

Most Asian-Americans are clustered in urban areas. Approximately 19.8% of Asian-American households have three or more workers in the family. This is compared with 13.3% of all United States households.

Asian-Americans routinely rank at the top or just behind whites in low divorce rates, lack of poverty, low employment rates and infrequent use of public assistance. Of Asian households, 8.7% are headed by single mothers. This is compared with 12.2% for whites, 14.8% for Hispanics and 39.9% for African-Americans. On the next page, Tables 1 and 2 give the birth, fertility and death rates of Asian-Americans.

## **Asian-Americans**

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### **I. DEFINITION**

The term Asian-American refers to those persons of Asian or Pacific-Island descent. These include those whose heritage is in Japan, Pakistan, China, Cambodia, Korea, Indonesia, Laos, India, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam. Asian-Americans consist of Chinese-Americans, Filipino-Americans, Japanese-Americans, Asian-Indian, Korean and Vietnamese ethnic and cultural groups.

### **II. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

The Chinese were the first Asian immigrants to enter the United States. In 1848, when news was broadcasted that gold had been found on John Sutter's property in California, many Chinese were drawn to California. Most immigrated from southeastern China, in hopes of finding work. Initially, approximately 700 Chinese came to California.

Most Chinese immigrants' first intentions were to make enough money to support their families in China. Their intentions were not to become United States citizens. Their primary interest was to work temporarily and return to their country financially stable. Simultaneously, the Chinese felt that because their country was stable and there was no need to become permanent citizens of America. However, in 1850, census records show that approximately 4,000 Chinese were in California. Within the next years, the Chinese population had grown to 35,000, with most of them living in California. By 1880, that number tripled. The reason for the population growth was that Asia, specifically China, began experiencing social problems.

By the mid-1800's, China had major social crises. Overpopulation, domestic revolts, and foreign invasions caused the Chinese government to weaken. In the 1850s, the Taiping rebellion shook China at its seams. In other regions, where many early immigrants originated, natural disasters made life extremely difficult. Many became desperate and sought to leave China for America, for a better life. Many arrived in California for work.

The influx of Chinese immigrants caused major problems. Initially, they were well received. When competition for jobs intensified, Americans began to impose harsh restrictions on them (they were not lifted until 1965). Native-born Americans began to resent the Chinese's customs and being forced into competition for employment. However, the Chinese provided cheap labor and worked extremely hard. In 1882, Congress put into effect the Chinese Exclusion Act. This kept all Chinese laborers from becoming citizens. The only exception to the Act was the allowance of Chinese immigrants who were teachers, merchants, or of similar status.

The Central Pacific Railway Company began construction of the first transcontinental railway. Chinese-American contribution to this was great. Central Pacific Railway hired many of them as laborers in 1864. In 1869, the railway was completed. Many Chinese returned to California to compete with white laborers. Race riots followed. As a result, the United States set up the China Exclusion Act of 1882. It was the first piece of legislation based on racial discrimination and on nationality. As a result, the Chinese population diminished to almost half in the next 30 years -- many returned to their homeland. In addition, they began to retreat into ethnic enclaves in urban centers, known as Chinatowns.

Because they were isolated, many started their own businesses. Their first efforts at starting businesses in America included laundromats, grocery stores and restaurants. Chinese-Americans began to thrive economically because they provided no threat to white laborers or businesses.

In the late 1800's and early 1900's, many Asians also began immigrating to Hawaii. The ethnic and cultural group who had the greatest influx of people were the Japanese. A group of businesses who owned sugar plantations in Hawaii began recruiting laborers. They hired approximately 29,000 Japanese. Many were brought over under a specific agreement and to work for a particular employer. When the contract agreements were over, many Japanese decided to reside in Hawaii. Others moved to California, Oregon and Washington.

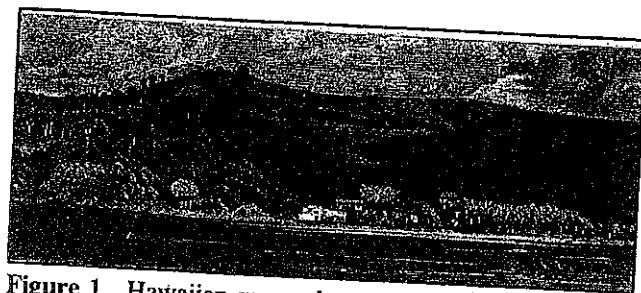


Figure 1. Hawaiian sugar plantation

The Japanese population began to face the same opposition that their Chinese counterparts faced as immigrants. White-Americans resented having to compete with them for employment. Thus, they formed a group called the Asiatic Exclusion League to halt Japanese and other Asian immigration. Concomitantly, Japan and the United States entered a "gentlemen's agreement," which restricted the influx of Japanese immigrants to the relatives of Japanese-American citizens.

In the early 1900's, Hawaiian plantation owners had problems with their Japanese labor workers. Many of the Japanese participated in labor unions and frequently demanded higher wages and better working conditions. The plantation owners resisted and turned to Korea for laborers. The

owners were cognizant of the famine Korea was experiencing and thought this would provide a beneficial solution to both dilemmas. The Hawaiian plantation owners were able to hire 7,000 Koreans. When the Japanese complained to their government that the Koreans were being used to negate their efforts at better pay and working conditions, the Korean immigration came to a stop. When Korea stopped the importation of laborers, the Hawaiian plantation owners then turned to the Philippines. From 1906 until 1932, the plantation owners brought in approximately 110,000 Filipino laborers.

World War II brought liberty and the release of restrictions on the immigration of Asians. In 1943, the ban on Chinese immigration was lifted. The Chinese were then allowed to become the first of foreign-born Asians to become American citizens. Subsequently, Asian Indian and Filipinos were also allowed to become American citizens. After the Vietnam War and in the late 1970's, millions of Southeast Asians have become American citizens. Most were Vietnam refugees. These Vietnamese refugees had worked for American companies or the United States government and possessed great technical skills.

### III. CULTURAL VALUES AND BELIEFS

#### A. Language

The languages of the Asian-American ethnic and cultural groups are varied. They include: Chinese, Hindi, Korean, Japanese, Tagalog, Javanese, Thai and Vietnamese.

#### B. Religion

Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, Hinduism, Shintoism and Christianity are major religions of the Asian-American ethnic and cultural groups.

Buddhism became Japan's official faith by the sixth century. From the 1600's to the mid-1800's or during the Edo Period, all families were required to register at one of the country's Buddhist temples. This custom continued even for laborers who worked on Hawaiian plantations. Many laborers built Buddhist temples to support their religious beliefs and the community. These practices continued when the immigrants moved to various states and built their own communities. Many were drawn to this religion because it rejected separating people according to class, race and religion. The Buddhist's philosophy is that each person must seek, learn and live his or her own life.

The Shinto religion is Japan's native and ancient religion. It is based on nature and used in cultural rituals. Shinto is the worship of the earth and ancestor gods. Every family, by the fourth century A.D., had its own special god. The family would honor this god and build a shrine. A Shinto custom includes visiting these shrines and praying to them for success and to receive a blessing. This is a common practice among the Japanese, along with other cultural groups.

Christianity is another major form of religion for Asian-Americans. Because many were not allowed to start their own congregations, many assimilated into mainstream American churches. Asian-Americans now have their own churches and are part of some major denominations like the Presbyterian and United Church of Christ.

Confucianism, an ancestor worship with supernatural forces, provided the Chinese people with a code of behavioral ethnics on morality and value. This was to be applied to public and private life. It is a major form of religion today.

### C. Family

Building relationships with family relatives, friends and the community are strong values and traditional customs of Asian-Americans. Each family member has a role to play and is expected to fulfill their role. Some roles are more important than others. For example, Asian-American families hold the first son in the family in high value. The first or oldest son is usually extended special privileges.

Asian-American families believe in success through hard work and self-discipline. Self-control is considered to have the highest value. Asian-American children are encouraged to return their appreciation to their parents by working hard, whether in or out of school.

The Asian-American family is held in high esteem. The needs and values of the family are considered primary and not to promote any individual. Marriages and personal relationships are usually arranged to benefit the family's household. Except the daughters who marry, the family members are close and remain so from birth until death.

Within Japanese families there are ranks. This can be seen when a Japanese speaker is requested to address people as above, below or equal in rank.

## IV. PROFILE OF GROUP (WHERE ARE THEY NOW?)

The Asian population is one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States. In 1990, Asian-Americans made up less than 3.7% of the total U.S. population. However, the Asian-Pacific-Islander American population is growing rapidly. It is projected that the Asian/Pacific-Islander population will grow by 40.6% to become 4.8% or almost 5% of the total population in 2007, in the U.S. The general percentage projected increase for the U.S. as a whole is 8.9%. Asian-American women equal 1.9% of the population, while Asian-American men equal 1.8% of the U.S. population. The Chinese are considered the largest Asian group in America, followed by Filipino-Americans. The groups considered the next largest are the Japanese, Asian-Indian, Korean and Vietnamese.

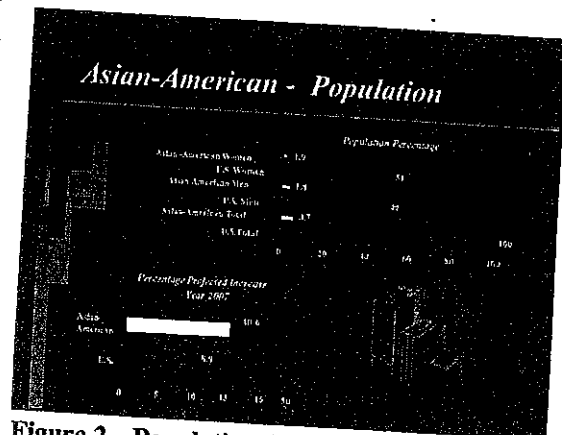


Figure 2. Population Statistics

Approximately 80.9% of Asian-Americans complete high school and 22.2% complete college. These totals are compared with the 43.5% U.S. residents who attend college. They also have a 40% rate of college graduates. Most of the resources of Asian-American families are focused on their children's education.

## V. QUESTIONS FOR THE READER

1. Who were the first Asian-Americans to come the United States? Why?
2. What events caused the Chinese to leave their native country to come to America?
3. How were Chinese immigrants used in the development of America history?
4. Describe how Chinese entrepreneurialism got started in America?
5. The Japanese were the next Asian-American cultural group to come to America. Describe the events that led to their immigration.
6. How did Korean immigrants come to the United States?
7. Why is World War II important to Asian-Americans, in light of their assimilation in American culture?
8. List the languages of Asian-Americans.
9. What are the major religions of Asian-Americans? Describe them.
10. List four major characteristics of the Asian-American family.
11. Construct a present day profile of Asian-Americans in the U.S.