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American Indian Adults in Los Angeles, California and the U.S.

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Introduction:

This policy brief is part of a series on the socioeconomic status of American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) in the Los Angeles metropolitan region. This brief presents findings about adults in this region relative to AIANs in California, the U.S. and to the total population and non-Hispanic white (NH White) populations. Understanding recent demographic patterns and trends related to the AIAN adult community is vital to developing public policies and to providing adequate social service provisions.

According to the 2000 Census, Los Angeles County had about 140,000 American Indian and Alaska Natives, 115,000 excluding Latin American Indians (LAI).¹ Even with the lower figure, Los Angeles County is home to the largest urbanized AIAN population in the country. Within this region, AIANs constitute the fastest growing minority group. The problems facing this community have been documented elsewhere and are examined further in this brief (Champagne et al. 1996; Ong and Houston 2002).

This brief covers education attainment, labor-market status, income levels, and home ownership, which are key factors in determining the socioeconomic status of American Indians in the Los Angeles area. Major findings include:

- AIANs are significantly more likely than NH Whites to have less than a high school education.
- AIANs are about two to three times more likely to be unemployed than NH Whites.
- Earnings for AIANs remain significantly lower than for NH Whites.
- AIANs are less likely to accumulate assets through home ownership.

This policy brief contains an appendix on data.

Population Trends:

The Los Angeles region is home to about 3 percent of the nation's 3.7 million AIANs. Not only are American Indian and Alaska Natives in Los Angeles County the largest urbanized AIAN population in the nation, but their numbers are rapidly growing. Compared to 1990, the 2000 Census shows a 35% increase when using the single-race AIAN count. When we include multi-racial AIANs, the growth rate is 153%. To put these growth rates in perspective, Los Angeles County experienced only a 7% increase.

In Figure 2, the geographic distribution shows AIANs are located throughout the Los Angeles metropolitan region, with clusters in parts of San Gabriel Valley, downtown, and San Fernando Valley.

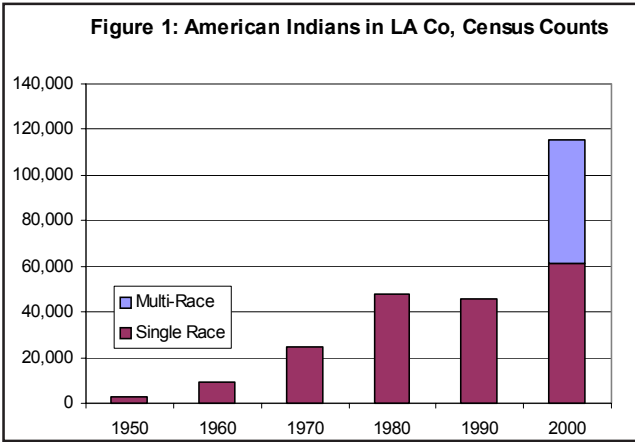
Table 1: Top 5 States, MSAs, and Cities for AIAN Adult (18-64) Population in 2000

Rank	State	Total	AIAN	AIAN%
1	California	20,422,548	337,767	1.7%
2	Oklahoma	2,023,057	209,472	10.4%
3	Arizona	3,014,134	151,411	5.0%
4	Texas	12,469,641	127,555	1.0%
5	New Mexico	1,072,987	102,639	9.6%

Rank	Metropolitan Area	Total	AIAN	AIAN%
1	Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA	5,808,683	70,838	1.2%
2	Phoenix-Mesa, AZ	1,947,710	48,461	2.5%
3	Tulsa, OK	484,899	47,034	9.7%
4	New York, NY	5,786,678	43,887	0.8%
5	Oklahoma City, OK	657,262	39,885	6.1%

Rank	City	Total	AIAN	AIAN%
1	New York City, NY	5,008,725	39,986	0.8%
2	Los Angeles, CA	2,297,201	26,383	1.1%
3	Phoenix, AZ	815,708	18,879	2.3%
4	Tulsa, OK	238,343	17,101	7.2%
5	Oklahoma City, OK	309,582	16,554	5.3%

Source: Census 2000, SF2. The AIAN adult count is based on the combined count, which includes both single-race and multi-race AIANs, but excludes Latin American Indians.



The Los Angeles metropolitan area (which is coterminous with L.A. County) also has the largest AIAN working-age (18 to 64 years old) population among all metropolitan areas. Table 1 provides the 2000 count of the working-age population in the top 5 states, metropolitan areas and cities with the largest total AIAN populations.² California is on the top of the state list, and the city of Los Angeles is second only to New York City.

Educational Attainment:

In general, educational attainment among adults (ages 25 and older) is considerably lower for AIANs. Our main reference group is the non-Hispanic White population, which is the dominant segment of American society. Table 2 shows that AIANs are about two times more likely than NH Whites to have less than a high school education. This disparity is seen on a national scale, but is more prominent at the LA County level. AIANs also lag in higher education categories. For example, 17% of male AIANs in California have a Bachelor’s degree or higher compared to 37% for NH White males and 29% for the total California population. These low attainment levels are partly a product of the poor education system provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs as well as the public schools off the reservation. In today’s globalized and technology-oriented economy, low educational attainment is a major barrier to economic success.

Two other sets of statistics indicate that the next generation of AIAN adults will lag behind in terms of educational attainment.

Figure 3 highlights high school dropout rates for youths (age 16-19). Nationally, one-in-seven AIAN

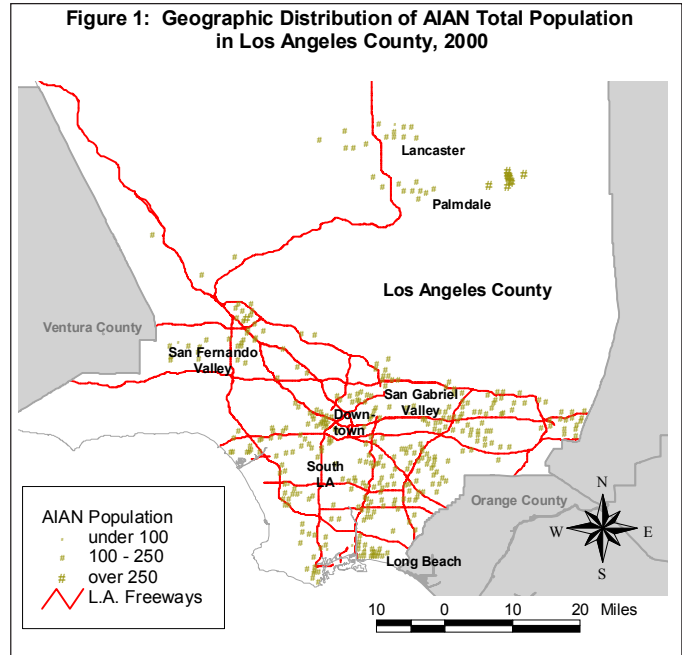
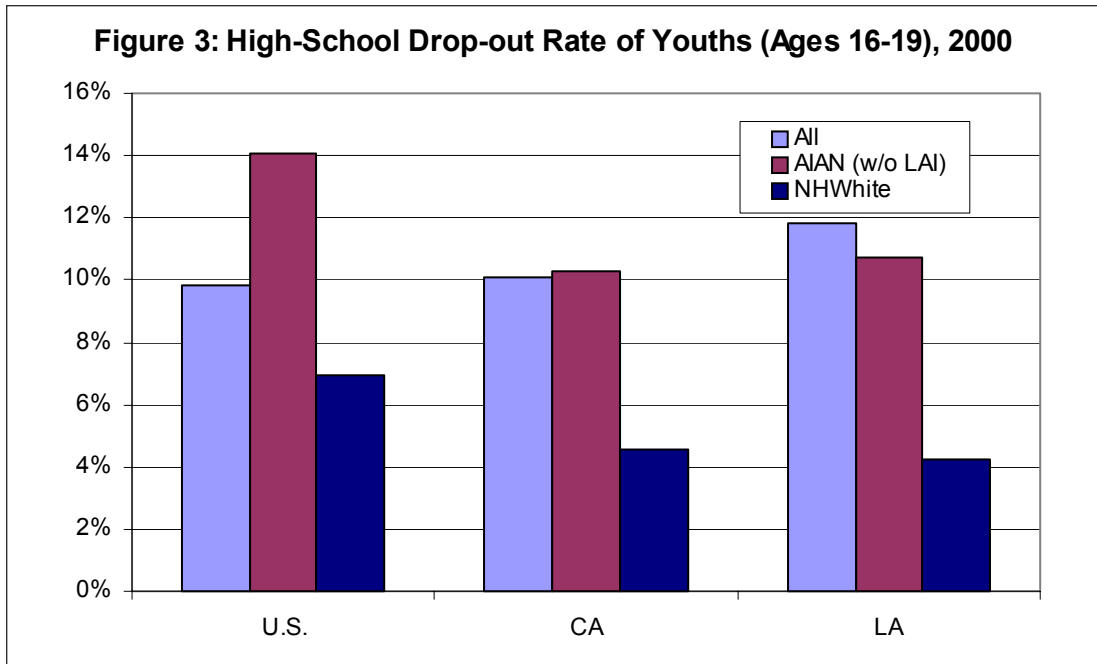


Table 2: Percent Distribution of Educational Attainment by Subpopulation Group, 2000

	ALL	AIAN	NHWhite
U.S.			
Male			
Less than H.S.	20%	25%	15%
High School Graduate	28%	29%	29%
Some College	26%	31%	28%
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	26%	15%	29%
Female			
Less than H.S.	19%	24%	15%
High School Graduate	30%	28%	31%
Some College	28%	34%	29%
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	23%	14%	25%
CA			
Male			
Less than H.S.	23%	23%	10%
High School Graduate	19%	23%	19%
Some College	29%	37%	33%
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	29%	17%	37%
Female			
Less than H.S.	23%	22%	11%
High School Graduate	21%	23%	23%
Some College	31%	39%	36%
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	25%	16%	30%
LA			
Male			
Less than H.S.	30%	27%	10%
High School Graduate	18%	20%	17%
Some College	25%	34%	31%
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	27%	20%	42%
Female			
Less than H.S.	30%	25%	11%
High School Graduate	20%	19%	22%
Some College	27%	37%	33%
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	23%	19%	34%

Source: Census Bureau, Census Summary File 4 (SF4), 2000
 Percentages do not always = 100% due to rounding
 AIAN statistics exclude Latin American Indians



youth is not a high school graduate and not enrolled in school. In Los Angeles, AIANs are over twice as likely to drop out of high school than NH Whites. The total U.S. and California AIAN populations are at least twice as likely to drop out of high school as NH Whites.

In terms of those enrolled in college, Table 3 shows the percentage of 18-24 year olds who are enrolled in college or graduate school. Both AIAN males and females significantly lag behind NH Whites in enrollment. The statistics on youths indicate that the educational shortfall facing AIANs will be repeated in the next generation of workers.

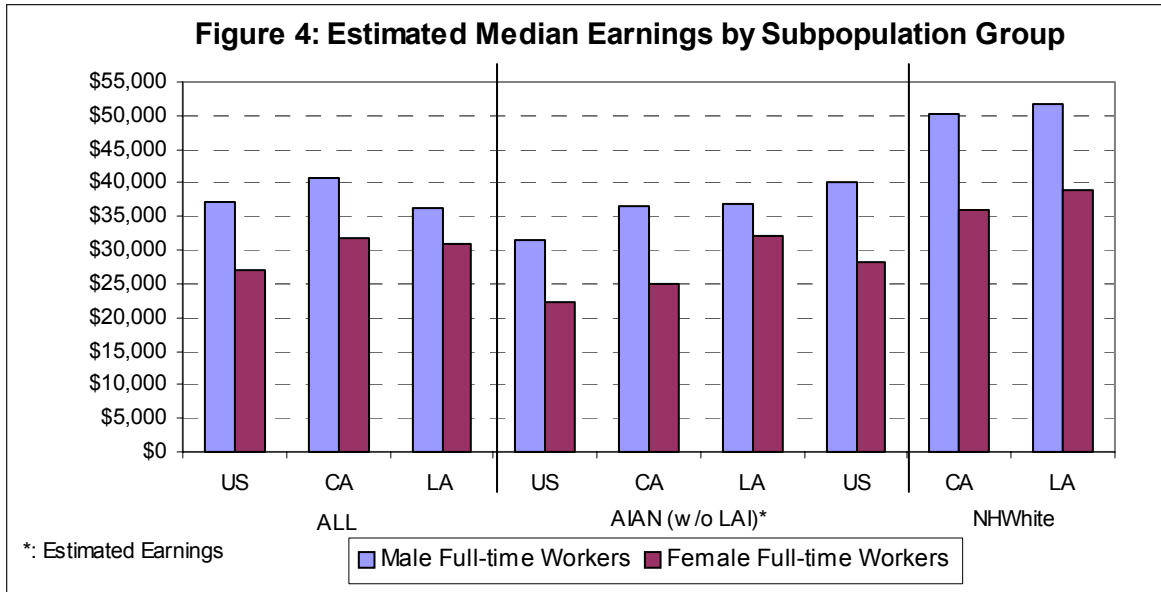
	ALL	AIAN	NHWhite
U.S.			
Male			
% in College	31%	21%	35%
Female			
% in College	37%	28%	41%
CA			
Male			
% in College	32%	26%	40%
Female			
% in College	40%	34%	47%
LA			
Male			
% in College	32%	28%	46%
Female			
% in College	39%	43%	52%

Source: Census Bureau, Census Summary File 4 (SF4), 2000
AIAN statistics exclude Latin American Indians

Labor Force Participation:

Low educational attainment translates into poor performance in the labor market (see Table 4). Without the necessary skills and training to succeed, AIANs are not prepared to enter and compete in the labor market. The labor-force participation (LFP) rate, which is the proportion of the population over the age of 16 that is employed or looking for work, is one way to gauge how successful AIANs are in finding and sustaining employment. AIAN males have lower LFP rates than NH White males, while the disparity between AIAN females and NH White females is less pronounced.

Two other labor-market indicators show that AIANs are faring worse than NH Whites. The unemployment rate is the proportion of the labor force that is unemployed (not working but actively seeking employment). The rates for AIANs are about two to three times higher than for NH Whites. The other labor-market indicator is the percent of those employed who are working full-time (35 hours or more) and full year (52 weeks or more). While all AIANs fare worse than NH Whites, the gap is smaller between AIAN females and NH White females. In this region, AIAN males for this labor indicator.



Earnings:

Another consequence of inadequate education is low earnings for AIANs. This can be seen in Figure 4, which reports the median earnings for full-time and full-year workers. There are considerable disparities across groups, with AIANs faring worst. Nationally, the median for AIAN males is only three-quarters of the median for NH White males. The gap is even greater in this region, with the typical AIAN male earning only two-thirds of what the typical NH White male earns. The racial gap among females is not as large but still troubling because AIAN females face a double burden of the economic cost of being both a minority and a female. In Los Angeles, the median for AIAN females is only three-quarters of the median for NH White females, and is less than three-fifths of the median for NH White males.

Table 5 provides another way to analyze the earnings data. Again, the statistics show that AIANs are economically disadvantaged. Overall, AIANs are about twice as likely to earn less than \$17,500 and less than one-half as likely to be in the highest category (\$75,000 or more) than NH Whites. Among the race and gender groups in the table, AIAN females fare the worst.

Overall Economic Status:

Because of poor earnings and educational attainment, AIANs are disproportionately more likely to be in poor households. This can be seen by comparing incomes against the federal poverty level,

Table 4: Labor Force Indicators, 2000

	ALL	AIAN	NHWhite
U.S.			
Male			
Labor Force Rate	71%	68%	72%
Unemployment Rate	6%	11%	4%
% Full-time/Full-year	65%	54%	68%
Female			
Labor Force Rate	58%	58%	58%
Unemployment Rate	6%	10%	4%
% Full-time/Full-year	50%	46%	51%
CA			
Male			
Labor Force Rate	70%	69%	72%
Unemployment Rate	7%	10%	5%
% Full-time/Full-year	60%	53%	65%
Female			
Labor Force Rate	55%	59%	57%
Unemployment Rate	7%	9%	5%
% Full-time/Full-year	46%	45%	48%
LA			
Male			
Labor Force Rate	68%	67%	72%
Unemployment Rate	8%	11%	6%
% Full-time/Full-year	56%	51%	63%
Female			
Labor Force Rate	53%	59%	56%
Unemployment Rate	9%	10%	5%
% Full-time/Full-year	46%	45%	49%

Source: Census Bureau, Census Summary File 4 (SF4), 2000
AIAN statistics exclude Latin American Indians

which was established in the 1960s at an income level approximately three times the cost of a basic food basket for a family. The data for this report are for income in the year prior to the 2000 census. The federal poverty line is adjusted for inflation, it is not adjusted to take into account regional variations in the cost of

The Status of American Indian Adults in Los Angeles, California & the U.S.

Table 5: Percent Distribution of Annual Earnings, 2000

	ALL	AIAN	NHWhite
U.S.			
Male Full-time Workers			
Less than \$17,500	12%	18%	10%
\$17,500 - \$35,000	33%	41%	31%
\$35,000 - \$75,000	41%	35%	44%
\$75,000 or more	14%	7%	16%
Female Full-time Workers			
Less than \$17,500	21%	29%	19%
\$17,500 - \$35,000	46%	47%	46%
\$35,000 - \$75,000	28%	22%	30%
\$75,000 or more	4%	3%	5%
CA			
Male Full-time Workers			
Less than \$17,500	14%	15%	8%
\$17,500 - \$35,000	27%	34%	21%
\$35,000 - \$75,000	40%	41%	45%
\$75,000 or more	19%	10%	26%
Female Full-time Workers			
Less than \$17,500	18%	23%	12%
\$17,500 - \$35,000	37%	42%	35%
\$35,000 - \$75,000	37%	31%	42%
\$75,000 or more	8%	5%	10%
LA			
Male Full-time Workers			
Less than \$17,500	18%	17%	8%
\$17,500 - \$35,000	29%	32%	19%
\$35,000 - \$75,000	36%	40%	44%
\$75,000 or more	16%	12%	29%
Female Full-time Workers			
Less than \$17,500	22%	20%	10%
\$17,500 - \$35,000	36%	40%	31%
\$35,000 - \$75,000	35%	34%	46%
\$75,000 or more	8%	6%	13%

Source: Census Bureau, Census Summary File 4 (SF4), 2000
 Percentages do not always = 100% due to rounding
 AIAN statistics exclude Latin American Indians

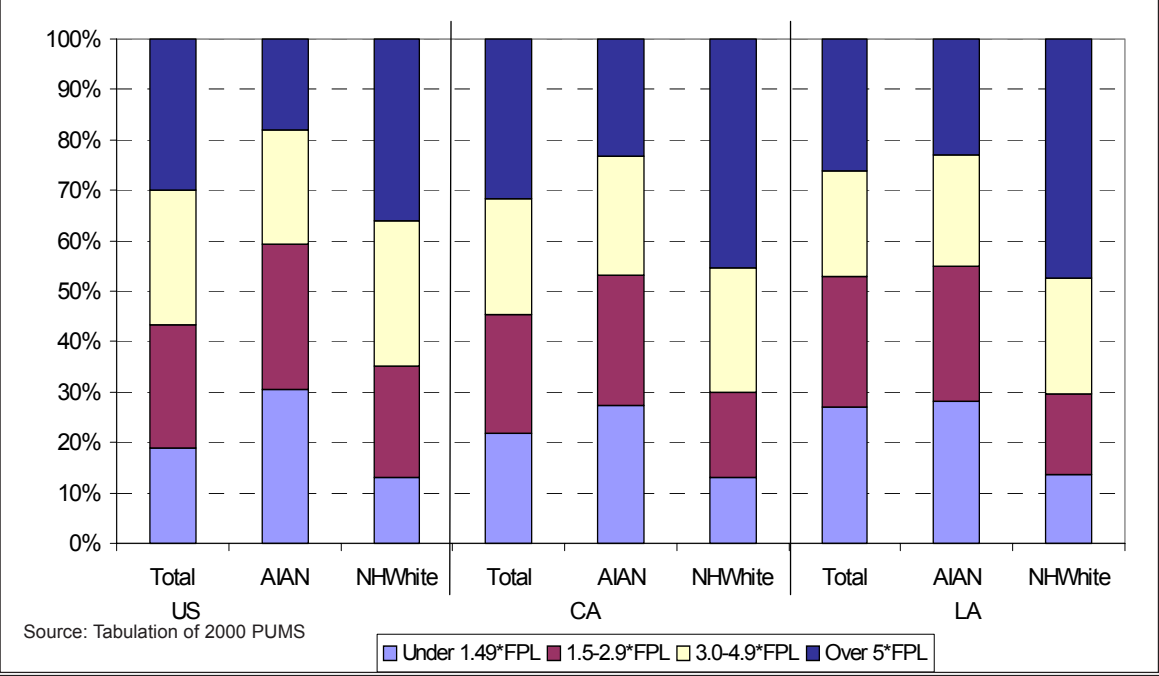
living. For relatively expensive areas such as Los Angeles, the FPL underestimates the problem posed by poverty.

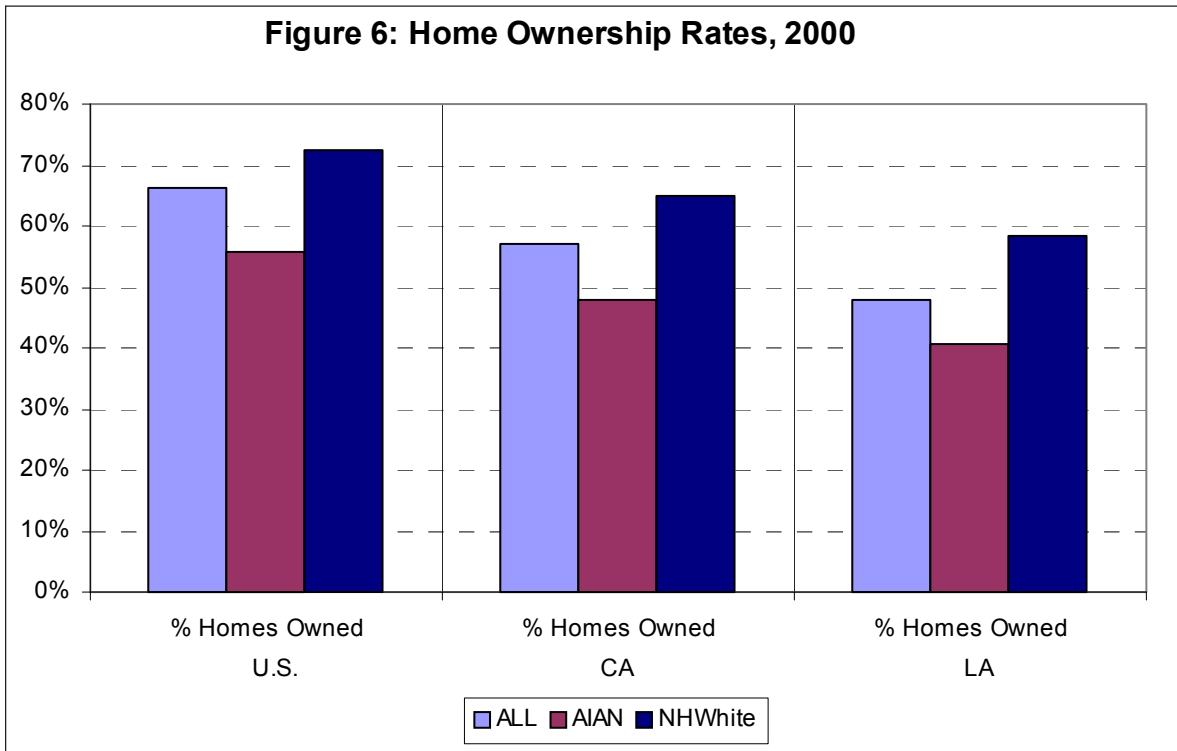
Despite the limitations of the poverty index, the statistics show a consistently troubling figure for AIAN adults. Figure 5 provides the distribution for those between the ages of 18 to 64 by multiples of the FPL. Those below 1.5 of the FPL are considered to be poor and those at or above 5 times the FPL are at least upper middle class. For the U.S., nearly 60% of AIAN adults are below 3 times the FPL, which places them in the low to middle class. In Los Angeles, roughly 30% of AIAN adults are considered poor whereas only 13% of NH Whites are below 1.5 time the FPL. At the other end of the economic ladder, AIAN adults in Los Angeles are less than half as likely to be in the over 5 times the FPL level compared to NH Whites.

Homeownership:

Poor earnings contribute to low wealth accumulation. This can be seen in the data on home ownership, which is one of the primary assets held by most households. Figure 6 clearly shows that the rates for AIANs greatly lag behind both the total population and NH Whites in the U.S., California, and Los Angeles. Homeownership among AIANs in this region is particularly low, where only two in five households own their homes. Not only is the ownership rate lower, but so are the value

Figure 5: Distribution by FPL Categories in LA, CA, and US





of homes owned by AIANs. As shown in Table 6, the average value of AIAN homes is about only two-thirds of that for NH White, and the relative difference is most pronounced in Los Angeles. Because of lower home ownership rate in this region, the average asset held in the form of housing for all AIANs households (not just owners) is less than half of that for all NH white households.

Conclusion:

American Indians and Alaskan Natives are the first Americans, but they are too often the most forgotten in the nation's, California's and this region's social priority. Too often, the media focuses on issues such as American Indian casinos. Unfortunately, that misses the harsh reality facing most AIANs.

AIAN adults (and their children) experience numerous economic and other hardships. The educational system has failed to prepare them to be competitive in the labor market, resulting in lower employment rates and lower earnings. These outcomes in turn contribute to low family income and low wealth accumulation. The data also show that the economic disadvantages facing AIANs will persist into the future because the next generation of AIAN adults is not being adequately prepared for the world of work.

As a society, we have an obligation to work with AIANs to formulate better and more appropriate public policies to address the barriers facing AIAN adults. Understanding and respecting the diverse cultures and experiences of AIANs must be an integral part of the programs to address and alleviate the challenges indigenous people.

Table 6: Home Values, 2000 (in thousands)

	ALL	AIAN	NHWhite
U.S.			
Average Home Value			
Per Owner	\$130.9	\$93.1	\$136.5
Per Household	\$100.5	\$61.0	\$113.3
CA			
Average Home Value			
Per Owner	\$235.2	\$174.2	\$258.2
Per Household	\$154.3	\$95.3	\$192.0
LA			
Average Home Value			
Per Owner	\$239.4	\$186.1	\$294.9
Per Household	\$132.3	\$88.0	\$196.8

Source: Census Bureau, Census Summary File 4 (SF4), 2000
AIAN statistics exclude Latin American Indians

Appendix: Data Sources and Data Issues

This policy brief draws from several data sources. Aggregated data come from Summary Files for the 2000 Census. Because AIANs constitute a relatively small population, our approach is to rely on statistics based on the largest underlying sample. Whenever possible, tabulations are based on the 100% population counts. Detailed demographic and socioeconomic data are obtained from the “long form” survey based on a 1-in-6 sample of the population. Unfortunately, aggregated data are limited by the way the Census reported the information, which is not always sufficient for analysis. The final data alternative from the Census used in this policy brief is individual-level and household-level data from the Public Use Micro Samples (PUMS), which contain a 5% sample of the population. For American Indians and Alaskan Natives, this small sample rate limits the level of detail of the analysis.

There are problems when the census data are used to examine changes over time. The single most significant difference is the collection of self-reported race. Prior to 2000, individuals were instructed to select only a single answer from a list of racial categories. The 2000 Census allowed people to check as many categories as appropriate. Given this change, caution should be exercised when comparing statistics across decades. The 2000 statistics are for the combined single- and multi-race AIANs. Generally, the socioeconomic status of single-race AIANs is lower than the socioeconomic status of multi-race AIANs.

This policy brief uses 2000 data specific for AIANs indigenous to the U.S. The AIAN category includes Indians from other parts of the Americas. The 2000 AIAN statistics were adjusted by excluding Latin American Indians, most of whom are not indigenous to the U.S.

This policy brief utilizes two comparison groups, the total population and the non-Hispanic white population. Geographic differences in the statistics for the total population are influenced by the composition of the population, particularly the number of immigrants. Los Angeles has a large number of Latinos, who tend to have a disproportionately large number of working poor immigrants. Statistics for NH Whites provide a more comparable benchmark to evaluate the socioeconomic status of AIANs.

Endnote:

1. Using estimates from the long-form sample produces a slightly lower count of AIANs without Latin American Indians, about 111,000.
2. Oklahoma and Arizona also have large AIAN populations, and Oklahoma’s AIAN adult population comprises 10.4% of their total state population. In Tulsa, Oklahoma, the AIAN adult population is just over 7% of the total population, and is the largest percentage in the country.

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American Indian Adults in Los Angeles, CA and the U.S.

United American Indian Involvement, Inc. (UAI)

The UAI is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that provides services to the Los Angeles American Indian Community. Its mission is to provide quality educational programs, primary health, mental health, housing, economic development and social services to American Indians residing in Los Angeles County in a manner that is sensitive and respectful to cultural, tribal and spiritual values. Activities include program development through community surveys and forums and provide emergency housing vouchers through a Community Services Block Grant from Los Angeles County. Services include medical, dental, optometry, and pharmaceutical as well as alcohol and other drug recovery treatment and prevention, mental health counseling.

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Ralph and Goldy Lewis Center

The Center was founded in 1988 with a \$5 million endowment from Ralph and Goldy Lewis with the mission of promoting the study of regional policy issues, with special reference to Southern California. The Center seeks to enhance the understanding of the problems of the environment, urban design, housing, community and neighborhood dynamics, transportation and economic development. It supports interdisciplinary activities, involving faculty members and graduate students from many schools and departments at UCLA. The Center fosters linkages with researchers at other California universities and research institutes, and with civic, community and governmental organizations.

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