



BlackEconomics.org®

“South Asian Immigration: Implications for Black America”

In “[Welcoming Black South Asians into the Black World](#),” BlackEconomics.org highlighted possible benefits of a favorable relationship between Black Americans, other Black people of the world, and South Asians, who are essentially Black people. Unfortunately, a closer look at the evolving nature of South Asians’ immigration to the US does not cast a warm glow on this relationship. This analysis brief considers how South Asian immigration to the US has unfolded and the related implications for Black America.

According to Vivek Bald’s *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America*, South Asians began to immigrate to the US during the 1880s, mainly as traders.¹ In fact, until the 1950s and early 1960s, because of the US color line, Black Americans and South Asians were bound together and stiff-armed by White America; although South Asians, like Africans, were accorded somewhat better treatment than Black Americans because they were foreigners. Most Black Americans who are familiar with the history of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King know that he derived some of his non-violent protest principles from the South Asian leader Mahatma Gandhi, and that the former visited India to study non-violent protest techniques. Even today, [this website](#) acknowledges the long-standing, important, and often close relationship between South Asians and Black Americans.

Yet casual consideration of reality reveals a widening chasm between the life of South Asians and Blacks (Afrodesendants) in the US. Since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the US South Asian population has grown from less than 100 thousand to around six million today.² As required under the Hart-Celler Act, many came and come already prepared to take elevated positions as physicians, professors, engineers, and managers, or to build a favorable life while

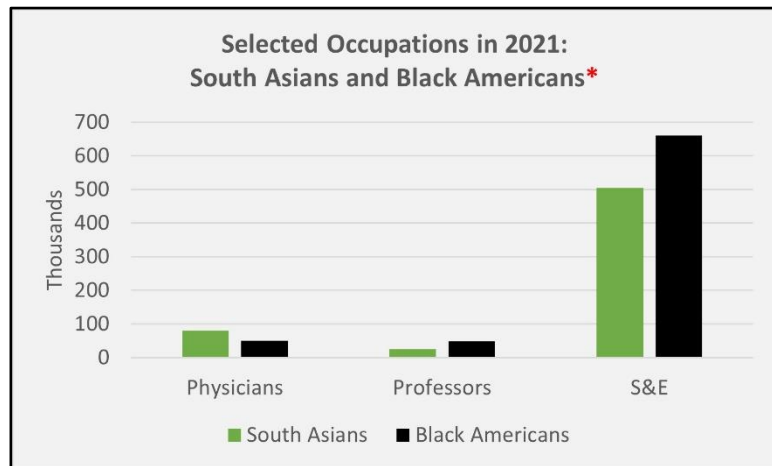
¹ This 2013 volume from Harvard University Press is a fascinating history of early South Asians in the US with a strong emphasis on how they were accommodated by Black America. Some Black Americans may be surprised to know that the “Asian” markers that they possess, which are revealed by genealogical tests, result from these South Asians that arrived during the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.

² The six million estimate is derived as follows. According to the US Census Bureau (QuickFacts; <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045222>), Asian and Pacific Islanders represent about 6.4 percent of the US population of 333.3 million (July 2022). Therefore, the total Asian and Pacific Islander population is estimated at about 21.3 million. However, the think tank Equitable Growth estimated that South Asians comprise about 27 percent of all Asians and Pacific Islanders in 2015 (<https://equitablegrowth.org/how-data-disaggregation-matters-for-asian-americans-and-pacific-islanders/>). (See Christian Edlagan and Kavya Vaghul (2016), *How Data Disaggregation Matters for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders*.) Hence, we estimate the US South Asian population at roughly 6 million today. (All Ret. 052423)

working as entrepreneurs (especially in hotel, restaurant, automobile service stations, commercial retail (shop owners and operators), and transportation (taxi drivers) industries).³ They either bring with them financial capital, or they leverage each other or the US financial system to gain access to such capital with which to start and grow their businesses.

One does not have to look very far to see evidence of South Asians’ growing presence and power in the US. Consider the following personalities as the tip of the iceberg: US Vice President Kamala Harris; CEO of the Microsoft Corporation Satya Nadella; President of the World Bank Ajay Banga; First Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund Gita Gopinath; 2024 Republic Presidential Candidate (former Governor of South Carolina) Nikki Haley; and former Governor of Louisiana Piyush “Bobby” Jindal.

As further evidence of Black South Asians’ success and power, while their current US population is estimated at about six million, the following estimates are of the number of South Asians in important positions: Over 80,000* physicians compared with less than 50,000 Black Americans;⁴ 25.4 thousand full-time professors in degree-granting post-secondary institutions in 2021 compared with 48.4 thousand Black American professors;⁵ and about 505



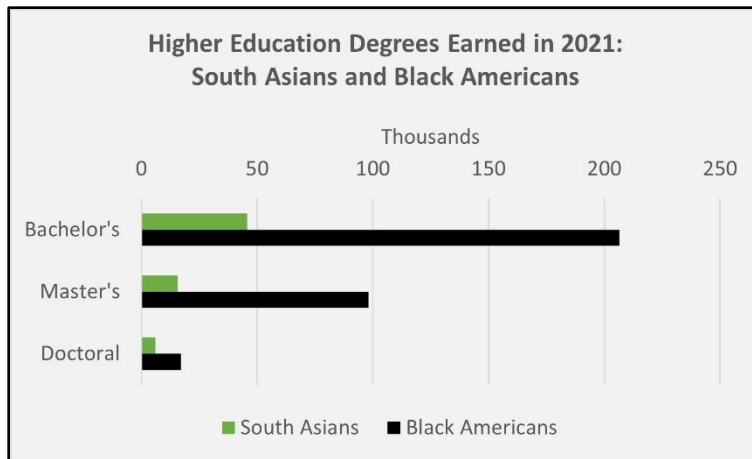
thousand South Asian workers in Science and Engineering (S&E) occupations compared with about 660 thousand Black American workers in S&E occupations.⁶

³ This Act of Congress, also known as the “Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965,” is discussed here: (<https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1951-2000/Immigration-and-Nationality-Act-of-1965/>); (Ret. 052423).

⁴ The estimated number of South Asian physicians is from the American Association of Indian Physicians (<https://aapiusa.org/>), which only reflects a portion of physicians of South Asian origin.* The estimate of Black physicians is from Hector Mora *et al* (2022), “The National Deficit of Black and Hispanic Physicians in the US and Projected Estimates of Time to Correction,” *Jama Network: Open* (A Research Letter on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion); (<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2792848>); (All Ret. 052423).

⁵ The estimates are derived using statistics from Equitable Growth (cited in footnote 2) and from the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), “Table 315.20. Full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity, sex, and academic rank: Fall 2019, fall 2020, and fall 2021,” *Digest of Education Statistics*; (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/current_tables.asp); (Ret. 052423).

⁶ By S&E occupations, we mean specifically computer and mathematical scientists, life scientists, physical scientists, social scientists, and engineers. These estimates are derived using statistics from Equitable Growth (cited in footnote 2) and from the National Science Foundation (2023), *Diversity and STEM: Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities* (see Figure 3-1 on page 18), (<https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf23315/>); (Ret. 052623).



On the education front in 2021, it is roughly estimated that South Asians earned 45.7 thousand bachelor’s degrees compared with 206.5 thousand for Black Americans; 15.7 thousand master’s degrees compared with 98.2 thousand for Black Americans; and 6.1 thousand doctoral degrees compared with 17.0 thousand for Black Americans.⁷ Viewed differently, the foregoing statistics mean that the 6 million South Asian population

represents about 13 percent of Black America’s 45 million population, but South Asian obtained 22 percent as many bachelor’s degrees as Black Americans, nearly 16 percent as many master’s degrees, and nearly 36 percent as many doctoral degrees as Black Americans, respectively. Broadly, the US Department of Education reports that for 2021 about 62 percent of all Asians in the US ages 25 and older held bachelor’s or higher degrees; only about 28 percent of Black Americans enjoy such educational achievement.⁸

Undoubtedly, South Asians, most of whom are adherents of Hinduism, have a sound work ethic based on a directive from an important religious book, the *Bhagavad Gita*, which features Lord Krishna (an important Hindu God) advising Arjun, an adherent, to “...just perform your duty...”⁹ Most importantly, Black South Asians are adamant practitioners of a fundamental economic principle: “Group economics” as espoused by Dr. Claud Anderson in his many writings on how Black Americans can succeed. Anecdotally, one rarely finds South Asians in other than South Asian restaurants. Their palates are so strongly oriented to their culture that they are motivated to consume South Asian cuisine.

All this is great news for South Asians. But it does not bode well for Black Americans.

South Asians, along with other Asians, represent the race/ethnicity with the highest average (median) household income in the US.¹⁰ They increasingly view themselves as elite and

⁷ The estimates are derived using statistics from Equitable Growth (cited in footnote 2) and from the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), “Table 322.20. Bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student: Selected academic years, 1976-77 through 2020-21,” “Table 323.20. Master's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student: Selected academic years, 1976-77 through 2020-21,” and “Table 324.20. Doctor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student: Selected academic years, 1976-77 through 2020-21,” respectively, *Digest of Education Statistics* (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/current_tables.asp); (Ret. 052423).

⁸ National Center of Education Statistics (2021), Table 104.30. Number of persons age 18 and over, by highest level of educational attainment, sex, race/ethnicity, and age: 2021,” *Digest of Education Statistics* (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d21/tables/dt21_104.30.asp); (Ret. 052623).

⁹ See Chapter II, verse 18 in Swami Shyam (1985), *Bhagavad Gita*, International Meditation Institute, Montreal.

¹⁰ Op. cit. (Edlagan and Vaghul, footnote 2.) Also, see US Census Bureau (2022), “Table H-5. Race and Hispanic Origin of Householder – Households by Median and mean Income” (<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-income-households.html>); (Ret. 052423). According to the Census Bureau,

disassociate themselves from Black Americans—despite their relationships with Black Americans during their early history in the US.

This outcome is natural given South Asian culture. For example, it is not uncommon today to observe an advertisement in a South Asian newspaper for a fair bride (arranged marriages remain very much a part of the South Asian tradition). The reference to “fair” is not to “honest;” rather, it is to a “very light skin.” Admittedly, it is possible to be Black (dark skinned) and a Brahman (the highest level of the South Asian caste system), but it is more typical that Dalits (so-called outcastes) are Black (dark skinned)—although a Dalit can also be light skinned.

In other words, there is a natural/conditioned proclivity for members of South Asian cultures to prefer Whiteness to Blackness. Moreover, given their self-perceptions and intent, this pro-White leaning is consistent with alignment with the wealthy, not the poor, in the US. Finally, comprehending fully the importance of competition, South Asians recognize the value of effort to achieve, and are willing to exert maximum effort to rise because they do not face the same racial discriminatory obstructions faced by Black Americans.^{11,12} In sum, South Asians are using all the tools at their disposal to achieve an elevated position in the US socioeconomic system, and generally find no reason to look favorably upon Black Americans.

All of this means that Black South Asians are not allies of Black America. The former view themselves as competing in a diverse socioeconomic environment, and they are willing to do whatever it takes to produce the best possible outcome for themselves—to the exclusion of all others—as well they should. They will not serve as a calvary to assist Black Americans in salvaging our unsavory situation/position in the US.

Black Americans have seen this scenario unfold before as large waves of immigrants from Europe (early 20th century) and from elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere (late 20th and early 21st centuries) have entered the country and passed us by socioeconomically. Now, South Asians have done the same.

This history should inform Black America that we are alone in our fight to exist in the US and to gain due compensation for our past and ongoing roles in building and sustaining this nation. We know that even Black Africans, to the extent possible, disassociate themselves from us. These realities should be rich food for thought. It should awaken in us a rejection of any do-gooder mentality (based on religious principles or otherwise) and foster an intensive and relentless mindset that we can only count on ourselves to ensure our continued existence and potential rise. We should all agree to sign a joint blood contract, in principle, that says “Black Americans for Black Americans”—whatever the cost. We do not have to come to such an agreement in the context of excessive European materialism (which has been adopted by other cultures), but we should take each and every opportunity to ensure our highest possible well-being—however we define it.

for 2021 the nation’s median household income was \$101,418 for Asians, \$48,297 for Black Americans, and \$70,784 for all races/ethnicities.

¹¹ The need to compete is obvious in a South Asian social system where the population is over 2.0 billion. Either one competes, survives, and experiences an opportunity to rise, or one falls by the wayside.

¹² The fact that South Asians incur less racial discrimination than Black Americans could be an artifact of the smallness of their population. The level and intensity of discrimination is likely to rise as their population grows in the US and as they and other Black and Brown populations become an increasing threat to White America.

Finally, Black America should find all the foregoing to be further clear-cut evidence of White America's White Supremacist attitudes and policies toward Black America. White America readily rejects and discriminates against Black Americans, but accepts with seemingly open arms South Asians who differ from Black Americans phenotypically only by the texture of their hair. If the White American response is that South Asians are different because they are from a different culture, then a logical response is that Black Americans should not be condemned for our culture. We are products of the American culture. Our original cultures were ripped from us and discarded, and we were reshaped/reformed and made fit for purpose by White America. For these acts, and so much more, **Reparations** are due from the United States Government mainly on behalf of White America. Given South Asians' alignment with White America, they should not balk at Black America's receipt of **Reparations**.

Importantly, until Reparations come (preferably mainly in the form of land), Black Americans should view South Asians as being like all other immigrant groups, who have come to the US with an informed intent to step up and over Black Americans in their search for position, wealth, and power.

B Robinson
052623
--