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# These Asian-Americans Have Lower Wages and Higher Unemployment

*A new Labor Department report aims to debunk the perception that all Asian-Americans are faring well economically*

**Melanie Trotman**

One of the fastest-growing U.S. racial groups is also faring quite well economically—at least, collectively.

But the nearly 18 million Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders in the country have vastly different experiences with education, wages and the labor market, according to a new U.S. Labor Department report.

Their general success “can mask some really important differences in what’s going on within the subgroups,” said Keith Miller, a Labor Department economist and lead researcher on the study.

Consider:

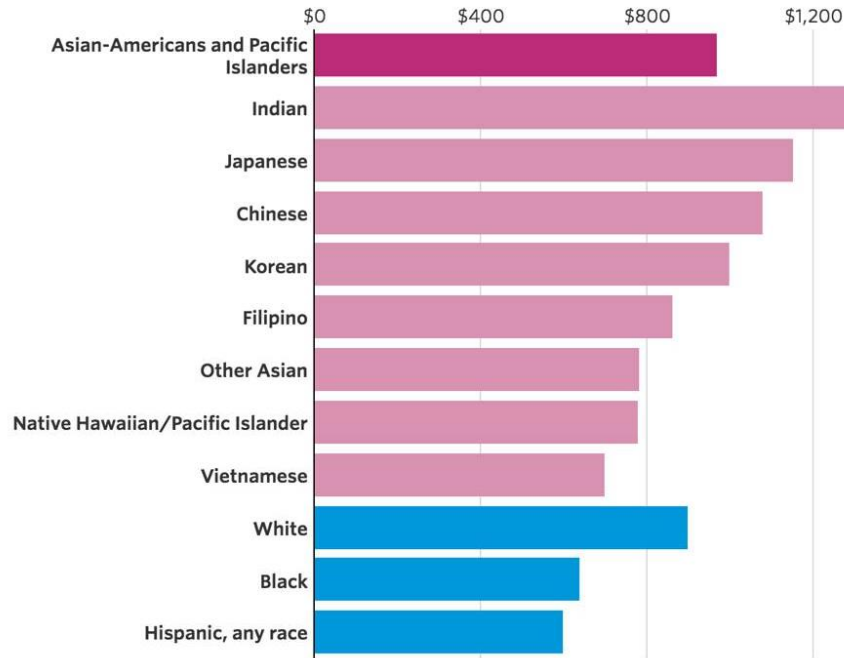
• Last year, Filipinos working full time in the U.S. earned just 64% of the weekly median for Indians.

• Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders were unemployed at more than twice the rate of Japanese.

• Just a third of Vietnamese had at least a bachelor’s degree compared with 60% of Koreans.

## Wide Pay Gaps Among Asians

Median weekly earnings of full-time workers by race and ethnicity in 2015



Source: Labor Department calculations using 2015 Current Population Survey microdata from U.S. Census Bureau

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The report, released this month, is part of a White House initiative on the so-called "AAPI" community and updates information released in 2011 and 2014. It pulls back the curtain on a group composed of more than 50 distinct ethnicities speaking more than 100 languages.

It's meant to be used as a tool for anyone who's providing services to help them know where to efficiently target those services," said Heidi Shierholz, the Labor Department's chief economist.

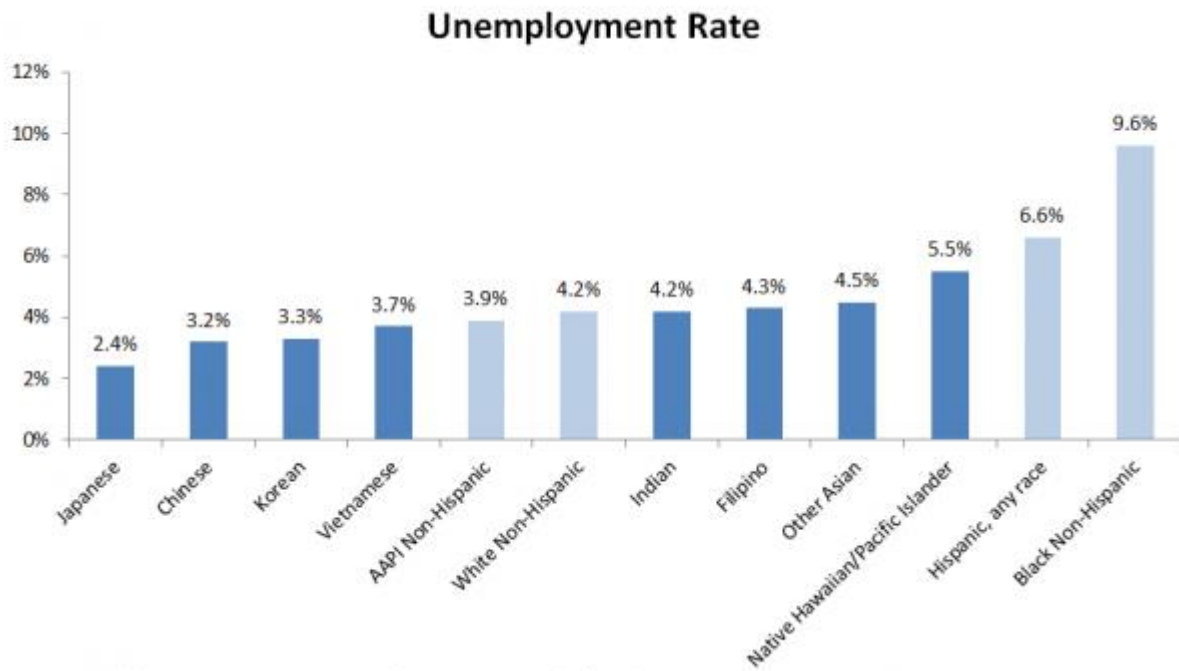
The vast majority of the community—17.4 million—consists of non-Hispanic Asian-Americans. The other small portion of 560,000 is made up of non-Hispanic Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders. Collectively, they represent about 5.6% of the U.S. population and descend from, or were born in, countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific Islands. Nearly two-thirds are foreign-born and California is home to most, or nearly one-third of the group's total.

The differences can be vast.

Vietnamese full-time workers, for example, had median weekly earnings of \$700 in 2015, about half what Indians made and less than the other subgroups. That could mean workplace agencies need to pay extra attention to the Vietnamese in part by ensuring they get information about training or mentoring programs through materials distributed in their native language, Ms. Shierholz said.

It's easy to see how disparities get overlooked when considering just the overall numbers. Last year, the Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders had an unemployment rate of about 4%, less than that of blacks, whites and Hispanics of any race. The group's labor-force participation rate was 62.8%, lagging only that of Hispanics. Its members also had outsized earnings power as a

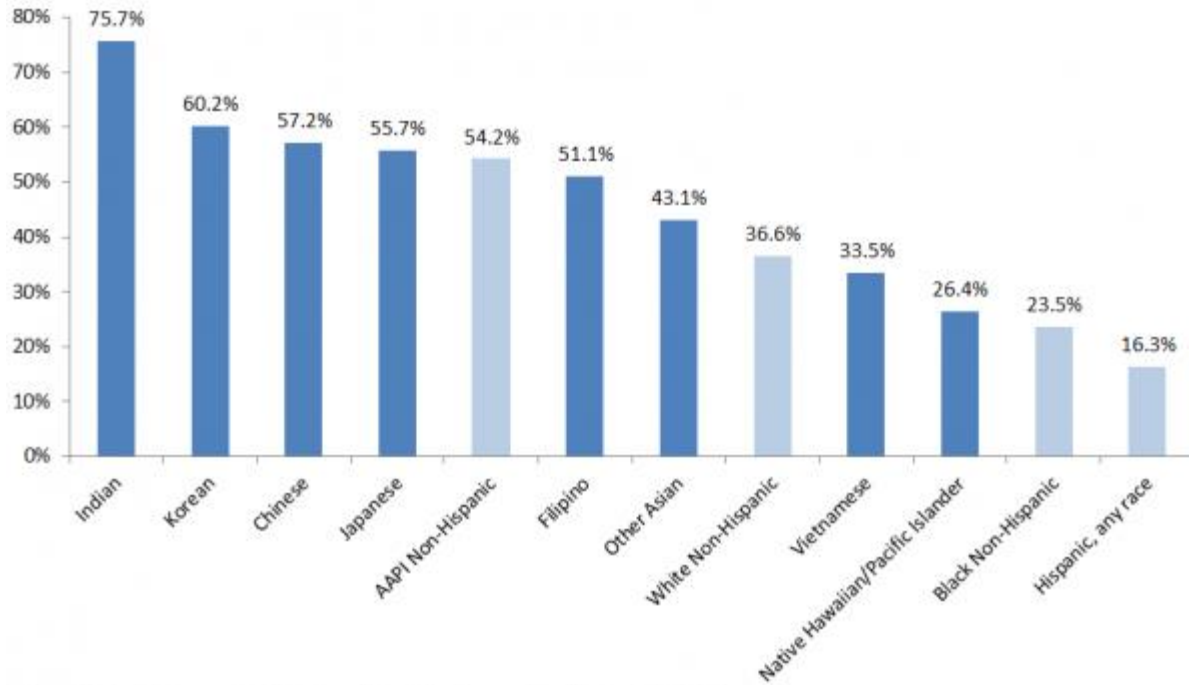
group, making \$969 in median weekly earnings for full-time work, more than whites, blacks or Hispanics.



Source: DOL calculations using 2015 Current Population Survey microdata from the U.S. Census Bureau

Education has helped. Of Asian-Americans older than 25, 54.2% had a bachelor's degree or higher last year, compared with 36.6% of whites, 23.5% of blacks and 16.3% of Hispanics. Still, some thrive much more than others, disparities due in part to varying education, age, citizenship status, gender and state of residence

## Share of Persons Age 25+ With a College Degree



Source: DOL calculations using 2015 Current Population Survey microdata from the U.S. Census Bureau