental health, special education and other services
- Provide training to Asian American community-based, cultural and religious organizations to help their constituents access mental health, special education and other services provided by the NJ Department of Human Services and other providers

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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03

**PUBLIC  
EDUCATION**  
JUN CHOI



Asian American students are both celebrated and invisible in New Jersey's public schools. Their experience is one of contrast. They have the highest median scores<sup>1</sup> on state standardized tests (PARCC 2017-18) in both language arts and math of any racial group. And the number of valedictorians graduating each academic year abound, but at the same time, many of their struggles are invisible with challenges that are often overlooked by school leaders, educators and the general public.

The perpetuation of Asian Americans as model minorities is still prevalent and the impact of this stereotyping has had a significant negative impact on learning and overall student and family well-being. While many students are academically high performing, they are also socially isolated and face high rates of bullying and discrimination from other students and educators. These experiences lead to fear, anger, distrust, poor self-esteem and in some cases, long term mental health and social challenges. As they become young adults, Asian Americans struggle to communicate effectively in their workplace, which limits their ability to become productive members of society.

Asian American families, like many new immigrants, view education as a priority and their best hope for a better life in America. However, parents often over-emphasize a narrow set of academic skills over the broader set of skills required to thrive in a modern-day American economy. They set unrealistic expectations, pushing their children to attain Ivy-league or other selective college degrees, believing with the best of intentions that this is their family's best hope to achieve the American dream. In many cases, both children and parents are disappointed and frustrated which can lead to internal family discord. Researchers have shown that the linguistic barrier between generations – i.e., the limited English proficiency of 1st generation immigrants and the loss of native language skills of their children -- also adds to the discord and psychological stress on families.<sup>2</sup>

This friction is only compounded by the enormous changes recent immigrants face and by the changes in values across generations.

In *Counseling the Culturally Diverse*, the authors write:

“often times, children in immigrant and refugee families learn the language and acculturate faster than their parents. The differential rates of acculturation sometimes make the parents more dependent on their children for help in terms of language translation and other social interactions. The role reversal sometimes affects the quality of the parent-child relationship. In conjunction with acculturation, children may adopt American values and behaviors that may conflict with those of their parents. Parents and elders may see it as a sign of disrespect due to differing styles of communication and behaviors. Children may develop individualistic goals that are divergent from their collectivistic family orientation.”<sup>3</sup>

Many teachers, often times overworked, under-resourced and under-appreciated, with limited professional development training at their disposal to understand the rapidly changing multi-cultural classroom, don't have the time to focus on individual student needs. They are unfairly burdened with all the problems of society in their classroom.

The face of education is rapidly changing in NJ. The majority of our 1.37 million students enrolled (56%) in academic year 2017-18 are students-of-color.<sup>4</sup> There is no longer a racial group that makes up a majority of the enrollment in public schools. Several school districts are even majority Asian American like Edison, the largest suburban school district in the state, West Windsor-Plainsboro and South Brunswick. *US News and World Report* consistently ranks Rutgers University – Newark, a major higher education institution where many NJ public school students enroll after graduation with a student body of 33% White, 22% Asian, 18% Latino/a and 16% African American as the most diverse college campus in the nation.

The enrollment of Asian American students in NJ's public schools has increased rapidly; however, a commensurate level of focus,

<sup>1</sup> NJ Department of Education; PARCC Results: <https://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/achievement/18/parcc/spring/Grade0308.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Sue, D.W., & Sue, D. (2008). *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice* (5th Ed.). New York: Wiley.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 2, Pg. 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> NJ Spotlight Analysis of NJ DOE – Enrollment and Certificated Staff Data (Feb 15, 2019). <https://www.njspotlight.com/stories/19/02/15/analysis-enrollment-stats-show-lack-of-diversity-in-front-of-nj-classrooms/>. <https://www.nj.gov/education/data/>

<sup>5</sup> US News and World Report. <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities/campus-ethnic-diversity>



understanding and changing educational practices has not kept up with the growing diversity.

At the policy level, Asian American students or parents are often not included in discussions on diversity. These discussions are more focused, depending on the school district and leadership, on the White - Black and Latino/a American student populations, whose life experiences are generally better understood and whose needs are perceived to be greater than those of Asian American students.

Meanwhile, as income inequality grows and 26%<sup>7</sup> of Asian American households live below the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) threshold, more students face additional stresses and uncertainty.

## Asian American Students Are Not All Good Students

There are wide variations in educational achievement among Asian American youth, depending on the educational level of their parents, parental involvement, when their families immigrated, the country of origin and a variety of other factors.

The narrow set of assessment indicators show that Asian American students, on average, achieve at high educational levels. However, these indicators mask important subgroup differences. Southeast Asian refugees tend to have the lowest levels of educational achievement among all Asian American groups, so their children typically face greater challenges in the classroom. Whereas Asian immigrants who came to NJ on employer-based visas or immigrated before 1965 tend to have much higher levels of educational achievement. Figure 2 illustrates the wide variations in such levels among Asian Americans in NJ depending on where they came from.

In NJ's public schools, Asian American students are often grouped together without a deeper appreciation for their cultural and migration

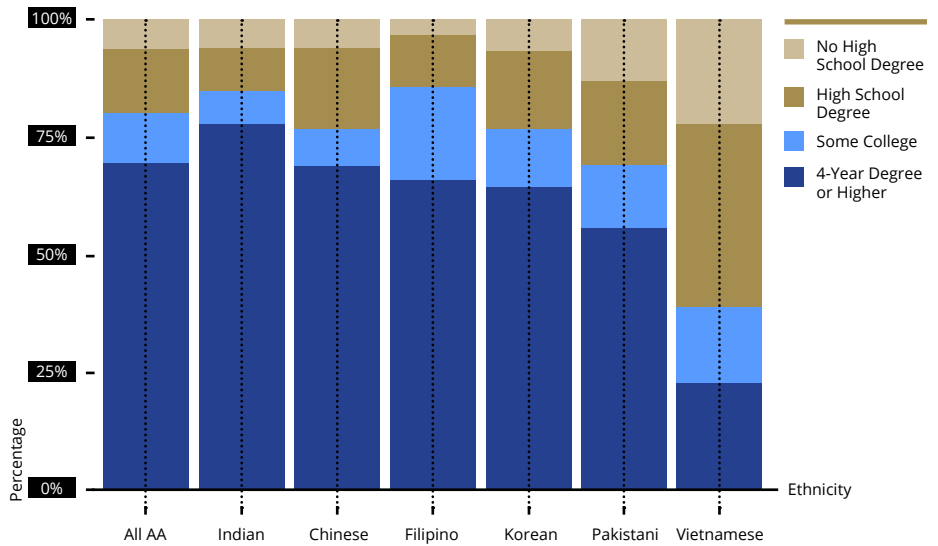
**TABLE 1:** Rapid Growth of Asian American Student Enrollment and Diversity in NJ Public Schools<sup>6</sup>

### PK-12 Enrollment and % of Total NJ Public School Enrollment

Year	Total Enrollment	Asian Enrollment	Asian	Black	Latino/a	White
1989-90	1,054,639	44,295	4.2%	18.3%	11.0%	66.4%
1999-00	1,289,221	78,642	6.1%	17.9%	14.7%	61.0%
2005-06	1,390,826	104,312	7.5%	17.6%	18.2%	56.5%
2010-11	1,383,706	124,534	9.0%	16.3%	21.7%	52.2%
2015-16	1,372,755	135,903	9.9%	15.7%	26.2%	46.4%
2017-18	1,370,236	142,757	10.4%	15.0%	28.3%	44.2%

**FIGURE 2:** Educational Attainment by Asian National Origin (2017)<sup>8</sup>

### Educational Attainment by Asian National Origin



history, family circumstances and the personal stresses associated with acculturation. As previously discussed in the Family and Social Issues chapter, students who rebel against a prescribed path that Asian American parents and families have placed on them may suffer from a variety of challenges. Acculturation

stresses are correlated to mental health, substance abuse, depression and conflicts within the family.<sup>9</sup> These students, in many cases, suffer quietly and generally do not seek professional counseling or support as this type of support is often stigmatized in the community.

<sup>6</sup> US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Common Core of Data; NJ Department of Education, Enrollment Data: 2017-18 is based on [https://www.nj.gov/education/data/enr/enr18/stat\\_doc.htm](https://www.nj.gov/education/data/enr/enr18/stat_doc.htm)  
<sup>7</sup> ALICE: A Study of Financial Hardship in New Jersey (2018). United Way ALICE Project. [https://www.dropbox.com/s/h3huycfbak512t2/18\\_UW\\_ALICE\\_Report\\_NJ\\_Update\\_10.19.18\\_Lowres.pdf?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/h3huycfbak512t2/18_UW_ALICE_Report_NJ_Update_10.19.18_Lowres.pdf?dl=0)  
<sup>8</sup> Ramakrishnan, Karthick & Ahmad, Farah (2014). State of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Series: Education. Center for American Progress. <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/AAPJ-Education.pdf>  
<sup>9</sup> Salant, T. & Lauderdale, D.S. (2003). Measuring culture: a critical review of acculturation and health in Asian immigrant populations. *Social Science & Medicine*, 57(1).



## Asian American Students are Generally Not Part of the Discussion on Diversity and Inclusion

Overwhelmingly, the discussions around public education policy have been focused on White, Black and increasingly Latino/a American experiences, and to a lesser degree on Asian American students. Even in school districts that have high percentages of Asian American students, Asian Americans are underrepresented on boards of education and on the professional staff of the school districts where important discussions take place around teaching and learning.

Only 16% of teachers, administrators and professional support staff were minorities in the 2017-18 academic year. And of the 140,300 certificated teachers in the same year, only 2,876 (2%)<sup>10</sup> were identified as Asian American.

Research demonstrates that students who have a positive self-concept may have higher educational achievement.<sup>11</sup> Racial diversity among teachers could also provide significant benefits to students. The US Department of Education's report on the State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce<sup>12</sup> states "the racial diversity of the teaching workforce can help to close the achievement gap...both quantitative and qualitative studies find that teachers-of-color can improve the school experiences of all students; further, teachers-of-color contribute to improved academic outcomes while serving as strong role models for students."<sup>13</sup>

Asian Americans are largely missing in the national debate around affirmative action policies. They could do more to engage civically and on issues such as this. However, many Asian Americans feel that they are being used by the conservative right (consider the Harvard University case led by Edward Blum, a longtime conservative activist and crusader against affirmative action, and funded by conservative donors like DonorsTrust – to eliminate race as a factor for college admissions), while at the same time not accepted by the progressive left who feel that Asian Americans are not fully people-of-color. The plaintiffs for Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard University are a group of Asian American students who were rejected by Harvard, but they are led by Edward Blum who aims to systematically eliminate all race-based tests for college admissions in American colleges and universities.

Most Asian Americans support affirmative action policies in general, however there are strong viewpoints on the question of how affirmative action is applied to education policy with the community divided by generation and ideology. On the one hand, a narrow set of test-based indicators would increase the admission of Asian American students in competitive high schools, colleges and universities. Berkeley, a gem of the University of California system, has a freshman class that is 42% Asian American<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, Asian Americans also benefit from a range of affirmative action policies beyond education, including small business opportunities, workplace fairness and voting rights. On questions of civil rights, given their long history of exclusion in America, the community is strongly in favor of such policies (see Civic Participation chapter).

This debate is closer to home when considering NJ public schools are some of the most racially

segregated schools in the nation.<sup>15</sup> How we reduce the segregation in our public schools is a critical question for the future of the Asian American community and the state.

## Struggling Asian American Students Are Not Receiving the Support that All Students Deserve

### ENGLISH LEARNERS (EL)

As the vast majority of Asian American students are immigrants or the children of immigrants, programs to support English Learners (EL) is especially important. Many times, parents may not fully understand the type of program best suited for their child - English Language Services, English as a Second Language (ESL), Sheltered Instruction, High-Intensity ESL, Bilingual Tutor, Bilingual Resource, Bilingual Part-Time Program or Full-Time Bilingual - due to their own difficulty in communicating with professional staff. Moreover, school districts may not provide bilingual programs in certain languages as they are unable to find qualified bilingual teachers, translators or tutors. They struggle with both staffing and funding issues to start high quality bilingual programs. The number of school districts in NJ which have approved bilingual waivers is surprisingly high in the current 2018-19 academic year.<sup>16</sup>

Generally, all EL students, regardless of age, ought to continue instruction in their native language. Research has shown the importance of ELs students developing as bilinguals in both languages for cognitive, social, and psychological health and success.<sup>17</sup> The opportunities, however, for native language instruction are severely limited to transitional bilingual programs that students phase out of once they reach a certain level of English proficiency and native language instruction has become the responsibility of families or heritage language schools, which are often under-staffed and under-funded.

<sup>10</sup> NJ DOE (2017-18) - <https://www.nj.gov/education/data/cs/cs18/county2.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Marsh, H.W. & O'Mara, A. (2008). Reciprocal effects between academic self-concept, self-esteem, achievement, and attainment over seven adolescent years: Unidimensional and multidimensional perspectives of self-concept, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 34(4), 542-552. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167207312313>.

<sup>12</sup> US DOE- <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> NJ Spotlight (Feb 15, 2019) - Colleen O'Dea. <https://www.njspotlight.com/stories/19/02/15/analysis-enrollment-stats-show-lack-of-diversity-in-front-of-nj-classrooms/>

<sup>14</sup> Berkeley Univ (2018-19 Enrollment) - <https://opa.berkeley.edu/uc-berkeley-fall-enrollment-data>

<sup>15</sup> UCLA Civil Rights Project (2018). *NJ's Segregated Schools: Trends and Paths Forward*. <https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/new-jerseys-segregated-schools-trends-and-paths-forward/New-Jersey-report-final-110917.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> NJ DOE. Approved Bilingual Waiver School Districts: <https://www.nj.gov/education/bilingual/policy/ApprovedWaiverRequests1819.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid 2.



in building trust with Asian American and other immigrant children in order to alleviate fear and early signs of mental illness.

## HARASSMENT, BULLYING AND SUICIDE

Of all students who reported bullying, Asian American students nationwide reported the highest rates of bullying in the classroom at a surprisingly high 51.5% and in bathrooms / locker rooms at 25.2% -- both higher than any other racial group -- according to the 2015 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey.<sup>22</sup> When harassed, many Asian Americans students, especially immigrants, may not know what to do. Some may fear the interaction with school administrators, school security or police.

In NJ, the Department of Education (NJ DOE) collects annual data -- rates of Harassment, Intimidation or Bullying (HIB) are reported in the Commissioner of Education's Annual Report on Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse. For the 2016-17 academic year (AY), the latest year available, 6,419 incidents were reported in the HIB statewide. Of these incidents, 19% were based on race/color, a 2% increase from 2015-16 AY, and 6% based on ancestry / origin. However, Asian Americans are not dis-aggregated in this report.<sup>23</sup>

Generally, suicide rates for all Asian Americans regardless of age is lower nationally; however, a few areas of significant concern surface. The Center for Disease Control (CDC)<sup>24</sup> in 2016 reported higher rates of attempted suicide nationwide for Asian American adolescent (Grades 9-12) females (11.1% vs. 9.8% of students) and males (5.2% vs. 3.7% of students) as compared to White American adolescents, and higher rates of students who seriously considered suicide for Asian American adolescent males (14.9% vs. 11.5% of students) as compared to White American adolescent males.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, these Asian American adolescents accessed mental health treatment or counseling at much lower rates.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION

For special education students and parents, understanding their rights and navigating the complex system of referrals, evaluations, services, reviews and reevaluations can be a full-time occupation even without the language and cultural challenges.<sup>18</sup> Asian American parents often find it challenging, due to cultural stigmas around disabilities, to enroll their child in special education programs. Culturally, for some Asian American parents, resistance to classifying their children. Asian American children are over represented among those designated as autistic, mentally retarded and speech impaired.

Of the 235,495 NJ students who were classified in the 2016-17 academic year, only 9,138 (age 6-21) and 1,810 (age 3-5) students (or 4.6%) were Asian American.<sup>19</sup> Compare this with the 16.7% -- NJ has one of the highest classification rates in the nation -- of all students who are classified. This is consistent with the general tendency that Asian American students, whether because of their family, their cultural background or for other reasons, seem to

underutilize special education services that could be of great benefit to them.

At the national level, NCES reports that the rates of Autism are highest (21%) for Asian American students ages 3-21 for the 2015-16 academic year. Speech and language impairment (26%) were high as well. However, specific learning disabilities were lowest at 21%.<sup>20</sup>

Relative to the overall population, Asian Americans are three times less likely to seek mental health services according to Mental Health America.<sup>21</sup> There are a variety of reasons for this including social stigmas and taboos in many Asian cultures. Limited English proficiency is another reason as students and parents find it challenging to find professional counseling that is both linguistically and culturally responsive. As a result, knowledge of the mental health needs and attitudes of Asian Americans are limited.

It is important for educational leaders to recognize early signs of social isolation, harassment and pressures from home. Teachers can play a critically important role

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Pg. 21.

<sup>19</sup> NJ DOE: <https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/data/2016.htm#placement>

<sup>20</sup> NCES: [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator\\_rbd.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator_rbd.asp)

<sup>21</sup> Mental Health America (2016). <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/issues/asian-american-pacific-islander-communities-and-mental-health>

<sup>22</sup> NCES: Student Reports of Bullying and Cyber-Bullying: 2015 or 2017 School Crime Supplement. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017015.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> NJ DOE: <https://www.nj.gov/education/schools/vandv/1617/vandv.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Center for Disease Control (2016). <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=54>

<sup>25</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health. <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=54>



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### Families

- School districts should promote and host family education/literacy events for families of Asian American students that support the needs of EL families, create meaningful relationships between school personnel and EL families, and inform parents of the resources that are available for their students in their schools and communities
- Offer more English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to immigrant parents and adults on school premises, at libraries and other community / public spaces

### Teacher Recruitment and Training

- The NJ Department of Education, in partnership with schools of education, should provide more incentives to programs that increase the number of teachers-of-color, including Asian American, and ESL / Bilingual teachers who are trained, certified and employed in NJ's public schools
- For schools with high populations of Asian Americans, provide professional development training on the unique needs of Asian American students and ELs, ways to successfully communicate and partner with Asian American families, and strategies for supporting Asian American ELs through teaching and assessment
- Improve professional development training for teachers and administrators by partnering with schools of education in order to update curriculum on cultural competency

### Community Partnerships

- Partner with Asian American community, cultural and/or religious organizations to assess and meet the educational and linguistic needs of Asian American families

- Partner with Latino/a American and other immigrant groups to help develop curriculum on cultural competency
- Provide training to Asian American social service providers and community-based organizations to reduce social stigmas and increase the utilization of special education, mental health and other services for children and families

### School and Statewide Policy

- The State Board of Education and Commissioner of Education should add multicultural education in the general certification requirement for all new teachers
- Provide more resources and pathways within the public school curriculum for developing bilingualism for Asian American students, including offering the option to take Hindi, Chinese, Korean and other Asian languages as a foreign language
- Expand NJ's bilingual programs to include dual language two-way immersion programs for the bilingual development of English and the major Asian languages in NJ
- Expand NJ's effective preschool programs beyond the current 62 non-Abbott school districts and 31 Abbott districts so that all the state's at-risk children, regardless of background or zip code, can enroll
- The NJ Department of Education should commission more research on the growing diversity of New Jersey's public schools, including effective teaching practices for students-of-color and immigrants

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# 04



## ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

JUN CHOI AND RICHARD SUN



Asian Americans are making vital contributions to New Jersey’s economy. They are entrepreneurs at higher rates than the general population, fill critical positions in STEM fields and the major industries of NJ, receive more skilled H1B visas than other immigrant populations and are well represented in the growth sectors of the future. They are contributing more as consumers, workers, entrepreneurs and taxpayers than their population would suggest. However, Asian Americans face the highest income inequality of any racial group, as discussed in previous chapters, and a growing number of Asian American low- and middle-wage workers struggle to make it day-to-day in NJ.

Statewide, Asian American buying power in NJ grew from \$5.7 billion in 1990 to \$57 billion in 2017, a ten-fold increase, and is projected to grow to \$74.8 billion by 2022.<sup>1</sup> This is especially significant as NJ’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), along with that of Connecticut, has trailed the overall regions’ growth. From

ceiling” (glass ceiling) is substantial, or they feel misunderstood in their current employment. Asian Americans also perceive discrimination in their workplace more frequently than any other racial group according to two national surveys – a Gallup poll commissioned by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, 2005) and a Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, National Public Radio and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation poll (2017) both report perceived discrimination rates of approximately 30%. Jersey Promise’s 2019 survey confirms a similar rate applies for NJ.

NJ’s economic future will depend significantly on how our diverse workforce can work together as we compete on the national and international stage. As NJ struggles to accelerate our growth rate and create high quality jobs, creating a sense of belonging for people of all backgrounds, and supporting new immigrant entrepreneurship is critical to NJ’s future economic health.

**TABLE 1:** Growth in Buying Power for Asian Americans in NJ<sup>3</sup>

(In millions of USD, 2017)

	1990	2000	2010	2017	2022 Projected
Asian American	\$5,712	\$16,556	\$37,233	\$57,039	\$74,800
% Change		190%	125%	53%	31%
All	\$167,682	\$278,764	\$400,167	\$492,566	\$569,438
% Change		66%	44%	23%	16%

2010-2017, following the Great Recession, NJ’s economy grew slower as compared to New York City’s (annual 2.3%), and the region’s and the nation’s annual growth rate during the same period.<sup>2</sup> If it were not for Asian Americans’ and other immigrants’, NJ would face a declining GDP.

Despite Asian Americans’ increasing contributions to NJ’s economic future, they often feel that they are cultural outsiders or treated differently in the workplace. Many Asian Americans feel that the “bamboo

**Asian Americans are working in every sector of the economy – both in blue and white-collar occupations, yet increasing numbers are low-wage workers**

<sup>1</sup> Selig Center for Economic Growth (2017). “The Multicultural Economy”  
<sup>2</sup> Regional Plan Association analysis of Census 2017.  
<sup>3</sup> Ibid 1.

Despite the popular stereotypes of the Asian American nerd or information technology worker, convenience store clerk with a foreign accent, or some of the super wealthy business moguls portrayed in the popular movie *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), Asian American entrepreneurs and workers today defy any easy classification. To be clear, the vast majority of characters (and actors) in *Crazy Rich Asians* are Asian, not Asian American. Asian Americans are contributing to every sector of the economy in low- and high-wage positions.

The median wage masks important subgroup differences for Asian Americans. As Figure 2 illustrates, there is wide variation across ethnic groups. Just like for the broader economy, socio-economic disparities threaten to undermine the stability of communities. Asian American workers are well represented in NJ's leading industries such as pharmaceuticals, finance and technology, however, an increasing share is occupying lower wage positions such as childcare, food services and retail clerks.

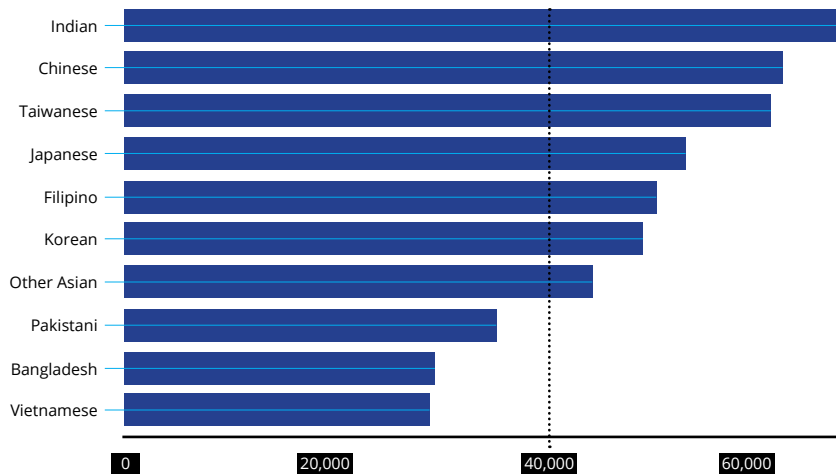
As Table 3 illustrates, Asian Americans are well-represented in these sectors: Accommodation and food services, finance and insurance, health care and social assistance, information, management of companies and enterprises, manufacturing, professional, scientific and technical services, and wholesale trade.

The industries with the greatest number of Asian American workers from lower-income households include: Restaurants and other food services, colleges and universities, including junior colleges (non-tenure track professors and part time lecturers), nail salons and other professional personal care services, grocery stores, construction, hospitals, elementary and secondary schools and childcare (nannies, etc.).

The conventional wisdom that Asian Americans hold a disproportionately large share of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) jobs is supported by the evidence. 34.5% of New Jerseyans of Asian descent are employed in STEM occupations as compared to 25% nationwide or 13.6% for the general population.

**FIGURE 2:** Median Wages by Ethnic Group in NJ (2017)<sup>4</sup>

**Median Wages by Asian National Origin**



**TABLE 3:** Representation of Asian Americans (AA) in Different Sectors<sup>5</sup>

Industry Sector	Total Employment	AA Employment	AA %
Accommodation and Food Services	301,494	30,899	10.2%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management	202,638	9,136	4.5%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	13,654	36	0.3%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	102,980	6,771	6.6%
Construction	270,658	6,227	2.3%
Educational Services	443,664	29,500	6.6%
Finance and Insurance	306,998	58,200	19.0%
Health Care and Social Assistance	654,009	72,950	11.2%
Information	134,879	16,891	12.5%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	7,407	1,380	18.6%
Manufacturing	385,110	47,523	12.3%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	2,404	210	8.7%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	207,850	20,463	9.8%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	430,062	84,124	19.6%
Public Administration	212,172	8,630	4.1%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	87,048	5,244	6.0%
Retail Trade	515,315	44,138	8.6%
Transportation and Warehousing	250,561	14,527	5.8%
Utilities	31,774	1,997	6.3%
Wholesale Trade	153,349	16,861	11.0%

**TABLE 4:** Representation of Asian Americans (AA) in STEM Occupations

	Total Employment	AA Employment	Total Employment Share	Share of AA Employment
Non-STEM Occupations	4,072,943	311,624	86.4%	65.5%
STEM Occupations	641,083	164,083	13.6%	34.5%

<sup>4</sup> Census PUMS / ACS 2017, 5 Year.

<sup>5</sup> Census PUMS / ACS 2017, 1 year. \*Representation is the ratio of % AA in a given industry over % AA in the workforce.

## Asian Americans make enormous contributions to the NJ economy as entrepreneurs and small business owners

Immigrants made up 47% of NJ's main street business owners in 2016, although they made up only 22% of the state's population according to a recent NJ Policy Perspective's report.<sup>6</sup> Asian American immigrants account for 54% of these small business owners, as compared with White (26%), Latino/a (15%) and African (2%) American immigrants.

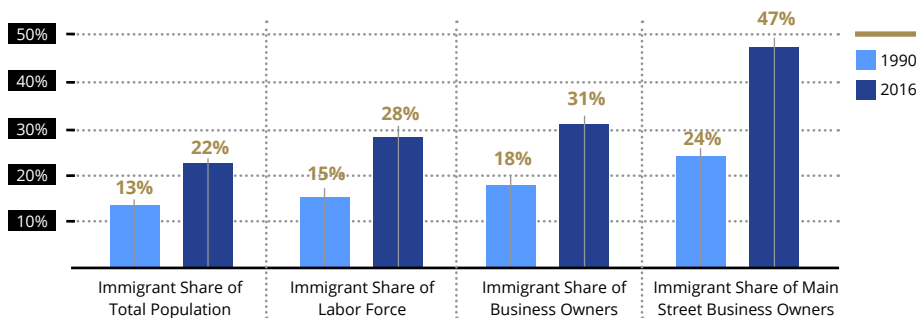
While Jersey Promise believes the recent passage of an increase in the minimum wage will have a positive impact on wages for lower-income workers, on closing the income gap in the state and on improving NJ's overall economy, we are concerned about its impact on small businesses. These impacts will be felt especially strongly by labor intensive, low-margin businesses such as food services or retail. To minimize any negative impact, the Governor and state legislators should consider appointing a special task force or commission to monitor how the minimum wage is impacting the state's economy, especially its small business community. The task force should publish an annual report and make specific policy recommendations to ensure the new minimum wage law is positively impacting the broader economy, especially as it relates to job growth for smaller businesses.

The Governor and state legislators should also consider new tax credits for smaller businesses as 85.6% of new private sector job gains come from this group.<sup>7</sup> The new tax credits could be awarded to small businesses that create new full-time positions. Moreover, as many small businesses struggle to retain or provide health care insurance for their employees, a new tax credit could be awarded to small businesses that provide health insurance (with minimum benefits) to their employees.



FIGURE 5: Immigrants Play a Vital Role in New Jersey's Economy

### Measuring the growth of New Jersey's immigrant population and the immigrant share of the state labor force and business owners



Source: NJPP analysis of ACS / PUMS, 1990 and 2016.

TABLE 6: Main Street Businesses with the Highest Share of Immigrant Owners

Industry	Total Businesses	Immigrant Owned	Immigrant Share
Household maintenance	835	676	81%
Dry cleaning and laundry	1,550	1,232	79%
Taxi and limousine	1,534	1,114	73%
Nail salons and personal car services	1,441	1,016	70%
Grocery stores	2,185	1,516	69%
Computer systems design and services	5,865	3,129	53%
Restaurant and food services	8,064	4,300	53%
Truck transportation	3,166	1,650	52%
Clothing store	1,298	649	50%
Child day care services	1,498	720	48%

Source: NJPP analysis of ACS / PUMS, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> NJPP analysis of 2016 Census PUMS data. <https://www.njpp.org/reports/immigrant-small-business-ownership-is-a-cornerstone-of-new-jerseys-economy>  
<sup>7</sup> The Fund for NJ (2017). *Crossroads NJ: Jobs and the Economy*. Pg. 11 based on National Establishment Time-Series Data compiled by CBPP (1995-2013).



Access to capital is one of the greatest challenges for small businesses. Jersey Promise encourages the state to partner with community banks to explore ways to streamline the loan application process and to create more financing opportunities for small businesses. Asian American owned firms number over 81,000<sup>8</sup> with combined revenues of over \$44 billion in NJ. Community banks are more likely to have the personal relationships with their local communities and to have some cultural and linguistic competency to connect with local entrepreneurs. By connecting the right banks, investors, professionals (attorneys, accountants, business consultants, etc.) with entrepreneurs, the right business relationships would be formed spurring growth and job creation.

**Asian Americans remain underrepresented in the leadership of large companies and face the “bamboo ceiling.” They report being misunderstood or cultural outsiders in work environments at all levels.**

The invisible “Asian American syndrome” is also prevalent in the private sector. There are important cultural reasons that partially explain this issue. Often times, East Asian culture stresses deference to leaders in authority, whereas American culture stresses speaking out and voicing changes to senior management. Making eye contact is still disrespectful in certain Asian cultures, while not making eye contact in American business situations can be viewed as being not trustworthy or even disrespectful. Asian Americans have a responsibility to learn mainstream business practices and cultural norms. Senior managers in many large companies also have a responsibility to address this issue. They could do more to include Asian Americans and other workers-of-color in their leadership pipeline.

<sup>8</sup> New American Economy (2017). *How Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Contribute to the US Economy*. <http://research.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/NAE-AAPI-v14.pdf>

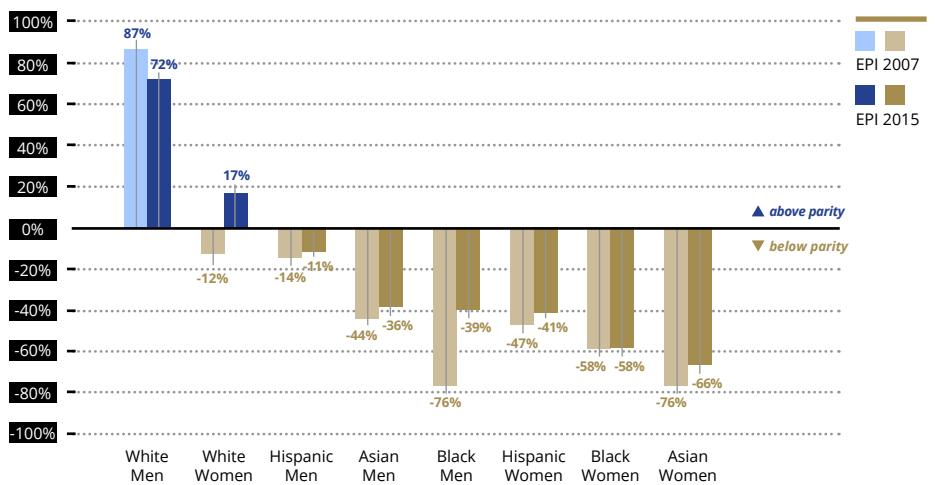
Board and C-Suite representation continue to remain extremely low. In large companies, Asian Americans are well represented in the workforce, however, only 2% of executive leaders in Fortune 500 companies are Asian American despite aspiring for top level positions at a higher rate (64%) than any other group.<sup>9</sup> 48% of Asian Americans report the biggest obstacle they face in rising through the ranks is conforming to Western leadership models. Asian Americans are also 15% less likely than White Americans to have a mentor (46% compared to 61%) in Fortune 500 companies nationwide.

Due to the lack of research specifically focused on NJ, we looked at two national studies that can be applied here. The Ascend study, "The Illusion of Asian Success," analyzed Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) data from 2007-2015 and found that Asian American technology workers in Silicon Valley are the least likely to be promoted to managerial or executive ranks and are vastly underrepresented.<sup>10</sup> This debunks popular perceptions that Asian Americans are doing well in tech. White American men and women were twice as likely as Asian Americans to become executives and held almost three times the number of executive jobs.<sup>11</sup> Black and Latino/a American workers were also less likely than their White American peers to become executives. The Ascend study developed the Executive Parity Index (EPI), the ratio of the percentage representation of minorities in a company's executive workforce as compared to that company's percentage representation of minorities in its entry-level professional workforce.



**FIGURE 7:** Gaps in Executive Parity: 2007 vs 2015

**San Francisco Bay Area Technology Sector**



Source: Ascend (2017)



As Figure 7 clearly shows, all workers-of-color remained below parity. However, Asian American women, more than Latina or Black American women, had the lowest rate of advancement. White American women, on the other hand, made significant advancements over the 8-year period moving from below parity to 17% above parity in 2015.

In the national Portrait Project focused on the legal profession and published by Yale Law School and the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (2017), the authors reported

<sup>9</sup> Talent Innovation (2011). [https://www.talentinnovation.org/\\_private/assets/CWLP\\_Asians-in-America-KeyFindings-CTI.pdf](https://www.talentinnovation.org/_private/assets/CWLP_Asians-in-America-KeyFindings-CTI.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Ascend (2017). *Illusion of Asian Success: Scant Progress for Minorities in Cracking the Glass Ceiling from 2007-2015*. <https://c.yumcd.com/sites/www.ascendleadership.org/resource/resmgr/research/TheIllusion-ofAsianSuccess.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid 10, pg 3.



that for nearly two decades nationwide, Asian Americans have been the largest percentage of attorneys in firms of any minority group (7%).<sup>12</sup> However, the attrition rate is highest for Asian American attorneys; 11.4% start as associates, but only 3.1% become equity partners. When asked what the perceived barriers were to advancing in these firms, the most common responses were: 1) inadequate access to mentors and contacts, 2) lack of formal leadership training programs, and 3) their work goes unrecognized.<sup>13</sup>

Many Asian American attorneys also report implicit bias and stereotypical perceptions as obstacles to promotion and advancement. Among Asian American attorneys, 23% of women report facing implicit discrimination often or always and 38% report sometimes facing them. 16% of men report facing implicit discrimination often or always and 37% report facing them sometimes.<sup>14</sup>

According to a 2017 study by national survey by National Public Radio, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, 27% of Asian

American adults reported being personally discriminated against when applying for a job, 25% when being paid or promoted, and 25% when trying to rent or buy a house.<sup>15</sup> This study is consistent with a national Gallup poll conducted with conjunction with the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) more than a decade ago in 2005; Asian Americans reported the highest perceptions of discrimination (31%) in the workplace, followed by African Americans (26.5%), White Women (22%), Hispanics (18%) and White Men (3%).<sup>16</sup> Overall, 15% of American workers reported perceived discrimination.

Interestingly, EEOC's records also show that while Asian American perceptions were highest, they only filed 3% of the charges that same fiscal year. 36% of all charges were based on race, 31% based on gender and 20% under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Commenting on this discrepancy, EEOC Chair Cari Dominguez noted "when you compare our most recent EEOC charge statistics with the Gallup data, we find that a far greater percentage of Hispanics and Asians perceive

themselves to be discriminated against than actually file charges."

Finally, Jersey Promise's survey results also confirm the findings in the national studies. 28% of Asian American adults in NJ report discrimination in their workplace.

**JERSEY PROMISE SURVEY**

**28% of Asian American adults in NJ report discrimination in their workplace consistent with national studies**



*See page 11 for survey methodology*

Valuing diversity and embracing our differences in practice, and not just superficially, is critical to the state's future economic health.

<sup>12</sup> The Portrait Project (2017). Yale Law School and the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association. [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59556778e58c62c7db3f8e84/t/596cf063849c2e5a0dc5766/1500311662008/170716\\_PortraitProject\\_SinglePages.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59556778e58c62c7db3f8e84/t/596cf063849c2e5a0dc5766/1500311662008/170716_PortraitProject_SinglePages.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid 12, pg. 30.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 12.

<sup>15</sup> Discrimination in America: Experiences and Views of Asian Americans (Nov, 2017). National Public Radio, RWJ Foundation and Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health. 500 Asian Americans out of 3,453 adult surveys. <https://www.npr.org/assets/news/2017/12/discriminationpoll-asian-americans.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Gallup Poll / US EEOC (2005). <https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/release/12-8-05.cfm>



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### Small Business Promotion

- Support small businesses with streamlined loan / financing programs, by expanding culturally competent business training and technical assistance
- Support financial literacy programs and small business start-up workshops targeting Asian American and immigrant communities
- Organize more support networks of investors, entrepreneurs and professionals (attorneys, accountants, management consultants, etc.) to establish mentoring relationships and spur innovation

### Reducing Barriers and Promoting Opportunity

- Include more Asian Americans in equal opportunity programs, such as minority public contracting programs to counter discrimination in hiring, retention and promotions
- Support leadership development training programs for Asian Americans, women and other workers-of-color who show promise as managers; strengthen these programs by adding mentoring relationships
- Support Diversity and Inclusion (DNI) programs for executive leadership of major companies

### State Policy

- Re-prioritize the state incentive tax credit program so more focus is placed on small businesses, where the vast majority of new jobs are created. New tax credits could be awarded to small businesses that create new full-time positions or provide health care insurance (with minimum benefits) for their employees.
- Increase capacity at the NJ Economic Development Authority to analyze and support small business growth opportunities
- Partner with community banks to explore ways to streamline the loan application process and to incentivize new financing opportunities
- Create high quality workforce development training programs partnering with community colleges, focused on on-the-job training, which is directly connected to industry-certified credentials
- Commission new research that explores the state of the Asian American and immigrant workforce in NJ in order to develop new policies and practices that create more pathways for advancement and to reduce workplace discrimination



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# 05

## HEALTH CARE

BY KYUNGHEE CHOI, MPH;  
STEVE SUNG KWON, MD, MPH; AND  
NAVEEN MEHROTRA, MD, MPH

## INTRODUCTION

Health equity is the attainment of the highest level of health for all people.<sup>1</sup> Currently, Americans from various cultural backgrounds are unable to attain this level of health for several reasons: the conditions they are born into, how they work and live their lives, and how they may be excluded from engaging fully in a community.<sup>2</sup> These are examples of social determinants, which include race/ethnicity, cultural background and beliefs, language proficiency, socioeconomic status and access to quality health care services.

Race and ethnicity play a significant role in a person's management of health. For example, language and cultural differences that exist between a person's racial background and health care systems can be a barrier to health care access. These barriers continue to pose challenges as Asian Americans navigate an overly complex health care system in New Jersey, particularly for the uninsured or underinsured Asian American populations. Uninsured or underinsured people are far more likely to postpone health care or forgo it all together. The consequences can be severe, particularly when preventable conditions or chronic conditions go undetected. Lower levels of health literacy also exacerbate the disparities in the current health care landscape. Health disparities can be reduced when providers are able to offer equitable and culturally sensitive quality care that is responsive to diverse cultural health beliefs and practices, preferred languages, and health literacy.

The vast majority of Asian Americans in NJ are new Americans, and as a result, the healthcare system's understanding of this population's health needs is still in its early stages. Despite being the fastest growing racial group with a 94% increase in population from 2000 to 2017, many of their problems often go unnoticed.<sup>3</sup> Health disparities for Asians Americans have only gained national research interest in the last decade or two.

The "model minority" myth continues to permeate the thinking of policymakers, many believing that Asian Americans, generally, experience good health and therefore require less attention and resources. However, recent research has shown that Asian Americans are at high-risk for certain chronic diseases, cancer, heart disease and poor mental health. In addition, lack of awareness of the value of preventive care continues to be alarming as studies suggest Asian Americans are much less likely than White Americans to seek routine cancer screenings.<sup>4</sup>

To reduce gaps in health care disparities in Asian Americans, we need more reliable data. We need to understand their general health conditions and associated risk factors, and their health care usage and access to health care. In this section, we will discuss the state of health among Asian Americans and some of the problems that they face in accessing quality health care. At the end of this report, we suggest health policy recommendations to help close the cultural and linguistic gap, and to improve the overall health of Asian Americans in NJ.

## HETEROGENEITY AMONGST ASIAN AMERICANS

Asian American are a highly heterogeneous group. Newer immigrants such as Indian Americans (68% foreign born), Vietnamese Americans (63% foreign born), Pakistani Americans (63% foreign born) and Korean Americans (61% foreign born) have unique health needs, while later generation Americans such as Samoan Americans (91% native born) and Japanese Americans (75% native born) have largely adapted to the "American" lifestyle.<sup>5</sup> The median age varies considerably from Hmong Americans (22 years) to the three largest ethnic groups in NJ -- Chinese Americans (35 years), Filipino/a Americans (34 years), and Indian Americans (32 years).<sup>6</sup>

NJ has one of the highest percentages of residents who do not speak English at home (30.8%). Language barriers play a significant role for certain subgroups: 50% of Vietnamese Americans, 40% of Chinese Americans, 40% of Korean Americans, 40% of Cambodian Americans, and 40% of Hmong Americans report speaking a language other than English at home (and label themselves as speaking English "less than very well"). A study from California suggests that there is a three-fold difference in level of health literacy between the English-speaking group and the limited-English proficiency group<sup>8</sup>. Given the health literacy's pivotal role in various health outcomes, we must put in place proactive measures to address this deficiency.

According to a study from the Institute of Medicine,<sup>9</sup> nearly half of all adults in America have difficulty understanding and acting upon health information. Asian Americans, as primarily new immigrants, face even bigger challenges. Studies have shown that people with low health literacy receive less preventive health care and have an increased tendency to use cost-conscious health services like emergency departments. Lack of dissemination of educational materials and information combined with content that is not culturally sensitive or language-specific contribute to knowledge gaps and health disparities.

Also, importantly, Asian Americans have the widest income inequality of any racial group in NJ. Nationwide, Asian American households also have the widest wealth inequality. At the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile (top 10 percent), Asian Americans have 168 times the wealth of the bottom 20<sup>th</sup> percentile in 2010-2013.<sup>10</sup> The median income for Asian Americans in the bottom half of the income distribution was \$18,270 in 2010-2013, significantly lower than the \$42,238 median income for White Americans.<sup>11</sup> The disconcerting fact is that 26% of Asian American households in NJ struggle day-to-day to make ends meet.<sup>12</sup>

1 US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health (2011).

2 World Health Organization. [https://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/sdh\\_definition/en/](https://www.who.int/social_determinants/sdh_definition/en/)

3 Census ACS 2000-2017.

4 National Health Interview Survey (2000-2015). QuickStats: Colorectal Cancer Screening Among Adults Aged 50-75 Years, by Race/Ethnicity, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR 2016;65:1042. DOI). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6538a6>

5 American Cancer Society Special Section (2016). *Cancer in Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders*, p 25. <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/research/cancer-facts-and-statistics/annual-cancer-facts-and-figures/2016/special-section-cancer-in-asian-americans-native-hawaiians-and-pacific-islanders-cancer-facts-and-figures-2016.pdf>

6 Ibid 5.

7 Census ACS 2017.

8 Low Health Literacy, Limited English Proficiency, and Health Status in Asians, Latinos, and Other Racial/Ethnic Groups in California, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3552496/>

9 Smedley BD, Stith AY, Nelson AR (2002). *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care: Summary*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

10 Weller, C. & Thompson, J. (2016) *Wealth Inequality Among Asian Americans Greater than Among Whites*. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race-reports/2016/12/20/295359/wealth-inequality-among-asian-americans-greater-than-among-whites/>

11 Ibid 10.

12 ALICE: A Study of Financial Hardship in New Jersey (2018). United Way ALICE Project. [https://www.dropbox.com/s/h3huycfbak512t2/18\\_UW\\_ALICE\\_Report\\_NJ\\_Update\\_10.19.18\\_Lowres.pdf?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/h3huycfbak512t2/18_UW_ALICE_Report_NJ_Update_10.19.18_Lowres.pdf?dl=0)



Photo Credit: Asian Health Services at Holy Name Medical Center

## PRIMARY HEALTH NEEDS OF ASIAN AMERICANS

### Diabetes

As immigrant groups adapt their dietary habits to living in the US, there is an increased risk for Type 2 diabetes. The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) showed that 21% of Asian Americans nationwide have diabetes, and 32% are pre-diabetic. Surprisingly, 51% of diabetic cases were not diagnosed, which is higher than any other ethnic or racial group.<sup>13</sup> Diabetes is also the 5<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death among Asian Americans, but screening is a challenge with high rates of misdiagnosis particularly for Asian and Latino/a Americans.<sup>14</sup> While Park et al. suggest that there are no differences in total mortality among Asian Americans within the Body Mass Index (BMI) range of 20 to 25 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, a lower BMI threshold for Asian Americans may increase the likelihood of identifying previously undiagnosed diabetes.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, the American Diabetes Association (ADA) changed its guidelines for testing Asian American adults from a BMI of 25 or higher to a BMI of 23 or higher.<sup>16</sup>

South Asian Americans, including Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepalese, Sri Lankan and Bhutanese had a significantly higher age-adjusted prevalence of diabetes (23%) compared to any other racial/ethnic group (6% in White Americans, 18% in African Americans, 17% in Latino/a Americans and 13% in Chinese Americans).<sup>17</sup>

### Cardiovascular Diseases

For South Asian Americans, heart disease is a major concern.<sup>18</sup> They have four times the risk of heart disease compared to the general population and they develop the disease up to a decade earlier. The Mediators of Atherosclerosis in South Asians Living in America (MASALA) study, led by researchers at the University of California San Francisco and Northwestern University, points out that South Asian Americans have the highest death rate from heart disease in the US compared to other ethnic groups.<sup>19</sup>

### Profiles

There are also varied cultural beliefs and practices that present barriers to Asian Americans obtaining quality health services.

Consider the case of Satish, an 8-month-old Indian American infant who developed a cough, cold and fever. The parents tried to use steam, menthol and warm compresses of caraway seeds on the chest to help relieve the symptoms. The grandmother advised the parents that ayurvedic, one of the world's oldest holistic healing systems, and homeopathic treatments would be much better for the infant than taking the child to the local doctor as these natural remedies are safer and more effective. Many Indian Americans accept Western medical practices but have cultural, spiritual and religious beliefs about the complexity of the relationship between health and illness, and how they should be handled.

In another example, Joung is a 75-year-old Korean American woman who is a retired homemaker and small business owner who suffers from corneal dystrophy, a rare eye condition that sometimes leads to blindness. After spending almost a year sending her to an ophthalmologist and multiple specialists, her doctors were unable to figure out the best course of action. During one visit, her doctor explained the reasons why they are unsure of her diagnosis. She nodded her head up and down, and repeated "yeah" many times as if she understood everything, because it is customary in her native culture to revere medical providers as authority figures, and therefore, not to question them. Even when the patient cannot follow the conversation, one acknowledges and acts as if she has understood. These situations are common and lead to poor compliance and outcomes.

<sup>13</sup> Joslin Diabetes Center. <https://aadi.joslin.org/en/diabetes-mellitus-in-asian-americans>

<sup>14</sup> Journal of the American Medical Association Study (2015).

<sup>15</sup> Park Y, Wang S, Kitahara CM, et al. (2014). Body mass index and risk of death in Asian Americans. *American Journal of Public Health*.

<sup>16</sup> Hsu W, Araneta M, Kanaya AM, Chiang JL, Fujimoto, W. (2015). BMI Cut Points to Identify At-Risk Asian Americans for Type 2 Diabetes Screening. *Diabetes Care*.

<sup>17</sup> MASALA and MESA Studies (2014). Understanding the High Prevalence of Diabetes in US South Asians Compared with Four Racial/Ethnic Groups. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4030091/>

<sup>18</sup> O'Connor, Anahad (2019). Why Do South Asians Have Such High Rates of Heart Disease? *New York Times*, Feb 12, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/12/well/live/why-do-south-asians-have-such-high-rates-of-heart-disease.html>

<sup>19</sup> MASALA Study. <https://www.masalastudy.org/about>

“Ethnicity matters. We’ve known that for a while,” said Dr. Salim Virani, an Associate Professor of Cardiology at Baylor College of Medicine, who helped write new cholesterol guidelines, which for the first time, recommended doctors consider ethnicity when determining a patient’s cardiovascular risk and treatment options.<sup>20</sup>

Disturbing trends regarding cardiovascular disease risk are not limited to South Asian Americans. A study about this serious condition in Asian Americans published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* in 2014 reported that while deaths for heart disease fell between 2003 and 2010 for White Americans, death rates for Asian Americans have remained the same, or in the case of Indian American women, have increased.<sup>21</sup> By examining more than 10 million death records in 34 states, the report also highlighted the need for up-to-date surveillance and disaggregated data in order to reduce health disparities by race and ethnicity. Lastly, the report has recommended that hypertension is an important risk factor to detect, screen and treat in all Asian American women (except Vietnamese Americans) because they face higher death rates of hypertensive heart disease.

## Liver Health

Hepatitis B virus (HBV), a serious liver infection, is common among foreign-born Asian Americans. There is a marked disparity between Asians and Whites in the prevalence of chronic HBV. For example, 5-10% of foreign-born Asian Americans have underlying HBV infection compared to 0.1% of White Americans. Foreign-born individuals from regions with high HBV prevalence rates such as Africa, Asia, and Central America are all recommended to undergo HBV screening.

A California study published in 2007 found that nearly 9% of 3,000+ Asian Americans screened for HBV were chronically infected, and only 35% of them were aware of their condition.<sup>22</sup> The study also found that foreign-born Asian Americans were 19 times more likely to be infected than native born. This is important



because studies have documented that while chronic HBV infection can remain asymptomatic for decades it can lead to cirrhosis or HBV-related liver cancer in approximately 25% of cases, and about 887,000 deaths per year worldwide are attributable to this infection and its complications.<sup>23</sup>

## Mental Health

There is significant evidence that many Asian American families experience mental health challenges, such as depression, PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and anxiety, due to the hardships of immigration, acculturation, and intergenerational conflicts. These challenges, however, are underreported as

mental illness because mental illness is highly stigmatized in many Asian cultures. Indeed, in many Asian American communities, psychiatric symptoms are viewed as appropriate reactions to stress rather than actual conditions requiring medical treatment.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, treating Asian Americans as a single demographic category in psychiatric research obscures significant variance among different Asian American subgroups.<sup>25</sup> For example, researchers found that the lifetime prevalence of ever having met the criteria for DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition) affective, anxiety or substance abuse disorder was 26.8% in all Asian Americans.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>20</sup> American Heart Association News (2019). Ethnicity a ‘risk-enhancing’ factor under new cholesterol guidelines. <https://www.heart.org/en/news/2019/01/11/ethnicity-a-risk-enhancing-factor-under-new-cholesterol-guidelines>

<sup>21</sup> Cardiovascular Disease in Asian Americans: Unmasking Heterogeneity (2014). *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*. <http://www.onlinejacc.org/content/64/23/2495>

<sup>22</sup> Lin SY, Chang ET and So SK (2007). Why We Should Routinely Screen Asian American Adults for Hepatitis B – A Cross Sectional Study of Asians in California. *Hepatology*.

<sup>23</sup> World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hepatitis-b>

<sup>24</sup> Lubin, Molly and Khandai, Abhisek Chandan (2017). Prevalence and Determinants of Psychiatric Disorders Among South Asians in America. *American Journal of Psychiatry*. <https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ajp-rj.2016.110203>

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid* 24.

<sup>26</sup> Masood N, Okazaki S, Takeuchi DT (2009). Gender, Family and Community Correlates of Mental Health in South Asian Americans. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 15(3), 265-274. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3955879/>

## Cancer

For Asian Americans, cancer is the leading cause of death. Cancer patterns for Asian Americans are more similar to Latino/a Americans than White Americans, with lower rates for the most prevalent cancers in America and higher rates for those cancers associated with infectious agents.<sup>27</sup> Liver, stomach, lung, colon, rectal and uterine cancers are particularly prevalent depending on the subgroup of Asian Americans. For example, Southeast Asian (Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian) groups have very high rates (up to 66.1 per 100,000 in population) of liver cancer, while Korean, Chinese and Filipino/as have moderately high rates.<sup>28</sup> Korean Americans have one of the highest rates of stomach cancer, while Japanese, Vietnamese and Chinese Americans have moderately high rates.

One reason for such alarming rates in incidence and mortality may be due to various barriers in accessing care. Researchers at Asian Health Services at Holy Name Medical Center conducted a study exploring barriers to preventive cancer screening. Based on 877 surveys completed by participants at an Asian American health fair in Bergen County, NJ, the



Photo Credit: Asian Health Services at Holy Name Medical Center

study revealed 70% of the participants had less than \$50,000 in annual household income and 75% did not have a regular primary care physician. While 91% believed preventative

cancer screening was important, only 20% were up-to-date.<sup>29</sup> The top cited barriers were lack of insurance (37%) and cost (26%).

**TABLE 1:** Leading Causes of Death Among Asian Americans, 2012

	Asian American				Non-Hispanic White American			
	Rank	Number of deaths	Percent of total deaths	Death rate	Rank	Number of deaths	Percent of total deaths	Death rate
Cancer	1	15,340	27.2	104.2	2	462,499	22.9	170.2
Heart diseases	2	12,266	21.8	92.0	1	481,991	23.9	171.2
Cerebrovascular diseases	3	4,108	7.3	30.8	4	100,154	5.0	35.5
Accidents (unintentional injuries)	4	2,372	4.2	15.0	5	99,288	4.9	43.7
Diabetes	5	2,158	3.8	15.7	7	50,443	2.5	18.5
Influenza and pneumonia	6	1,745	3.1	13.9	8	40,460	2.0	14.3
Chronic lower respiratory diseases	7	1,624	2.9	12.8	3	127,116	6.3	46.2
Alzheimer's disease	8	1,379	2.4	11.6	6	72,772	3.6	24.9
Suicide	9	1,152	2.0	6.2	9	33,727	1.7	15.7
Nephritis, nephrotic syndrome & nephrosis	10	1,054	1.9	8.0	10	33,105	1.6	11.8
All causes		56,352	100.0	406.1		2,016,896	100.0	742.3

Rates are per 100,000 and age-adjusted to the 2000 US standard population.

**Source:** US Mortality Data, National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015. American Cancer Society, Inc., Surveillance Research, 2016

<sup>27</sup> Ibid 5.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid 5.

<sup>29</sup> Kwon, S. (2019). *Exploring barriers to preventive cancer screening in Asian Americans*. Manuscript in Preparation.

## UNDERUTILIZATION OF HEALTH AND PREVENTATIVE SERVICES AMONGST ASIAN AMERICANS

Asian Americans tend to avoid visiting a physician or hospital unless necessary. They are more likely to not have visited a doctor, compared with White Americans (51% vs. 39%).<sup>30</sup> Chinese Americans (55%) and other Asian subgroups (58%) are unlikely to have visited a doctor in the past year compared to Indian Americans (42%) and Filipino/a Americans (36%).

Based on 1,250 Indian American survey respondents (1,016 foreign born) completed at cultural and religious events in New Jersey and Chicago, South Asian Total Health Initiative (SATHI) found that there is an “observed discrepancy between self-health perception and health status” which highlights the need to improve the utilization of preventative services.<sup>31</sup>

A study at the City University of New York Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy examined the differences among noncitizens, naturalized citizens and US-born citizens about using the emergency room for preventable visits. Dr. Jim Stimpson, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at the Graduate School, stated that “immigrant populations tended to visit the emergency department for routine care less often than US native populations. This finding not only contradicts the political perception that immigrants are responsible for overcrowded EDs, it is also consistent with research that has found that immigrant populations have significantly lower utilization of health care than US native populations.”<sup>32</sup>

Financial hardship is a major reason why some Asian Americans choose not to seek medical care. Choosing between health insurance and out-of-pocket medical expenses, and paying for essential items like food and rent is a gut-wrenching decision indeed. As stated earlier, Asian Americans face the widest income and wealth disparity of any racial group. The official Census figures from 2017 seem to misleadingly



indicate that Asian Americans, overall, are better off than the general population (see Table 2). However, when examining these estimates more carefully, Asian Americans appear to face greater challenges than reported in the Census. In NJ, 26% of foreign-born residents do not have health coverage.<sup>34</sup> And as described earlier, at an Asian American health fair in Bergen County, many lower

income Asian Americans considered lack of insurance and cost as the two biggest barriers to health care. Many who are insured also face hardships due to costs. 21% of Asian Americans nationwide who are insured year-round report high out-of-pocket medical expenses and/or high deductibles as a percentage of their annual income.<sup>35</sup>

**TABLE 2:** Share Without Health Insurance and With Private Health Insurances in NJ (2017)<sup>33</sup>

Health Coverage - Detail	Total Pop	AA Pop	% of Total Pop.	% of AA Pop.
Without Health Insurance	700,245	55,714	7.8%	6.3%
With Public Health Insurance	1,853,739	122,837	20.6%	13.9%
With Private Health Insurance	5,450,550	662,903	60.5%	74.9%
With Public and Private Health Insurance	1,001,110	43,777	11.1%	4.9%

<sup>30</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation and APIA Health Forum. Race, Ethnicity & Health Care Fact Sheet (2008). <https://kaiserfamilyfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/7745.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Mehrotra, N., Gaur, S., & Petrova, A. (2011). *Health Care Practices of the Foreign Born Asian Indians in the United States*. A Community Based Survey. Springer Science and Business Media. Pg. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Wang, Y., Wilson, F., Stimpson, J., Wang, H., Palm, D., Chen, B. & Chen, L. (2017). *Fewer Immigrants Have Preventable Emergency Department Visits in the United States*. The American Journal of Emergency Medicine.

<sup>33</sup> Census 2017, PUMS / ACS, 1 Year.

<sup>34</sup> NJ State Health Assessment Data New Jersey's Public Health Data Resource. NJSHAD - Query Result - New Jersey Behavioral Risk Factor Survey Data: 2011-2016 - Not Covered by Any Kind of Health Care Coverage, Age-adjusted. [https://www-doh.state.nj.us/doh-shad/query/result/njbrfs/Uninsured/UninsuredAA11\\_.html](https://www-doh.state.nj.us/doh-shad/query/result/njbrfs/Uninsured/UninsuredAA11_.html).

<sup>35</sup> Commonwealth Fund (2017). *How Well Does Insurance Coverage Protect Consumers from Health Care Costs?* [https://www.commonwealthfund.org/sites/default/files/documents/\\_\\_\\_media\\_files\\_publications\\_\\_\\_issue\\_brief\\_2017\\_oct\\_collins\\_underinsured\\_biennial\\_ib.pdf](https://www.commonwealthfund.org/sites/default/files/documents/___media_files_publications___issue_brief_2017_oct_collins_underinsured_biennial_ib.pdf)



Photo Credit: Asian Health Services at Holy Name Medical Center

**+ Holy Name Medical Center – Asian Health Services: A Pioneer for Person-Centered Culturally Competent Care (PC3) Model**

As the Asian American population rapidly grows in Bergen County and in its surrounding area, Holy Name Medical Center (HNMC) has been addressing the community’s medical needs. Through the Asian Health Services (AHS), HNMC provides Asian American patients with high quality customized health care in a culturally competent manner.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace established HNMC in 1925. Over 90 years, the hospital has upheld the vision of its founding members: to open a facility where newcomers from all cultures could work together and patients would receive care from medical professionals who understood their needs. The mission of AHS, in line with that of HNMC’s, is to provide the Asian American population with culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate medical care, and to raise awareness of the importance of prevention, screening and early detection of medical conditions prevalent in the community.

Established by HNMC in 2008 as the Korean Medical Program (KMP), AHS has expanded and now includes Chinese, Filipino/a, Japanese, and Indian medical programs. By addressing medical, preventive and wellness care, and social determinants of health needs of Asian Americans—primarily first-generation immigrants facing

language, cultural, financial and other barriers to seeking health care—AHS has transformed HNMC into a top choice hospital for many Asian-Americans living in NJ, particularly in Bergen and Hudson Counties.

AHS is the most comprehensive program of its kind in the US, and is recognized as a national model for providing Person-Centered Culturally Competent Care (PC3) for a population that is largely uninsured, underinsured, or untapped in its potential for achieving improved population health. HNMC is equipped with culturally sensitive in-hospital services such as specific food, in-language cable channels, transportation, and concierge services. The hospital also houses more than 200 Asian American physicians and provides PC3 training to all staff, so that the entire patient population can benefit from individualized culturally competent health care.

Another important facet of AHS is community outreach. AHS, in partnership with community leaders, social service organizations, philanthropic partners, and physicians, provides education to raise awareness, encourage health screenings, and seek out medical services.

**EDUCATION**

AHS has been at the forefront of raising awareness of disease conditions and educating Asian American communities to better equip them with critical knowledge and health literacy for the challenges of modern health care. AHS physicians, with their expertise in various medical fields, periodically conduct lectures and seminars covering a range of topics such as diabetes, cancer prevention and mental health. In addition, AHS recruits insurance specialists to enroll eligible participants in insurance programs such as the individual market created under the Affordable Care Act or NJ Medicaid or Medicare, so that the uninsured population may gain access to primary care. Over the years, more than 7,000 families have obtained health coverage through AHS navigators. These educational and outreach events serve pivotal roles in empowering our community with health care knowledge and access to care.

**SCREENING**

Routine screening is one of the most cost-effective ways to maintain one’s health. However, without access to primary care or health insurance coverage, it becomes difficult for many uninsured and underinsured populations to undergo basic screenings. AHS places strong emphasis on routine screening and regularly provides screening for diabetes (hemoglobin A1C), cardiovascular diseases (lipid panel), depression and dementia, breast cancer (mammogram), colorectal cancer, and liver health (hepatitis B).

Between 2009 and 2017, reaching out to Asian American communities, AHS screened more than 13,000 people for Hepatitis B, close to 16,000 for hemoglobin A1C, and 10,000 people for annual physical exams. In this time period, over 10,000 people used AHS’ mental health screening services. In addition, nearly 1,000 women had mammograms, detecting and treating 15 women with newly diagnosed breast cancer.

Among people who had participated in blood test screenings, many had an abnormal result—elevated hemoglobin A1c meeting diabetics criteria (11.9%) prediabetes criteria (41.5%), Hep B positive serology (3.2%), and people needing Hep B vaccination (36.3%). See table 1 for Hep B, table 2 for diabetes, and table 3 for overall Asian Health Fair blood test results.





Photo Credit: SKN Foundation

**+** **Shri Krishna Nidhi Foundation**  
<http://sknfoundation.org>

The Shri Krishna Nidhi (SKN) Foundation is a community based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a mission to improve the total well-being of South Asian American immigrants by improving the physical, mental and cultural aspects of their lives through innovative forms of education and support. The focus of SKN Foundation's work has been dedicated to those who suffer from diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Understanding the lack of awareness in areas such as preventive care, SKN Foundation educates the community and provides a network to decrease these health disparities with projects such as Move It to Lose It for childhood obesity (MITLI), South Asian Health Resource Initiative (SAHRI), Asian Indian Cultural Awareness Training (AICAT), Special Needs Community Outreach Program for Empowerment (SCOPE), and South Asian Diabetes Institute (SADI).

SCOPE provides South Asian American families with support, education and socialization for their children with special needs. The South Asian Diabetes Institute developed, in

collaboration with St Peter's University Hospital, a program that supports patients with a patient navigator to streamline care coordination and referrals to prevention programs for those at risk for developing diabetes. Free screenings and various outreach efforts help to identify patients who are then guided to culturally appropriate quality Diabetes prevention programs and care. Culturally relevant expert education, support, care and resources are provided through the Institute which connects valuable Diabetes resources to South Asian Americans. Since its inception in 2017, the institute has screened hundreds of patients of which many have been streamlined into culturally sensitive care. The SKN Foundation aims to support not just the community but the health care providers through the Asian Indian Cultural Awareness Training Program which provides better informed care for South Asian Americans. SKN collaborates with various organizations to bridge the cultural gaps to improve the health outcomes for the South Asian American population.

**CULTURAL AWARENESS TRAINING**

Attitudes and behaviors are more than likely to be conditioned by culture: values, assumptions and perceptions that are instilled early on in life and are expressed in the way we behave and interact. These cultural influences are so deep that we act upon them instinctively in everything we do, from the way we stand and talk, to the way we deal with superiors, conflict and decision-making. These can have a substantial impact on the health care management of Asian Indian patients especially if the health care provider is unaware of them. These differences can be deep and intuitive and may lead to substantial misunderstanding and miscommunication, impacting compliance and health care outcomes. Through these provider-training modules, we aim to empower the providers with basic skills sets to reduce health care disparities.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### State Policy

- In collaboration with the NJ Department of Health, establish a Task Force to review and make specific recommendations on the collection of health data in NJ so that it becomes more reliable, more disaggregated (so that cultural distinctions and prevalence of risk factors are taken into account), more efficient and more relevant to patients, providers, insurance companies and health care policy makers
- NJ Department of Health should proactively encourage both public health agencies and private providers to organize more health literacy, health fairs and community health outreach programs that reach populations who are at high-risk and those who have no access to routine health care.
- The State of New Jersey should lead a multi-agency program to provide more cultural and linguistic competency training for state and local government employees and health care providers, to expand the use of cultural navigators and to improve multi-lingual services for immigrants especially in the areas of

health, senior care, education and social services

- Update state policy on covered screenings by insurance companies
  - » Provision of health care insurance coverage for screening in certain pathologies uniquely prevalent in Asian Americans, particularly for the high-risk patients who are foreign-born from countries that have a high prevalence rate of that pathology (example: upper endoscopy screening for gastric cancer)

### Community Partnerships

- Develop and implement a private \$250,000 statewide health marketing campaign in a culturally and linguistically competent manner that provides health information for specific at-risk Asian American populations with action steps to close the disparity gap
  - » Expand the successful models at Holy Name Medical Center and SKN Foundation to other parts of the state targeted to high concentrations of at-risk Asian American populations (see Introduction Chapter)

- Build a broader coalition of health care providers and community-based organizations that would:
  - » Act as a unified voice on health practices related to the Asian American community
  - » Share best practices and develop standards for quality cultural and linguistic competent care
  - » Build consensus for a more regular, on-going programs to reach out to at-risk populations
- Promote more regularly scheduled community health outreach events and health literacy programs
  - » Provide pro-active, multi-lingual health care insurance enrollment programs
  - » Provide physician led educational and screening programs for high prevalent diseases



### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Kyunghee Choi, MPH**, is the Founder of Asian Health Services and Vice President at Holy Name Medical Center where she pioneered Person-Centered Culturally Competent Care (PC3) and population health management. She previously had a 25-year career in banking at JP Morgan as a managing director.

**Steve Sung Kwon, MD, MPH**, is a surgical oncologist and health service researcher. He specializes in liver, gall bladder, bile duct, stomach, intestinal, colon, rectal and thyroid cancers and completed his fellowship at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

**Naveen Mehrotra, MD, MPH**, is a pediatrician and Co-Founder of Shri Krishna Nidhi (SKN) Foundation. He received his pediatric training at the University of Chicago and serves as adjunct faculty at the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## APPENDIX

**TABLE 1:** Asian Health Services – Hepatitis B Screening

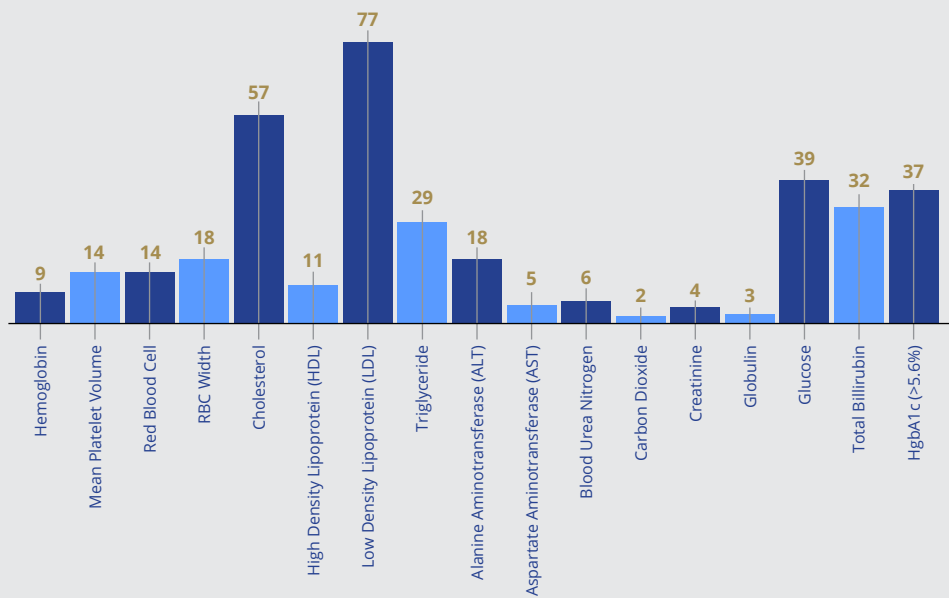
	Blood Screening	Hepatitis B Carrier	Vaccination Required
2009	107	5	31
2010	1,489	50	655
2011	1,916	80	506
2012	2,010	49	794
2013	2,125	42	817
2014	1,660	48	511
2015	1,870	66	674
2016	1,393	56	568
2017	463	15	166
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,033</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>4,722</b>
<b>% of Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>3.2%</b>	<b>36.3%</b>

**TABLE 2:** Asian Health Services – Diabetes Screening

	A1C Screening	Normal	Pre-Diabetic	Diabetic
2011	1,704	1,006	509	189
2012	2,349	1,106	1,008	235
2013	2,454	757	1,260	437
2014	2,007	942	856	209
2015	2,219	958	977	284
2016	2,486	1,237	943	306
2017	2,688	1,403	1,041	244
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,907</b>	<b>7,409</b>	<b>6,594</b>	<b>1,904</b>
<b>% of Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>46.6%</b>	<b>41.5%</b>	<b>11.9%</b>

**FIGURE 3:** Asian Health Services – Historical Abnormal Results from Asian Health Fair (2010-2017)

**Percentage of Abnormal Results  
Annual Asian Health Fair, 2010-2017 Average**



A photograph of a diverse group of students in a classroom. In the foreground, a young man in a dark suit jacket and light pink shirt has his right hand raised. To his right, a young woman in a brown blazer and white blouse with a purple bow also has her right hand raised. Other students in the background also have their hands raised. The classroom has large windows with a grid pattern, and the lighting is bright and natural.

# 06

**IMMIGRATION  
AND JUSTICE**  
RONALD CHEN



## Interaction of Immigrants with Law Enforcement and the Legal System

The first immigration law enacted in the United States was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (not repealed until 1943), and indeed until 1965 federal immigration law was specifically designed to suppress the number of Asians who immigrated to the United States. While Jersey Promise acknowledges the need for fair and equitable federal immigration laws, those equities must be understood in light of the historical reality that the number of New Jerseyans of Asian heritage who are not immigrants or children of immigrants is unnaturally low because of the formal legal restrictions placed on Asian immigration in particular, until relatively recent times.

As a result, Asian American communities in the United States tend to be more self-contained than other racial and ethnic communities, such as those that came from Europe which have had generations to integrate into the mainstream of American life. State government policies that seek to promote that process of integration must therefore be sensitive to the special linguistic, cultural and social challenges that currently exist disproportionately with regard to Asians and Asian Americans.

## Law Enforcement and the Legal System Must Foster a Relationship of Trust with Asian American Communities in New Jersey

Nowhere is the need for cultural competence and understanding more evident than in the relationship between local law enforcement and the community. The Migration Policy

Institute currently estimates that there are approximately 118,000 undocumented immigrants of Asian origin in NJ.<sup>1</sup> Fear that local law enforcement personnel will seek to enforce federal immigration law is therefore an impediment to developing the relationship of trust that is vital in order for law enforcement to discharge their primary function of providing for the safety of the local community.

Governor Phil Murphy has stated that he wants NJ to become a “sanctuary state.” The details of what that phrase means in practical terms are subject to debate, but several practical steps are demonstrative.

The “Immigration Trust Directive”<sup>2</sup> issued by NJ Attorney General Gurbir Grewal (the first Asian American Attorney General of NJ) severely restricts the circumstances under which a New Jersey state or local law enforcement officer may inquire about a resident’s federal immigration status or cooperate with federal immigration officials in enforcing federal immigration law.

Directive 2018-6 merely provides the foundation upon which the relationship of trust is further inculcated. NJ law enforcement needs to continue the process of building trust. There are several concrete steps that they can take:

- Develop linguistic competency in order to be able to interact with members of the Asian American immigrant community. While access to those who are competent speakers of Asian languages is of course preferable, even use of relatively inexpensive technology can provide a vital link to understanding residents with limited English proficiency (“LEP”). In emergency situations, doing so can literally save lives.
- Develop cultural competency (which is not coterminous with linguistic competency). For instance, an understanding of traditional gender roles in Asian cultures may enable law enforcement to discern potential domestic violence situations.

Apart from law enforcement, the legal system generally, including the civil law system, should strive to achieve linguistic and cultural competency, lack of which can have dire consequences for LEP persons.

<sup>1</sup> Migration Policy Institute analysis of Census 2012-16 ACS and 2008 SIPP Data. Profile of the Unauthorized Population: New Jersey. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/authorized-immigrant-population/state/NJ>

<sup>2</sup> Attorney General Directive 2018-6, November 29, 2018. <https://www.nj.gov/oag/dci/agguide/directives/ag-directive-2018-6.pdf>

When LEP persons come before state and local courts in NJ, their ability to understand the court proceedings is critical for the fair administration of justice. For instance, if a court issues a restraining order under the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act that is only in English, it is possible that both the complainant and the respondent will not fully understand the terms of the order or its implications. Likewise, the ability of immigrants to understand the ramifications, in terms of federal immigration law, of the decisions made in these courtrooms is also essential to the fair administration of justice. Jersey Promise will work with local community organizations and seek cooperative partnerships with local law enforcement authorities to ensure both linguistic and cultural competence within our legal institutions and processes.

## New Jersey Should Support Efforts by Undocumented Immigrants to Regularize their Immigration Status

It is in the economic best interests of NJ to maintain its reputation for having a well-educated and skilled workforce. Indeed, without immigrants, the size of NJ's workforce would have actually decreased in recent years.<sup>3</sup> Nearly 30% of immigrants living in NJ today came from Asian countries.<sup>4</sup> Immigrants account for 47% of NJ's Main Street small business owners despite making up just 22% of the total population.<sup>5</sup> Of those small business owners, 54% are Asian American.<sup>6</sup>

It is therefore also in the general interest to encourage undocumented immigrants to regularize their status and contribute to NJ's economic growth. The current process to regularize status is at best labyrinthine and for many, non-existent. New Jersey may not be able to change the federal immigration system, but it can at least take steps to ameliorate



its effects. Recent events have started this process:

- The state has allocated \$2.1 million to provide representation (allocated to legal services organizations and local law schools) to NJ residents in federal immigration proceedings.
- Soon after Governor Murphy took office, the NJ Legislature amended the state's higher education student assistance laws to make students registered under DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) eligible for Tuition Assistance Grants (TAG), thus making higher education accessible to a large number of low-income students. P.L.2018, c.12 (S699). This is in addition to legislation signed by former Governor Christie which granted in-state tuition rates to DACA students.

Jersey Promise will work to develop structural pathways by which immigrants, many of whom contribute to our state's economic commonwealth, can do so unencumbered by barriers to innovation and entrepreneurship, and particularly barriers caused by cultural and linguistic divides.

## Encouraging Higher Education for Dreamers

New Jersey has about 17,400 DACA recipients, according to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI).<sup>7</sup> Among states in the Northeast, only New York has more people enrolled in the program, in absolute numbers. But MPI estimates that there are approximately

<sup>3</sup> Gang, Ira N. & Piehl, Anne Morrison (2011). *Destination, New Jersey: How Immigrants Benefit the State Economy*, Rutgers University. <http://epid.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Destination-NJ.pdf>.  
<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* 7.  
<sup>5</sup> Nava, Erika (2019). *Immigrant Small Business Ownership is a Cornerstone of New Jersey's Economy*, NJ Policy Perspective. <https://www.njpp.org/reports/immigrant-small-business-ownership-is-a-cornerstone-of-new-jerseys-economy>.  
<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* 5.  
<sup>7</sup> Migration Policy Institute (2018). *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Data Tools*. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles>

52,000 persons who are eligible for DACA in NJ which translates into a participation rate of 35%, which is low compared to other states. California has a participation rate of 52% and Texas 61%.

Among the reasons for low participation among those eligible for DACA is concern about drawing attention to themselves and their families, and lack of accurate information about the application process, especially in light of the Trump Administration's announced intention to terminate the program (which the federal courts told them they could not do). The state should take proactive measures to provide accurate information and give assurances to fearful DACA eligible students using high school guidance counselors, county welfare agencies, and other state entities likely to encounter such students.

## New Jersey Should Ensure Strict Enforcement of the Constitutional Right of All Immigrant Children, Including Undocumented Children, to a Free Public Education

The United States Supreme Court ruled over 35 years ago that all children, regardless of immigration status, are entitled to a free primary and secondary school education.<sup>8</sup> This legal requirement is also embedded in NJ statute and regulation. Despite this clear legal mandate, periodic checks by civil liberties organizations spanning many years reveal that NJ school districts often engage in practices that, whether intentionally or in effect, exclude immigrant children from being registered.<sup>9</sup> Such practices can be direct, such as asking for the student's or a parent's Social Security Number, or indirect, such as disproportionately intrusive inquiries to establish residency in the district for children who apparently come from immigrant households. After so many years,



the state should adopt a “no tolerance” policy, with possible sanctions, against school districts that continue these practices. Jersey Promise, with its ties to the Asian American community, will assist in monitoring compliance with this constitutional standard by encouraging families who might otherwise be reticent about asserting their legal rights to do so.

## Granting Undocumented Immigrants Driving Privileges

While NJ cannot on its own alter federal immigration law, it can take steps to make daily life for unauthorized immigrants in NJ more secure. Among the most important initiatives is a bill awaiting passage in the Legislature that would allow undocumented immigrants to drive legally on NJ roads. As Governor Jon Corzine's Blue Ribbon Advisory Panel on Immigrant Policy noted in its 2009 report:

“Among the most compelling reasons for licensing undocumented immigrants was the safety and welfare of all the driving public in New Jersey. Unlicensed drivers are not examined to assure their knowledge of the rules of the road, are not checked to establish identity, and cannot procure liability insurance that protects other drivers and passengers in the event of accident. Thus, there may be significant costs and losses imposed on innocent third parties as a result of not bringing within our driver's license regulatory scheme those who, as a practical matter, are driving on our roads anyway. And it may also enhance safety, security and law enforcement efforts if state government has access to some basic information about the identity of undocumented immigrants.”

The Legislature should therefore act quickly upon pending bills, S3229/A4743, that would create a standard driver's license that would be available to those unable to establish lawful presence in the United States, and a license for REAL ID Purposes for those who desire a license that complies with the federal REAL ID Act in order to fly domestically.

<sup>8</sup> *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982).

<sup>9</sup> The ACLU of New Jersey has recently sued 12 school districts that continue to implement policies requiring students to demonstrate legal immigration status. See *ACLU-NJ Sues 12 School Districts That Unconstitutionally Discriminate Against Immigrants*. <https://www.aclu-nj.org/news/2018/07/26/aclu-nj-sues-12-school-districts-unconstitutionally-discrimi>.

## The State Should Grant Professional Licenses To All Qualified Persons Regardless of Immigration Status

Under 8 U.S.C. § 1621 (part of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996), someone without authorized immigration status is prohibited from receiving a "state or local public benefit," which is defined to include a "professional license." Under subsection (d), however, "A State may provide that an alien who is not lawfully present in the United States is eligible for any State or local public benefit for which such alien would otherwise be ineligible under subsection (a) only through the enactment of a State law after August 22, 1996, which affirmatively provides for such eligibility." So the state can unlock the gate to professional licensure through affirmative legislation.

NJ should enact such legislation forthwith. The state is being deprived of the services of skilled professionals, such as doctors, nurses, and engineers, by denying them licensure. A portion of those trained professionals are Asian American. And while the state cannot by itself grant work authorization under federal immigration law, a professional license plus immigration status such as DACA, or Temporary Protected Status, would add a trained professional to NJ's workforce.

## We Should Encourage Asian Americans to Participate in Public Affairs

Despite making up over 10% of NJ's population, Asian Americans do not currently participate in a proportionate way in government and public life.



State government should take steps to encourage civic participation including, to the extent possible, immigrants. Although US citizenship is required to vote for federal elective office, and the Legislature is unlikely to extend the franchise to non-citizens for state offices, a few local municipalities in other states have extended the vote for offices such as school board to non-citizens who are nevertheless bona fide members of the community.

Part of the responsibility to correct this lack of public engagement must rest with the Asian American community itself. Jersey Promise will support programs that educate the various components of the Asian American community of the value and necessity of participating in public life, including the basic acts of participation: voting, speaking out at local meetings on matters of public concern, and eventually seeking elected office.

A disproportionate number of American political leaders, and all of our judges, come from the legal profession. But of the over 400 judges in the NJ Superior Court, currently (according to common knowledge) only three are Asian American, i.e. less than 1%. There

has never been an Asian American member of the NJ Supreme Court. While in the past, this disparity might have been explained by less interest in legal careers among Asian American communities due to cultural norms, Asians and Asian Americans currently constitute 8% of the student population of NJ's law schools, which is slightly below the overall Asian American population in NJ. Internal cultural bias within the Asian American community can therefore no longer be the excuse for lack of representation in the profession. Jersey Promise will seek to develop pathways for inclusion of Asian Americans in the legal system. Like other communities of shared interest, Asian Americans cannot be expected to have confidence in a system that does not reflect and represent their communities. That relationship of trust and confidence is crucial to the integration of Asian American communities into the larger public community of NJ.

10 This figure was derived from the required ABA Standard 509 disclosures of Rutgers Law School (98 Asian/1134 total students) and Seton Hall Law School (40 Asian/596 total students).





## OTHER POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Partner with immigrant rights organizations, such as the NJ Alliance for Immigrant Justice, and Latino/a American organizations to build a larger coalition in order to more effectively advocate for the recommendations in this report.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ronald Chen** is a Co-Founder of Jersey Promise and University Professor, Distinguished Professor of Law and Judge Leonard Garth Scholar at Rutgers Law School. He was Dean of the School of Law-Newark and former Public Advocate of New Jersey.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Johanna Calle at NJ Alliance for Immigrant Justice and Professor Rose Cuison Villazor at Rutgers Law School for their review. Opinions and recommendations expressed are those of Jersey Promise and the author and do not necessarily represent the views of reviewers or funders.

A young man with dark hair and glasses is shown in profile, talking on a black mobile phone. He is wearing a dark jacket. In the background, another person is visible, also on a phone, but they are out of focus. The overall scene suggests a busy, possibly public or professional environment.

# 08

**CIVIC  
PARTICIPATION**  
**RICHARD SUN**



Asian Americans have historically been underrepresented in all levels of government and the democratic process in New Jersey. This underrepresentation is not surprising given the recent immigrant history of the vast majority of Asian Americans. Rates of citizenship, voter registration, voter turnout, government service and pursuing elected office are all well below average. However, higher rates of volunteerism show encouraging signs.

Asian Americans are underrepresented in the forums where the state's important public policy decisions are made. These decisions impact the lives of over 940,000 residents in NJ today. More than a quarter (26%<sup>1</sup>) of these households live in desperate conditions that fall under the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) threshold for financial hardship. This underrepresentation has both descriptive and substantive consequences. The relative lack of Asian American civic engagement reduces the need for those in public office to be responsive to the needs of the Asian American community at large. One recent example is the newly formed NJ Complete Count Commission<sup>2</sup> signed into law in August, 2018 and charged with "creating a strategy to ensure an accurate and complete count of New Jersey's population with a particular focus on hard-to-count populations..." The accuracy of this count would impact the allocation of billions of federal dollars in NJ. Although Asian Americans are a substantial portion of the "hard-to-count populations," not one member of the 27-member Commission is of Asian descent or has deep ties to the state's hundreds of Asian American community-based organizations.

Finding pathways to increase Asian American civic engagement at all steps of the democratic process is vital to increasing substantive representation of the Asian American community in NJ.

Part of the responsibility to correct this rests with the Asian American community itself. Our community has the opportunity, by closing this civic participation gap, to achieve one of the greatest increases in voter registration and turnout of any new voting group in NJ. Thus, from the perspective of current and future elected officials, focusing on Asian American issues should represent one of the most meaningful and impactful coalition building opportunities for the future.

## VOTER REGISTRATION AND TURNOUT

Following the immigration and naturalization process (covered in previous chapters), the most common and direct step for new Americans to engage civically and in the democratic process is to register and exercise their right to vote. Asian Americans, owing largely to their relatively recent arrival to the United States, are less likely to be registered compared to other racial groups and have similar voting rates as Latino/a Americans. In NJ, 75.4% of eligible white voters are registered compared to only 55.2% of Asian Americans.<sup>3</sup> However, as Asian Americans' longevity in the US increases, citizenship and registration numbers should catch up to those of other groups. Given the high level of voting among Asian Americans (84%<sup>4</sup>) who are registered nationwide, it is widely anticipated that the number of Asian American voters as a percent of the adult population will match or exceed those of other groups in due time. Of the 941,057 (2017) Asian American population in NJ, an estimated 467,507<sup>5</sup> are eligible voters or part of the Citizen Voter Age Population (CVAP). The breakdown of the CVAP population in the three largest Asian American counties shows:

**TABLE 1:** Estimate of Statewide Asian American Eligible Voters: 467,507<sup>6</sup>

County	% of AA	Size of AA Population	% of AA CVAP	Size of AA CVAP
Middlesex	24%	195,195	17%	89,405
Bergen	16%	145,485	11%	71,635
Hudson	15%	97,860	10%	39,605

<sup>1</sup> ALICE: A Study of Financial Hardship in New Jersey (2018 Report). United Way ALICE Project. [http://www.unitedwaynj.org/documents/UWNNJ\\_ALICE%20Report\\_FINAL2\\_lr.pdf](http://www.unitedwaynj.org/documents/UWNNJ_ALICE%20Report_FINAL2_lr.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> NJ Complete Count Commission. <https://nj.gov/state/njcounts.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation (2016). <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/voting-and-voter-registration-as-a-share-of-the-voter-population-by-raceethnicity/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colld%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>

<sup>4</sup> Ramakrishnan, Karthick and Ahmad, Farah (2014). *State of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders: Civic Participation and Democracy*. Center for American Progress. <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/AAP-Participation.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> APIA and AAPI Data Analysis (2018). <http://www.apivote.org/sites/apivote/files/NJ-2018.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 5.



As a general rule, naturalized citizens are less likely to register and to vote than native-born citizens, net of other effects.<sup>7</sup> In fact, according to a Center for American Progress analysis of Census data (Table 2<sup>8</sup>), citizens born abroad are less likely to register and less likely to vote than those born in the US regardless of region of origin.

However, Pew research<sup>9</sup> shows that in the 2016 election, naturalized citizens voted at a higher rate than native-born Americans. One explanation is that certain circumstances, like the emergence of anti-immigrant rhetoric, would motivate increased voter participation for newer Americans.

Among naturalized citizens, those who have a longer length of time at their current residence and in the US are more likely to register and vote. Once duration in the US was included in the model, region of origin was not significantly related to voting and registration

**TABLE 2:** Rates of Citizenship, Voter Registration, and Voting by Race (2012)

	Citizen (among adults)	Registered (among adult citizens)	Voted (among registered voters)	Voted (among adults citizens)
White	98%	73%	87%	64%
Hispanic	66%	59%	82%	48%
African American	95%	73%	91%	66%
Asian	66%	56%	84%	47%
American Indian	99%	64%	80%	51%
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	88%	58%	85%	49%

**Source:** Center for American Progress' analysis of Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey November 2012: Voting and Registration Supplement File (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2012).

among naturalized citizens. Thus, it is widely anticipated that, over time, Asian Americans will reach parity in terms of voter registration with other racial groups.

Once registered, the turnout disparity between Asian Americans and White / African Americans essentially disappears. Among registered voters, Asian American voting tracks closely with those of other racial groups. This suggests that Asian American voter participation will

likely increase significantly if there is a strong voter registration push within the community and if external barriers to voter registration are reduced. Jersey Promise will work with Asian American community-based organizations, and partner with other groups who historically have low voter participation rates including Latino/a American groups, to raise voter awareness, registration and participation. We also recommend greater cultural competency

training for poll-workers and for employees of County Boards of Elections to address and ameliorate both intentional and non-intentional voter suppression at the polls, and the provision of more non-English language voting resources. Such resources could be provided by a combination of social sector foundation resources and strengthening state law to go above and beyond the requirements outlined by Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act. Such steps would be beneficial to the political climate of the state as a whole. Creating a statewide culture of providing language resources for voting sends a strong signal of democratic value and reduces the risk of litigation or other challenges at the polls. The federal Voting Rights Act imposes a floor rather than a ceiling for states in terms of providing appropriate election resources.

Increased language resources for voting is especially important in our state given the rich mosaic of languages spoken in New Jersey households. NJ has 10 counties protected by Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, including two that require ballots in Asian languages (for

<sup>7</sup> Bass, Loretta and Casper, Lynne (1999). *Are There Differences in Registration and Voting Behavior Between Naturalized and Native-born Americans?* Population Division. US Census Bureau. February 1999.  
<sup>8</sup> Ibid 4.  
<sup>9</sup> Pew Research Center (2017). [https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/12/black-voter-turnout-fell-in-2016-even-as-a-record-number-of-americans-cast-ballots/ft\\_17-05-10\\_voter-turnout\\_naturalized/](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/12/black-voter-turnout-fell-in-2016-even-as-a-record-number-of-americans-cast-ballots/ft_17-05-10_voter-turnout_naturalized/)



than 10%) would suggest (see Economic Opportunity Chapter).

It is also noteworthy that the rate of political contributions (see Table 3) for Asian Americans nationwide is comparable to White Americans. This suggests that Asian Americans are interested in engaging in the political process but may be unsure of the means to do so. When they are solicited to contribute by those currently in office or those seeking office, Asian Americans are highly responsive.

Jersey Promise intends to focus on educational programs that promote civic participation generally, including encouraging Asian Americans to stay informed about current affairs, and increasing volunteerism, philanthropic giving, entering professional careers in teaching and government service and participation in the democratic process. Asian Americans groups should also be encouraged to build stronger ties with networks and groups beyond the Asian American community.

Korean Americans in Bergen County and Indian Americans in Middlesex County). In Section 203 protected subdivisions, all information that is provided in English also must be provided in the minority language as well. This covers not only the ballot, but all election information - voter registration, candidate qualifying, polling place notices, sample ballots, instructional forms, voter information pamphlets, and absentee and regular ballots - from details about voter registration through the actual casting of the ballot, and the questions that regularly come up in the polling place. Written materials must be translated accurately, of course. Assistance also must be provided orally. These numbers should be refreshed with the next Census and should also be adjusted to reflect historic underreporting of language concerns by Asian American groups.

There is strong anecdotal and empirical evidence of discrimination or lack of cultural sensitivity by poll workers in NJ. In Middlesex County, the US Department of Justice has monitored elections numerous times since 2000 based on reports of voter intimidation in high Asian American precincts. These problems are compounded by the fact that minor discrepancies between Westernized and Anglicized names, including middle initial and hyphens, make it harder for some individuals to vote. There have been numerous reports poll workers have asked Asian American voters for voter ID in order to vote. While some of these poll workers have undoubtedly done so with good intentions, requesting voter ID is currently illegal in NJ.

## OTHER AREAS OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Asian American civic participation beyond voting is largely in line with that of other people of color in terms of community activism and contacting public officials. Rates of volunteerism are comparable to African Americans although a subset of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders, report a far higher level of volunteerism. In addition, based on Census 2017 data, Asian Americans are working in the field of public administration at lower rates (4.1%) than their overall population (greater

TABLE 3: Political and Civic Participation beyond Voting by Race<sup>10</sup>

	White	Latino/a	Black	Asian
Campaign Work	4	4	6	3
Campaign Contributions	13	5	8	13
Contact Public Officials	21	9	11	9
Community Activism	30	21	27	21

FIGURE 4: Rates of Volunteerism by Race 2013<sup>11</sup>



Source: Center for American Progress' analysis of Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey September 2013: Volunteer Supplement File (U.S.) Department of Commerce, 2013).

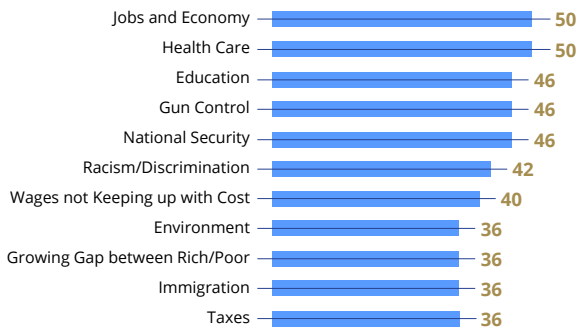
<sup>10</sup> Ibid 4.  
<sup>11</sup> Ibid 4.



## ON THE ISSUES

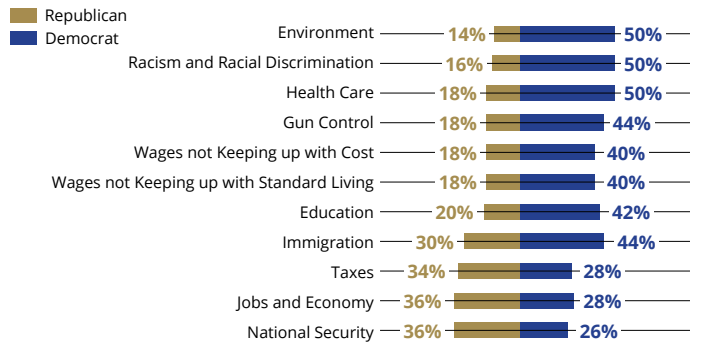
According to a national survey in 2018 (Figure 5<sup>12</sup>), Asian American voters prioritize jobs and the economy, healthcare, education, gun control and national security as their top five issues. Moreover, as identified in Figure 6, on issues related to racial and income inequality, Asian Americans support the Democratic Party view of greater equality by wide margins.

**FIGURE 5:** “Extremely” Important Election-Related Issues (2018)



Source: 2018 Asian American Voter Survey (AAVS) by APIAVote and AAPI Data

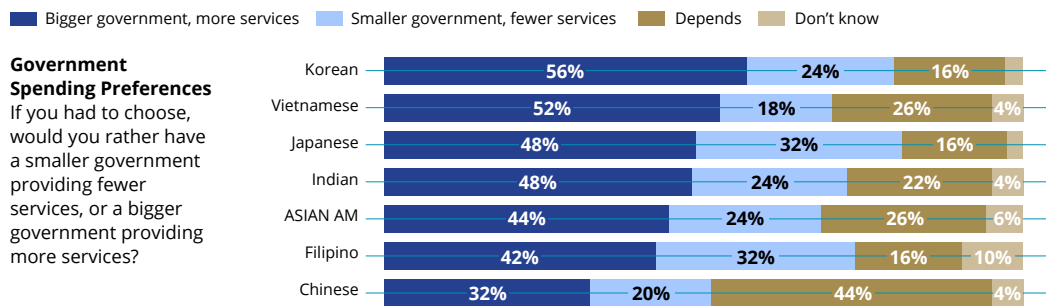
**FIGURE 6:** Views of Party Advantage on Issues, Among Asian American Registered Voters (2018)



Source: 2018 Asian American Voter Survey (AAVS) by APIAVote and AAPI Data

On issues of taxes, jobs, the economy and national security, Asian Americans report views closer to the Republican Party (Figure 6), although they report a preference for more government services by a significant 44% to 24% margin (Figure 7). When further examining their views by ethnic group, all the major ethnic groups in NJ prefer to have “bigger government providing more services.”

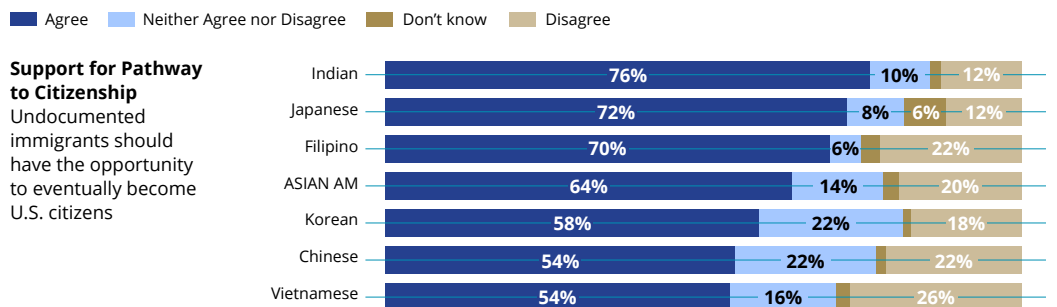
**FIGURE 7:** Preferences on Government Spending, 2018



Source: 2018 Asian American Voter Survey (AAVS) by APIAVote and AAPI Data

On the critical issue of immigration, Asian Americans voted overwhelmingly for “undocumented immigrants should have the opportunity to eventually become US citizens” by a 64% to 20% margin. Ethnic breakdown of views is provided in Figure 8. Nationally and in NJ, Indian and Japanese Americans tend to be the most Democratic in their views, while Vietnamese Americans tend to be most Republican.

**FIGURE 8:** Support for Pathway to Citizenship among Asian American Registered Voters, 2018



Source: 2018 Asian American Voter Survey (AAVS) by APIAVote and AAPI Data

<sup>12</sup> Asian American Voter Survey by APIA Vote and AAPI Data (2018). <http://aapidata.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018-AA-Voter-Survey-report-Oct9.pdf>

## GOVERNMENT SERVICE AND ELECTED OFFICE

Despite making up more than 10% of the state's population, only 1% of the state's elected officials are Asian American. Based on an analysis of 2016 elected officials, approximately 90<sup>13</sup> out of NJ's 8,938 elected officials were Asian American. The vast majority (83%) of these 90 elected officials served on school boards.

There have been trailblazers in government for decades despite the low numbers. Allen Chin (R) served as Mayor of Westfield from 1979-82. Kevin O'Toole (R), now Chair of the Board of Commissioners at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, served as Councilman in Cedar Grove beginning in 1989, then became Mayor, State Assemblyman (1996-2008) and State Senator (2001-2002, 2008-2017). He was the first state legislator of Asian descent in NJ history. Dr. Shing-Fu Hsueh (D) served as Mayor of West Windsor (2001-2018) while Robert Rivas (D) served as Mayor of Bergenfield, a working-class community with the highest percentage of Filipino/a Americans in NJ at the time. Upendra Chivukula (D) served in the State Assembly from 2002-2014. Jun Choi (D) became the first Mayor of Asian descent of a large NJ municipality (100,000+ population), Edison, from 2006-2010 and became the first directly elected Korean American mayor in the continental US. Ron Chen, former Dean of Rutgers Law School, and Kris Kolluri were sworn in as the Public Advocate and Commissioner of Transportation, respectively, on the same day in 2006, becoming the first cabinet level officials of Asian descent for the state of New Jersey.

Today, there are two state legislators (1.7% or 2 out of 120), the first State Senator of South Asian descent Vin Gopal (D) and Assemblyman Raj Mukherji (D). Gurbir Grewal is the first Attorney General of Asian descent and the first Sikh American Attorney General in the US. New Jersey's first Congressman of Asian descent, Andy Kim (D) of Burlington County, was elected in 2018. He is a Rhodes Scholar and served as a national security official and diplomat in the Obama administration. In addition, four County Freeholders (legislators) are currently serving – Susan Shin Angulo (D-Camden) who also became the first Asian American to serve



on a freeholder board in NJ in 2015, Asaad Akhter (D-Passaic), Shanti Narra (D-Middlesex) and Balvir Singh (D-Burlington). Other trailblazers include the first Sikh American mayor, Ravi Bhalla (D) of Hoboken, the first South Asian American woman mayor, Sadaf Jaffer (D) of Montgomery, Filipino American Rolando Lavarro, Jr. who serves as city council president in Jersey City and Grace Park, the first county prosecutor (Union) of Asian descent, who served from 2013-17. Asian Americans tend to be least underrepresented in larger political units, suggesting that current political divisions do not adequately capture the state's diffuse Asian American population.

In addition to increasing the number of Asian American elected officials and senior appointees, Asian American representation in the judiciary – which in New Jersey is appointed rather than elected – is also critical. While Governor Murphy's Transition Working Group on Law and Justice focused primarily on criminal justice reform and marijuana decriminalization, there were several measures geared towards increasing Asian American representation in the State and County bar. One of the most notable measures was an agreement between the then Governor-elect and the New Jersey State Bar Association to re-institute what is commonly known as the Hughes Compact. Under this agreement, NJ governors have historically agreed to withhold nominations of judges, justices and prosecutors until the organization's Judicial and Prosecutorial Appointments Committee

deems them qualified. The National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA) and South Asian Bar Association (SABA) of North America and their local organization will have the opportunity to weigh in to ensure added geographic as well as racial and ethnic diversity. These changes go hand-in-hand with another recommendation of the panel, to solicit judicial candidates whose background and experience reflect the diversity of the communities that they will serve.

Of the over 400 Judges in the NJ Judiciary, only Mark Ali, David Baumann and Haekyoung Suh are serving today. The first Asian American NJ Judge, Randolph Subryan, was appointed to the Superior Court in 1993.

## 2020 REDISTRICTING: COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST

To increase both substantive and descriptive representation of the needs of the Asian American community, Jersey Promise recommends that communities of interest should be considered as a redistricting principle<sup>14</sup> in concert with other redistricting principles. The over 940,000 Asian American residents are concentrated in certain areas of the state and could therefore easily become at the least a community of influence during the 2020 redistricting of the state's 40 legislative districts and indeed some of the 12 congressional districts. Opportunities to create Asian American influence districts (where

<sup>13</sup> Jersey Promise analysis of 2016 elected officials based on first and last name matching.

<sup>14</sup> So long as such re-districting is consistent with other redistricting criteria.

Asian Americans makeup ~20% or more of the electorate and can work with other groups to elect representatives who are substantively responsive to the needs of the community include:

**Bergen County** - LD 37 including Englewood Cliffs, Fort Lee, Hackensack, Palisades Park, Teaneck and Tenafly

**Hudson County** - South Asian American communities focused on Jersey City and parts of Hoboken

**Middlesex County** - LD 18 (the highest % Asian American state legislative district) including East Brunswick and Edison, CD 6 (the congressional district with the highest percentage of South Asian Americans in the US)

**The I-78 Corridor** - Including northern Somerset and western Union counties could be drawn as an Asian American influence district

Over time, there is the potential to draw a majority Asian American state legislative district. This is especially true if districts are drawn that are not currently Asian American but can become so over time.

Jersey Promise, however, does not support formulaic application of one redistricting principle over others. While constitutional principles require that state legislative districts be of approximately equal population (+/- 10%), and the NJ constitution requires that legislative districts be contiguous and respect municipal boundaries except for our largest cities, there are many other principles, such as compactness, competitiveness, partisan fairness, minimizing voter confusion by promoting continuity of representation, that may be considered along with preserving communities of interest. There are times when these principles may conflict, such as when irregular residential patterns of certain communities require less than compact districts.

In order to reconcile these often competing interests, Jersey Promise will work to improve our current reapportionment and redistricting processes, by supporting the inclusion of more independent members of the Reapportionment and Redistricting Commissions.

## ENGAGING AND COMMUNICATING WITH THE ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Asian Americans also face an awareness gap when it comes to voting and other ways of engaging with government and the democratic process. Partnering with both Asian American ethnic and mainstream media would be an important step to close this gap.

Asian Americans have among the highest rates of limited English proficiency (35%) and languages other than English spoken at home (77%).<sup>15</sup> As a consequence, it is important to gauge the extent to which Asian Americans get

their news from mainstream or ethnic news sources.

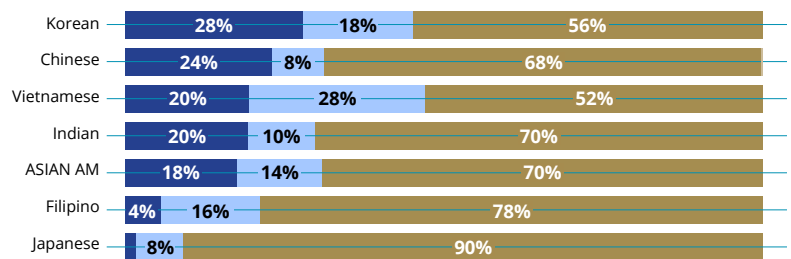
While television and internet news are the leading ways in which Asian Americans receive news on public and current affairs, for those who consume non-English ethnic media, newspapers are the primary source of information. Approximately 20% of Indian American voters receive their news from ethnic newspapers while as many as 24% to 28% of Chinese and Korean American voters do. Asian American civic groups should provide translation material, although time consuming and labor intensive, to engage those for whom English is not a first language.

**FIGURE 9:** Reliance on Ethnic Media (Newspapers), Asian American Registered Voters, 2018

■ Yes ■ Both Asian and non-Asian ■ No ■ Don't know

### Newspapers: Mix of Ethnic and Mainstream

You indicated that you get your news from newspapers. Is that mostly from a (respondent's ethnicity) or Asian newspaper?



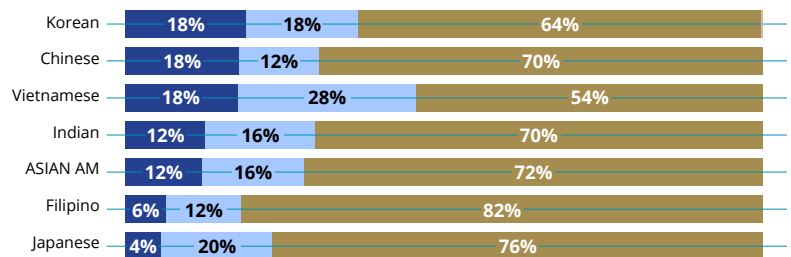
**Note:** Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding  
**Source:** 2018 Asian American Voter Survey (AAVS) by APIAVote and AAPI Data

**FIGURE 10:** Reliance on Ethnic Media (Television), Asian American Registered Voters, 2018

■ Yes ■ Both Asian and non-Asian ■ No ■ Don't know

### Television News: Mix of Ethnic and Mainstream

You indicated that you get your news from television. Is that mostly from a (respondent's ethnicity) or Asian television show?



**Note:** Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding  
**Source:** 2018 Asian American Voter Survey (AAVS) by APIAVote and AAPI Data

<sup>15</sup> Center for American Progress and AAPI Data (2014). *State of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders*. <http://ampr.gs/AAPReports2014>.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Governor should appoint one or more Asian American civic leaders on the 27-member New Jersey Complete Count Commission knowledgeable about Asian American community-based organizations in the state, and have representative Asian American leaders from a diverse range of ethnic, cultural, religious, educational and social service organizations review and comment on the recommendations before finalizing the Commission report on or before June 30, 2019.
- Partner with Asian American community-based organizations, and with other groups who historically have low voter participation rates including Latino/a American groups, to raise voter awareness, registration and participation.
- Increase cultural competency training for poll workers and for employees of County Boards of Election to address and ameliorate both intentional and non-intentional voter suppression at the polls and provide more non-English language voting resources.
- Enact new state law that would require multi-lingual voting access throughout the state, not just in the Section 203 counties.
- Enact new state law that would improve ballot access or reduce barriers to ballot access for Asian Americans and other groups.
- For 2020 redistricting, communities of interest should be considered as a redistricting principle in concert with other redistricting principles in the State of New Jersey.
- Partner with African and Latino/a American groups on issues related to racial and income inequality.
- Civic Participation and citizenship education programs should be promoted and expanded for Asian Americans.
- Improve the dissemination of important government policies and news by publishing regularly in the Asian American ethnic media especially newspapers.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Richard Sun** is a Co-Founder of Jersey Promise. He is currently a student at Harvard Law School. Previously, Richard served as Councilman At-Large (2016 - 2018) in Summit, NJ and as a consultant at McKinsey & Company.

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