

How do African-American and Asian-American Income Inequalities Affect Their Race Relations?

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Abstract: This study investigates the causes of discrimination and discordant relationships among Asian and African Americans in the United States. The thesis will answer questions about the grounds of discrimination between the two minorities by collecting data from previous studies. This study examines the rarely explored area of "mutual discrimination between minorities." It identifies the reasons for mutual discrimination between African Americans and Asian Americans as income inequalities and social media impacts. Finally, this study suggests American government assign education resources more evenly, provide financial assistance to low-income families, encourage every individual to speak out against racial discrimination, and enhance their communication and interactions with people from other ethnic groups.

Keywords: Income Inequality, Discrimination between minorities, Anti-Asian hate, Asian-American, African-American

1. Introduction

Tensions between Asian Americans and African Americans have long been a potential problem. There is still much prejudice between the two races nowadays [1]. As one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in recent years, Asian Americans have achieved higher average income levels than other groups in the US. This income inequality has led to various stereotypes of Asian Americans among other racial groups, including African-Americans. Meanwhile, Asian-Americans also often view African-Americans with racialized stereotypes due to some African-Americans 'low-profit occupations. Such occurrences exacerbate tensions between Asian-Americans and African-Americans.

Since the global coronavirus pandemic outbreak, anti-Asian prejudice in the US has been worse. According to the NYPD (New York Police Department) the increase in reported anti-Asian hate crimes is far more than in 2020, when they rose by 124 percent over the previous year [2]. According to Yale News: "Hate crimes against Asians in America have been steadily on the rise, aided by derogatory language stemming from the pandemic and a historical culmination of caricatures and

stereotypes of Asian people.” [3]. During the pandemic, many factors contributed to the discrimination against Asian Americans. Income level, as one of the factors, also played an essential role in this anti-Asian prejudice.

Therefore, this study will examine the disparity in income between Asian-American and African-American groups and explain the causes of growing tension in the relationship between the two ethnic groups.

1.1. Research Questions

More specifically, the questions to be addressed in this essay are:

1. What is the current inequality of income levels between Asian Americans and African Americans in the US?
2. How does income level, as one of the factors, influence the relationship between Asian Americans and African Americans?
3. To what extent do model minorities play a vital role in shaping people’s impression of Asian American?

1.2. Significance of the Study

First, the rise in the average income of Asian Americans is significant. As reported by US news organizations, Asian Americans are called “the highest-income, best-educated and fastest-growing racial group in the United States.” [4]. As a result, researching Asian Americans’ incomes can provide people with a more comprehensive understanding of their actual financial status and income inequality without the influence of the model minority stereotype.

Additionally, the tension between Asian Americans and African Americans has been increasing due to income inequality. Researching the income inequality between the two ethnic groups can help find specific reasons that caused the tense relationship and put forward policy suggestions that contribute to reducing discrimination between the two races.

1.3. Definition

According to Merriam Webster, we define Anti-Asian Prejudice in the current paper as People’s biases that are opposed to or hostile toward the people or culture of Asia [5].

According to The University of Texas at Austin, we define Model Minority Stereotype for Asian Americans as The Model Minority stereotype for Asian Americans is the cultural expectation placed on each individual inside the group of Asian Americans [6].

2. Literature Review

First, previous research has comprehensively analyzed Asian American and African American income levels. The US news reported that Asian Americans’ living quality has significantly increased in recent years, and their average income level has increased considerably [4]. Compared with Asian Americans’ income, the median black household income in the US is relatively lower. Ruiz et al. state in the survey research that the African Americans’ median income is half of Asian Americans [7]. This paper analyzes the differences between Asian and African Americans’ incomes.

Moreover, according to recent studies, scholars found that Asian and African Americans both suffered from discrimination in the US. Using statistical data, Ruiz et al. researched how Asian Americans were discriminated against during the COVID-19 pandemic [7]. Cheryl Bluestone mentioned that cultural differences might lead to specific characteristics of different ethnicities by

providing an example related to the influence of culture and ethnic differences on parenting techniques [8]. Such differences might lead to discrimination by other ethnicities.

Eventually, previous research has raised the issue that social media will interact with the model minority effect, leading to a worse race relation between Asian and African Americans. Due to the incredibly high income of some Asian Americans these years, researchers have mentioned the concept of the model minority when explaining the reasons for Anti-Asian Prejudice. Budiman claims that the model minority is “members perceived as achieving higher degrees of socioeconomic success than the population average.” [9]. Many posts on the internet shape people’s impression of Asian Americans as model minorities, leading to stereotypes and thus causing Anti Asian Hate. On the other hand, social media often exaggerates the social effects related to race relations to gain more attention. Naoko Shibusawa mentioned in the book “Where is the Reciprocity? Notes on Solidarity from the Field” that European-American crimes against Asians are indeed severe. Nevertheless, the media often magnifies African-American crimes against Asians instead of European-Americans’ crimes [10].

Although many previous studies focus on the income status of Asian and African Americans, the discrimination they suffered in the US, and the social media that magnifies the model minority effects, few studies explain the worsening race relations between Asian and African American Americans. In this case, this study will conduct secondary data analysis based on the previous research mentioned above. This paper will focus on income as a factor that may result in mutual discrimination between Asian and African Americans and lead to worse race relations.

3. The Reasons for Asian and African American Mutual Discrimination

According to this study, there are two reasons for the mutual discrimination between Asian and African Americans. The reasons are, respectively, the inequality of job opportunities and the model minority effect.

First, different outcomes resulted from racial differences between Asian and African Americans. Asian Americans were given more and better jobs in the workplace because they valued and prioritized education more than African-Americans. According to “The Rise of Asian Americans” by the Pew Research Center, “Asian Americans are the highest-income, best-educated and fastest-growing racial group in the United States.” [4] The data interacts with the unemployment rate by race in the US in 2021. According to the “Unemployment rate in the United States in 2021, by ethnicity”, the African-American unemployment rate in 2021 is 8.6%. In contrast, the Asian-American unemployment rate is only 5%, much lower than the African American unemployment rate [11]. Moreover, according to recent studies, scholars found that The value of education for Asian Americans has resulted in improvements in their situation in the United States. According to “The Rise of Asian Americans” by the Pew Research Center, “Compared with the educational attainment of the population in their country of origin, recent Asian immigrants also stand out as a select group.” [4] The New Educational Attainment Data, released on February 24, 2022, states, “From 2011 to 2021, high school completion increased from 84.5% to 90.3% for the Black population, from 88.6% to 92.9% for the Asian population.” Additionally, “From 2011 to 2021, the percentage of adults age 25 and older with a bachelor’s degree or higher increased from 19.9 percent to 28.1 percent for the Black population, from 50.3 percent to 61.0 percent for the Asian population.” [12].

Additionally, the model minority effect on Asian Americans was magnified. In an article published on April 19, 2017, NPR stated that “Sullivan’s piece, rife with generalizations about a group as vastly diverse as Asian-Americans, rightfully raised hackles. Not only inaccurate, his piece spreads the idea that Asian-Americans as a group are monolithic, even though parsing data by ethnicity reveals a host of disparities.” [13]. Such harmful labels not only ignore the critical role that highly educated Asian immigrants play in Asian Americans’ success but also make false comparisons between Asian

Americans and African Americans. Therefore, they worsen the intense relationships between minorities and attribute the failure of minorities such as African-Americans to the success of Asians.

Eventually, as the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in China progressed, the new coronavirus was dubbed the "Wuhan virus," "China virus," or "Asian virus." Such titles undoubtedly fueled anti-Asian sentiment and encouraged "anti-Asian" behavior. According to an article published on the website of Human Rights Watch, "Government leaders and senior officials in some instances have directly or indirectly encouraged hate crimes, racism, or xenophobia by using anti-Chinese rhetoric. Several political parties and groups, including those in the United States, United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Greece, France, and Germany, have also latched onto the Covid-19 crisis to advance anti-immigrant, white supremacist, ultra-nationalist, anti-semitic, and xenophobic conspiracy theories." [14]. Under such circumstances, the divide between African Americans and Asian Americans has been further deepened and exacerbated.

4. Data Analysis

Income disparities are growing across the globe due to different factors such as education, geographical location, and other social factors. In this examination, the study compares the income of African Americans and Asian Americans. In 2019, (www.federalreserve.gov), the real median income for a household for African Americans and Asian Americans was \$4,400 higher than the previous year, reaching a new all-time high [15]. This reflects the record's highest one-year gain in median income, coming in at 6.8%, making it the largest one-year increase in median income ever.

From the below, the real median income for a household has increased by 9.7 percent over 2016. Minority groups saw the greatest increases in their incomes in 2019. The real median income of African Americans increased by 7.9%, while the income of Asian Americans increased by 10.6%. These one-year increases all set new records for the highest levels ever, while the new income levels that were achieved in 2019 all set new records for the highest levels ever (https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov) [16].

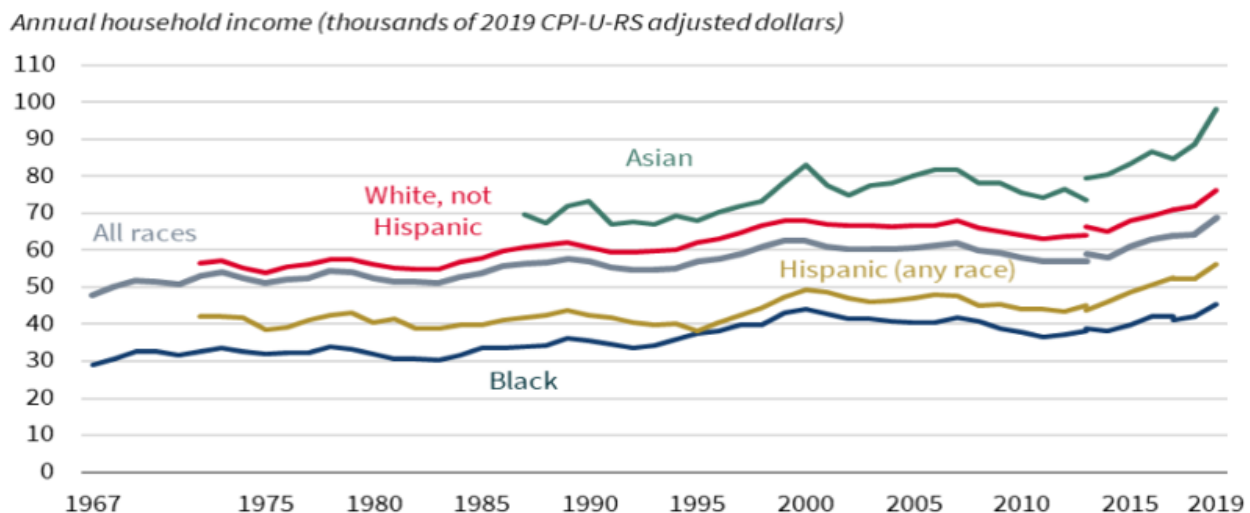


Figure 1: Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1968 to 2020 Annual Social and Economic Supplements.

Taani et al. (2020) note that income disparity between African and Asian Americans has decreased even though average salaries have increased [17]. The Gini index of income inequality decreased from 0.489 in 2017 to 0.484 in 2019; this decrease occurred during those two years. During the same

two years, there was a decrease of 0.4 percentage points in the share of income held by the top 20% (<https://www.pewresearch.org>) [18].

First, Asian Americans continue to hold a social status distinct from Whites and African Americans inside the country. More specifically, there is a viewpoint by Nicholson, Carter, & Restar, which contends that the issues of triangulation have existed between the two groups in terms of the social hierarchies. According to this point of view, American society has contributed to the perpetuation of false stereotypes of Asian Americans as a universally socially and economically successful group. This places Asian Americans in a position of superiority over African Americans while simultaneously labeling African Americans as "outsiders" [19]. In sharp contrast, African Americans continue to be one of, if not the most, disadvantaged racial groups in the nation economically, socially, politically, and historically. Despite a history of strong political connections, Asian Americans frequently hold unfavorable views and attitudes toward African Americans, which makes Africans locked out of highly lucrative jobs.

On the contrary, the attitude held by African Americans' towards Asian Americans tends to be unfavorable towards the two groups, making them treat each other with contempt as they hold each other with racialized stereotypes. (Systematic racism toward African) This is the case even though in most nations and states in the nations despite the two groups have strong political afflictions that have been there from previous times [19].

Both within-group and intergroup income inequality tell us something important about the economic status of America's various racial and ethnic groups, but they do so differently. Increased inequality among each racial and ethnic group demonstrates that no one was safe from the forces that were blamed for the rise in inequality in the United States after 1967. The minimum wage is losing its purchasing power due to several issues, including automation, international trade, the demise of labor unions, and rising living costs. The difference between the Asian and African Americans is continuously growing due to the starting point of their native nations and inequality factors that limit social-economic growths. That might be due to variations in worker attributes like age, immigration restrictions and experience. In addition, wider societal influences may have had a disproportionate impact on certain populations, such as the disproportionately high incarceration rate among black men.

5. Policy Suggestions

Many different factors caused the inequality in income levels between African-Americans and Asian Americans. Among those factors, education is one essential factor that strongly connects with one's capabilities and employment. However, the average education level of African-Americans is relatively lower than which of Asian Americans. Without a doubt, this is one of the dominating causes of inequality in income levels. Therefore, to alleviate the disparity of education levels, governments should assign education resources more evenly, providing more chances for minority groups' higher education.

Furthermore, for many children, poverty is the most significant impediment to their education. As a result, governments should provide financial assistance to low-income families to meet their basic living needs.

On the other hand, society should encourage every individual to speak out against racial stereotypes, discrimination, and violence. Social media can be an excellent platform for this. In addition, governments should encourage people from different ethnic groups to enhance communication and interactions with each other to solve the lack of comprehension.

6. Conclusion

By analyzing previous studies and data, as well as individual comments and opinions, this paper attributes the reasons for the mutual discrimination between Asian and African Americans to the inequality of job opportunities resulting from different education levels and the model minority effect magnified by various media. Based on our analysis, this study also comes up with several policy suggestions, which are 1. Governments should assign education resources more evenly, providing more chances for African-American higher education. 2. Government should provide financial assistance to low-income families to meet their basic living needs. 3. Government should encourage people from different ethnic groups to enhance communication and interactions with each other to solve the lack of comprehension.

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