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Socioeconomic Characteristics of
American Indians in Los Angeles County

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Socioeconomic Characteristics of American Indians in Los Angeles County

Abstract

Los Angeles County is home to the largest urbanized American Indian population in the country. This culturally diverse population has survived and maintained its identity despite centuries of oppression and a legacy of marginalization. Today, the American Indian population in the Los Angeles region is an economically disadvantaged group that is difficult to serve because of its geographic dispersion. Knowledge of the socioeconomic characteristics and spatial patterns of American Indians is critical to identifying the needs of this community and to improving programs tailored to it. This report contributes to our understanding of the needs of American Indians by examining census and enrollment data on the socioeconomic status and distribution of American Indians in Los Angeles County. (Released in Conjunction with the United American Indian Involvement, Inc. of Los Angeles)

SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF AMERICAN INDIANS IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY

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Released in conjunction with the
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Introduction

Los Angeles County is home to the largest urbanized American Indian population in the country.¹ This culturally diverse population has survived and maintained its identity despite centuries of oppression and a legacy of marginalization. Today, the American Indian population in the Los Angeles region is an economically disadvantaged group that is difficult to serve because of its geographic dispersion. Knowledge of the socioeconomic characteristics and spatial patterns of American Indians is critical to identifying the needs of this community and to improving programs tailored to it.

This report contributes to our understanding of the needs of American Indians by examining census and enrollment data on the socioeconomic status and distribution of American Indians in Los Angeles County.² Part 1 provides an overview of the population trends and geographic dispersion of American Indians in the county. This community has experienced growth over most of the last half century, a trend that coincides with both internal and international migration. While urban areas offer relatively better opportunities, American Indians in these areas remain disadvantaged by low educational attainment, poor employment outcomes, and higher poverty rates. Part 2 examines the geographic distribution of American Indians. Unlike other minority groups such as Latinos or African Americans that comprise a majority in some neighborhoods, there are no areas where American Indians comprise a majority. Although American Indians remain one of the least segregated racial groups in the county, they are disproportionately concentrated in low-income communities. Part 3 provides additional information on the geographic distribution of four segments of the American Indian population: youth, the poor, the disabled, and enrollees in American Indian Health Services (AIHS). The report concludes with policy and programmatic recommendations.

Part 1: Socioeconomic Characteristics of American Indians in Los Angeles

American Indians have comprised less than one percent of the total population of Los Angeles County since 1950 (Figure 1). Making comparisons of the count of the American Indian residents over time, though, is complicated by the variations in methodology used each year by the decennial census to collect information on race and ethnicity. The 2000 Census allowed individuals to select one or more racial categories. Previous census counts required a respondent to make only one racial selection. Many American Indians are of a multi-racial heritage and, when forced to select only one racial category, may have reported one of their other races such as White or African American.

¹ The 2000 Census counted 138,696 persons who were full or part American Indian in the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area, which corresponds with Los Angeles County. Five other metropolitan areas had at least 50,000 full or part American Indians: New York (95,093), Phoenix (91,520), Tulsa (86,118), Oklahoma City (71,926), and San Francisco /Oakland (57,262).

² This report focuses on American Indians and Alaskan Natives indigenous to the United States. This subgroup is eligible to receive federally funded services for American Indians because of the unique nation-to-nation relationship between Indian tribes and the United States.

Therefore, the counts presented in Figure 1 for 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980 and 1990 represent exclusive racial categories (that is, a person is assigned to only one self-reported racial category).³ By allowing respondents to choose more than one racial category, the 2000 Census may have identified American Indians who were not in previous exclusive racial counts. This change in 2000 makes comparing data from 2000 with counts from previous decades difficult. Despite these limitations, census data provide a reasonable overview of the size of the American Indian population in Los Angeles.⁴

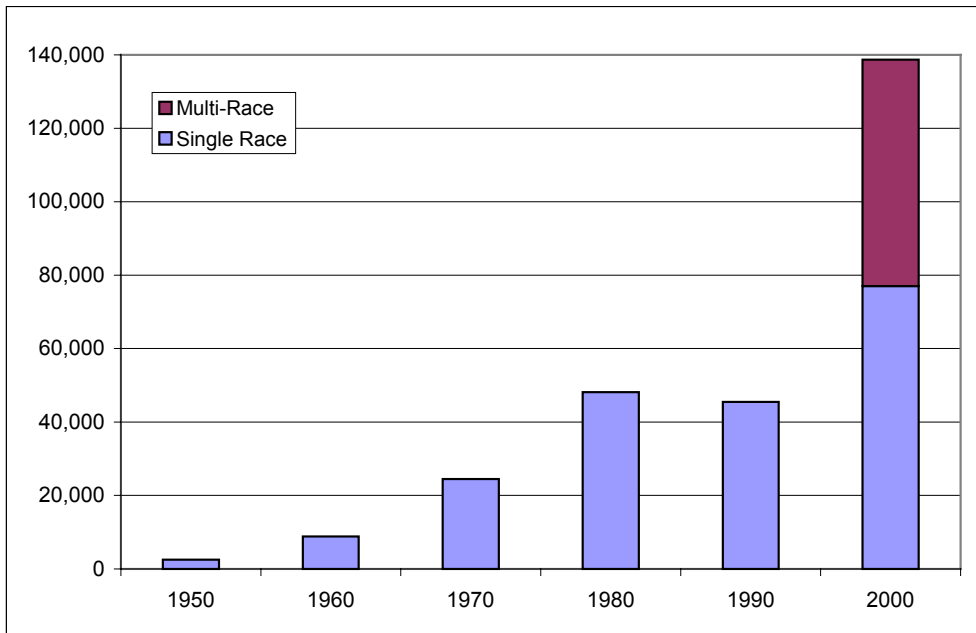


Figure 1. Census Counts of American Indians, Los Angeles County

The trends in the census count of American Indians are consistent with the recent history of American Indians in Southern California. Up until the 1950s, the majority of American Indians lived on or near reservations; however, starting in the 1960s, many American Indians migrated from reservations due to changes in federal policies and practices. Legislation terminated the special “nation to nation” relationship between the United States and a number of tribes, thus ending the federal government’s legal obligation to a large number of American Indians. Moreover, the Bureau of Indian Affairs implemented a policy and program to encourage American Indians to relocate to urban areas to find better economic opportunities. One of the consequences was the urbanization of the majority of American Indians. This relocation fueled the growth of

³ The 1950 figure is estimated because the American-Indian count was not reported separately for Los Angeles County in the 1950 census. The estimate is based on estimating Los Angeles County’s share of the American Indian urban population in California in 1960 and 1970 (35% and 43%, respectively), and extrapolating backwards to 1950 (50% of the state’s American Indian urban population).

⁴ 2000 Census counts do include counts of homeless persons. Previous research suggests that approximately 6% of the homeless population of the Skid Row area are American Indian or Alaskan Native. Information on the American Indians homeless population is critical to understanding the needs of the community as a whole, especially since many homeless American Indians are eligible for services.

the American Indian population in Los Angeles. Between 1960 and 1980, the population increased by more than five fold from less than nine thousand to over forty-eight thousand.

Census data indicate another period of growth in the American Indian population occurred in the 1990s.⁵ By the end of the century, nearly seventy-seven thousand listed American Indian as their sole racial classification (single-race American Indians), and another sixty-two thousand listed themselves as part American Indian (multi-race American Indians). Single-race American Indians comprise 0.8% of the county's total population, and multi-racial American Indians comprise another 0.6% of the county's total population. The large number of American Indians of multi-racial background is not surprising given the high historic rate of out-marriage for this population.

“American Indian” is a racial classification that includes numerous linguistic and cultural groups with distinct histories. The 2000 Census provides some insight into this heterogeneity since it reports tribal affiliation of residents. Eleven tribes in Los Angeles County had at least 1,000 members in 2000,⁶ and another eighteen tribes had at least 100 members.⁷

Although many American Indians migrated to Los Angeles County in search of better economic opportunities, American Indians as a whole remain severely disadvantaged because of low human capital. Figure 2 profiles the educational attainment of American Indian adults (ages 25 and older) relative to non-Hispanic white (NHW) adults.⁸ Two out of five (41%) American Indians did not complete high school.⁹ This low level of educational attainment could reflect a low quality of education provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and public schools off the reservation. This proportion is about four times higher than the proportion of non-Hispanic whites without a high school education (10.5%). Workers with limited education are often relegated to low-wage work given today's global economy and often face high competition for jobs. A four-year college or university education has become an important asset when securing a

⁵ Some of this influx may be due to an influx of indigenous populations from Latin America.

⁶ Based on the inclusive counts: Cherokee, 14783; Apache, 4992; Navajo, 3747; Choctaw, 3102; Blackfeet, 2907; Sioux, 2360; Pueblo, 2107, Yaqui, 1636; Chippewa, 1194; Iroquois, 1179; Creek, 1056.

⁷ There were over 23,000 who reported themselves as “Latin American Indians.”

⁸ Statistics on education, labor-market status, earnings and poverty are based on tabulations from Summary File 3 (SF3). SF3 provides statistics from Census 2000 on social, economic and housing characteristics based on the long-form questionnaire for the 2000 Census, which was administered to about 1 in 6 households. The statistics reported in the text are based on aggregated data for the “American Indian alone” and “Non-Hispanic white alone” categories.

⁹ The 2000 educational figures include large numbers of “Latin American Indians.” Given the influx of this group in the 1990s, the 1990 data may provide a better profile of American Indians indigenous to the United States. According to the 1990 census, about 3-in-10 American Indians had less than a high-school education, a proportion about twice that for non-Hispanic whites. Moreover, American Indians were less than half as likely as non-Hispanic whites to have a bachelor's degree.

good-paying job. Unfortunately, American Indians are less than a third as likely as non-Hispanic whites to have at least a bachelor's degree.

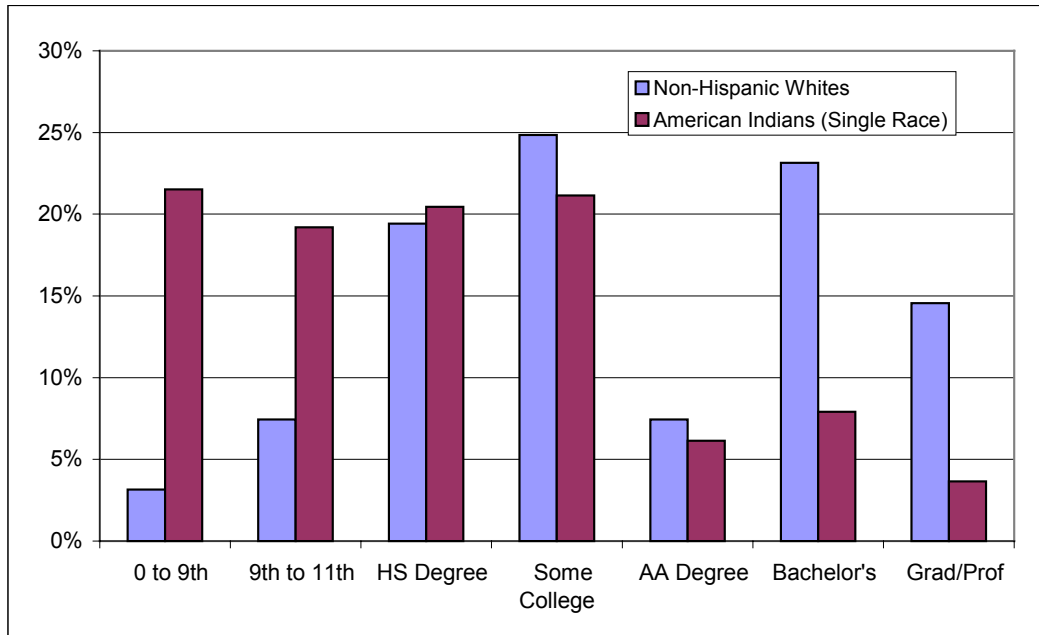


Figure 2. Educational Attainment of Adults, Los Angeles County, 2000

Low educational attainment among American Indians translates into poor performance in the labor market (Figure 3). American Indians have a lower labor force participation rate than non-Hispanic whites (NHW). The labor force is comprised of persons 16 years or older who are employed or looking for work. The labor-force participation rate—or the proportion of the population that is in the labor force—among American Indian men is lower than that of non-Hispanic white men. Likewise, American Indian women have a lower participation rate than non-Hispanic White women. The difference in participation percentage points is larger among men than women, indicating that American Indian men are having a relatively more difficult time participating in the labor market or are more discouraged from participating than American Indian women.

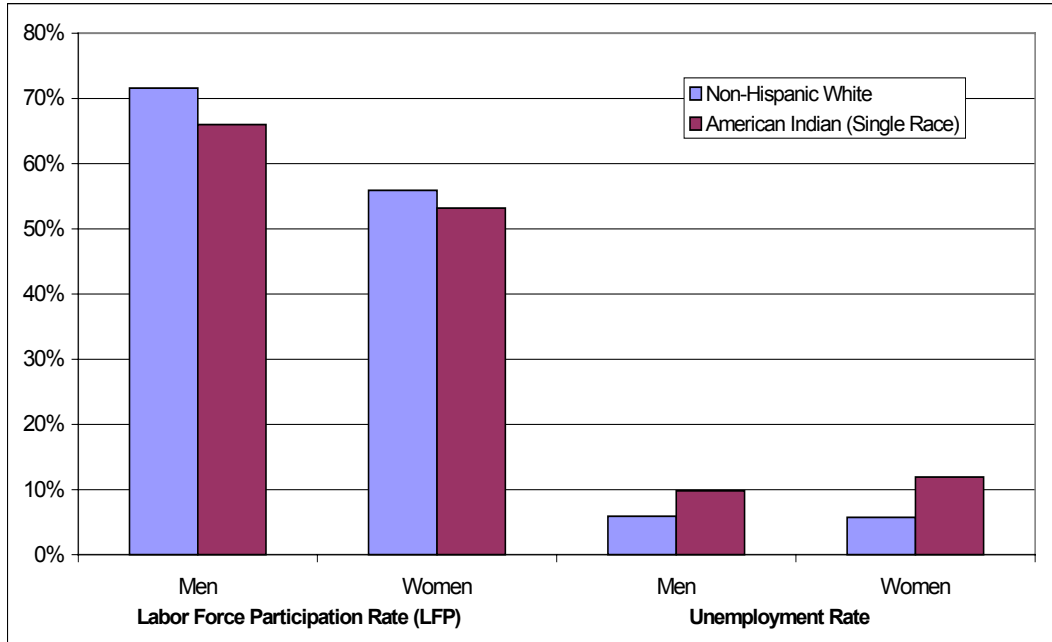


Figure 3. Labor Market Indicators, Los Angeles County, 2000

The unemployment rate—or the proportion of the population that is not working but actively looking for work—among American Indians is nearly twice as high as the rates for non-Hispanic whites (Figure 3). Interestingly, the racial gap is greater for women. In other words, among American Indians in the labor market, American Indian women experience relatively more difficulties finding work than American Indian men.

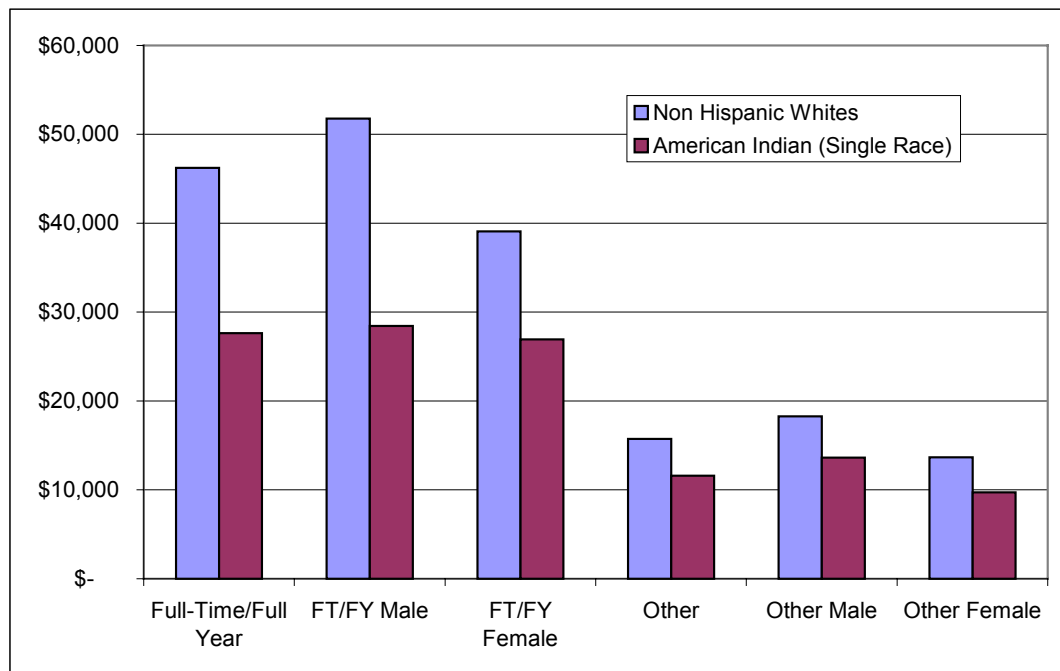


Figure 4. Annual Earnings, Los Angeles County, 2000

Another consequence of low educational attainment is low earnings (Figure 4). Among those who worked less than a full-time/full year, the average American Indian earned 26% less than what the average non-Hispanic white earned. Although this difference could be the result of lower human capital among American Indians, it could also be the result of American Indians working fewer hours in aggregate than non-Hispanic whites. A comparison among these groups for those who worked a full-time/full year eliminates the potential influence of differences in hours worked. Among this group, the average American Indian earned 40% less than what the average non-Hispanic white earned. The racial gap is higher among men than American Indian women. American Indian men earned 45% less than non-Hispanic white men while American Indian women earned 31% less than non-Hispanic white women.

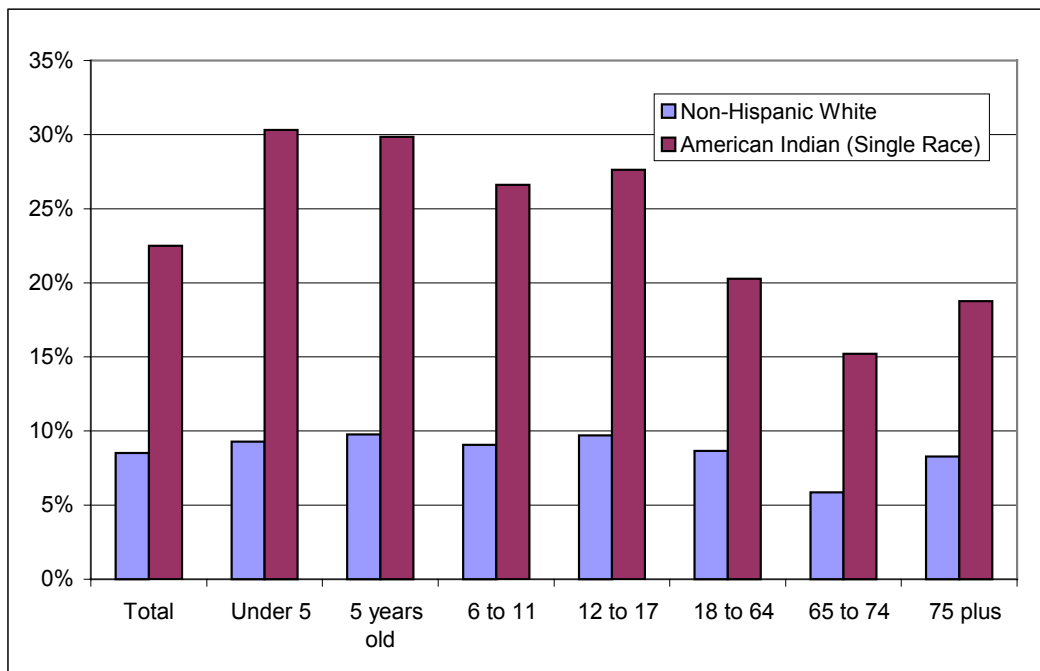


Figure 5. Poverty Rates, Los Angeles County, 1999

As a consequence of poor labor-market outcomes, American Indians are much more likely to fall below the federal poverty line than non-Hispanic whites.¹⁰ As shown in Figure 5, the poverty rate for American Indians is over two and a half times the rate for non-Hispanic whites (22.5% and 8.5%, respectively).¹¹ The poverty rate is particularly high among American Indian children. Approximately three out of ten fall below the poverty line.

Part 2: Geographic Distribution of American Indians in Los Angeles

This section examines the geographic distribution of American Indians in Los Angeles County. Figure 6 displays the distribution of single-race American Indians in 2000, and Figure 7 displays the distribution of multi-race American Indians in 2000. The darker shades indicate the population density (persons per square mile). The patterns show that some parts of the county have a disproportionate share of the American Indian population. These areas include the downtown areas of the cities of Los Angeles and Long Beach. There are also pockets in the southern parts of the San Gabriel Valley and the Tri-city area.

These maps display the population density among American Indians and do not incorporate other racial groups. When placed relative to other racial groups, American Indians remain highly dispersed among other racial groups within the county. Unlike other minority groups such as Latinos or African Americans that comprise a majority in some neighborhoods, there are no areas where American Indians comprise a majority. This can be seen in the Dissimilarity Index (DI), a widely used measure of the level of segregation. This index compares two populations (e.g., American Indians and all others) at the neighborhood, or census tract, level. The values for the index range from 0 to 100.¹² The value can be roughly interpreted as the percent of a region's population that

¹⁰ For 1999, the year for which the 2000 census reported annual income, the threshold for a family of four with two children was \$16,895. According to the Bureau of the Census: "The U.S. Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is poor. If a family's total income is less than that family's threshold, then that family, and every individual in it, is considered poor. The poverty thresholds do not vary geographically, but they are updated annually for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). The official poverty definition counts money income before taxes and does not include capital gains and noncash benefits (such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps). Poverty is not defined for people in military barracks, institutional group quarters, or for unrelated individuals under age 15 (such as foster children). They are excluded from the poverty universe--that is, they are considered neither as 'poor' nor as 'nonpoor.'" <http://www.census.gov/hhes/poverty/povdef.html>.

¹¹ As noted in a previous footnote, the 1990 data may provide a better profile of American Indians indigenous to the United States. According to the 1990 census, over 17% of American Indians fell below the poverty line, over two and a half times the rate for non-Hispanic whites.

¹² The DI for two groups is computed using the following equation:

$$DI = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n abs \left[\frac{N_i}{N} - \frac{M_i}{M} \right]$$

must be redistributed from over-represented census tracts to under-represented census tracts to achieve full residential integration. The DI for single-race American Indians versus all others is 24, and the DI for multi-race Americans versus all others is 17. These values are considerably lower than the equivalent DI values for African Americans (57), Non-Hispanic whites (56), Latinos (51), and Asian/Pacific Islanders (46).

Because of their dispersal in Los Angeles County, American Indians live in neighborhoods where the population is dominated by other racial/ethnic groups. There was not a single census tract in the county in 2000 with an American Indian majority. On the other hand, there were 834 Latino majority tracts, 625 NH white majority tracts, 85 African-American majority tracts, and 68 Asian/Pacific Islander majority tracts. The typical American Indian (single- or multi-racial) lived in a census tract where American Indians comprised only 1.5 percent of the tract's population. In fact, there were no census tracts with more than 5 percent American Indians (inclusive count). As Figure 8 shows, a small majority of American Indians reside in neighborhoods with a Latino majority, and a fifth reside in neighborhoods with a non-Latino majority. Relative to single-race American Indians, multi-racial American Indians are more dispersed across the various types of neighborhoods.

where N is the county population for the first group, N_i is the population of that group in the i^{th} census tract, and M is the county population for the second group, M_i is the population of that group in the i^{th} census tract.

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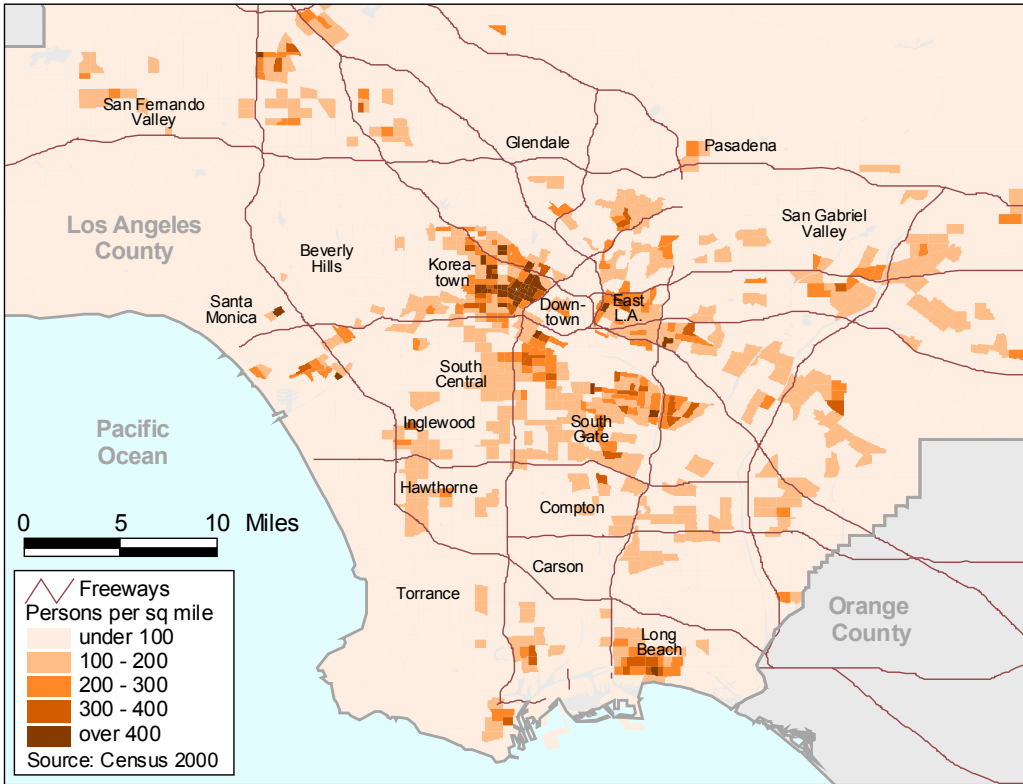


Figure 6. Single-Race American Indian Population Density, 2000

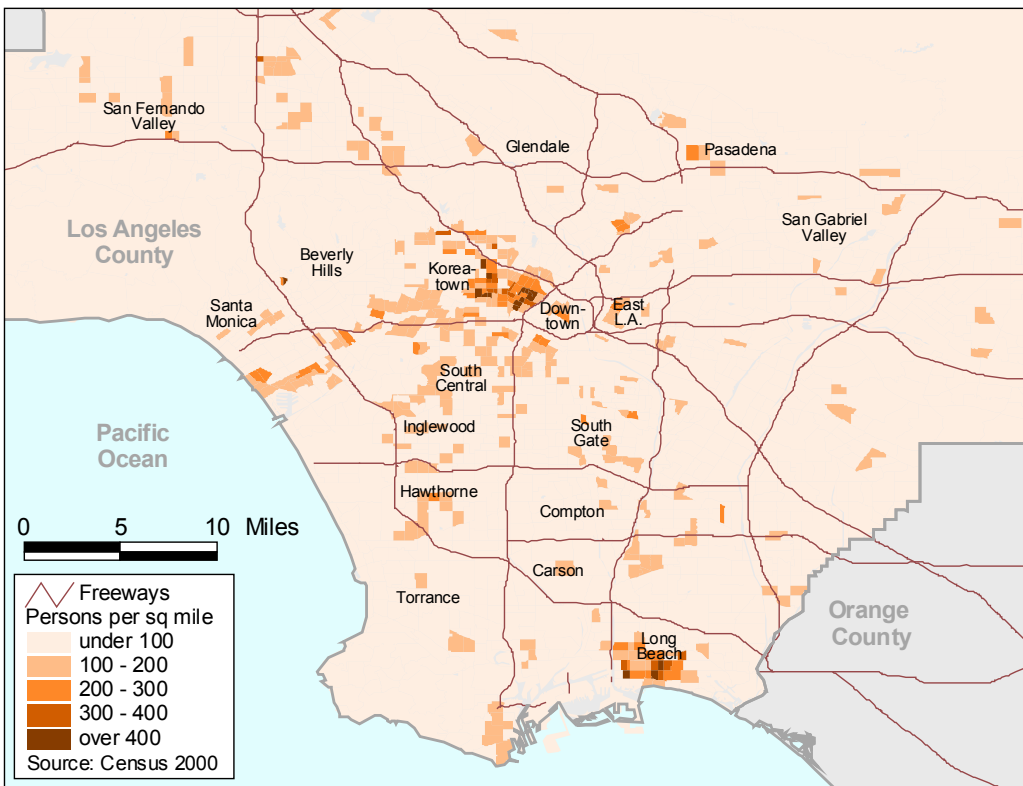


Figure 7. Multi Race American Indian Population Density, 2000

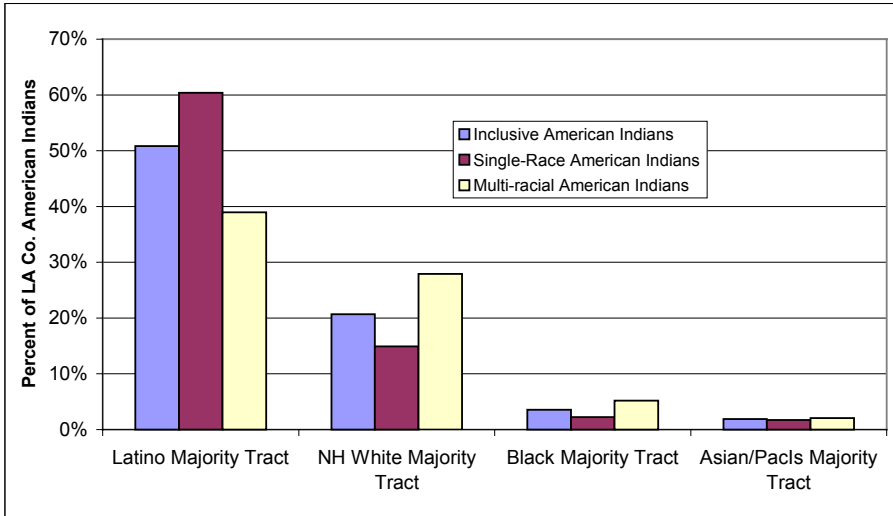


Figure 8. Geographic Distribution of American Indians, Los Angeles County, 2000¹³

While American Indians are the least segregated racial group in Los Angeles, they are disproportionately concentrated in low-income communities. Figure 9 displays the distribution of single-race American Indians and non-Hispanic whites into five classes of neighborhoods ranked by per-capita income.¹⁴ American Indians are eight times more likely to live in the poorest neighborhoods than non-Hispanic whites; and are only one-fifth as likely to live in the most affluent neighborhoods.

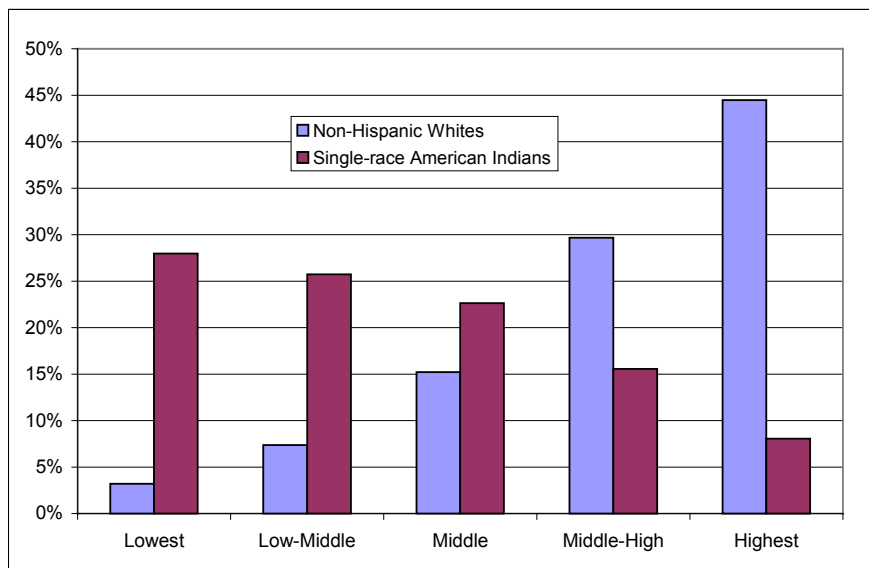


Figure 9. Distribution of American Indians by Economic Neighborhoods, 2000

¹³ Figure 8 reports the percentage of American Indian in tracts in which a single racial group comprises the majority of the population. American Indians also live in tracts in which no one racial group comprises a majority.

¹⁴ Per-capita income data come from Census 2000 Summary File 3. Population data come from the Census 2000 PL files.

Part 3: Geographic Distribution of American Indian Subgroups in Los Angeles

The widely dispersed American Indian population is characteristic of the subgroups of American Indians eligible for educational, health and anti-poverty services and programs. This section examines four segments of the American Indian population that contain potential or actual participants for these services and programs: youth, the poor, the disabled, and enrollees in American Indian Health Services. Analysis of the dispersion of American Indian youth is based on the educational institution of elementary-school age children derived from data on American Indian students for the 1999/2000 school year and comes from the California Department of Education (CDE).¹⁵ The residential location of American Indians in poverty is based on poor American Indians in the county whose income is below the federal poverty line based on 2000 Census data. The health-related analyses examine two groups: disabled American Indians based on the 2000 census,¹⁶ and American Indians using American Indian Health Services by enrolling through the United American Indian Involvement.¹⁷

The four subgroups of American Indians are more concentrated than the overall American Indian population, perhaps because their relatively lower income limits their housing options. Figures 11-13 display the distribution for the four subgroups of American Indians. The patterns show that some pockets have a disproportionate share of some of the American Indian subgroups. This includes the downtown areas of the cities of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Students appear to be the most dispersed, while American Indians in poverty appear to be the least dispersed.

¹⁵ For all public schools in California, the CDE annually collects enrollment data as part of its California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS). A student is classified as an American Indian or Alaskan Native if he/she is “A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North America and who maintains cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition.”
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/demographics/files/ethsch.htm>

¹⁶ Disability status is based on the six disability questions in the long-form of the 2000 Census and is defined by four categories: no disabilities, one disability, two disabilities, and three to six disabilities. The data comes from Summary File 3 and includes only single-race American Indians.

¹⁷ AIHS enrollment data was obtained from the Los Angeles American Indian Health Project (LA/AIHP), which provides American Indian Health Services (AIHS) in Los Angeles County. LA/AIHP is a federally funded program for American Indians, and is open to anyone who can document at least 1/8 American Indian ancestry, is enrolled in a state or federally recognized tribe, or is recognized as an Indian tribe or group as a member of the Indian community. Qualified American Indians can use programs supported by the Indian Health Service (IHS) Urban Indian Health Programs (UIHP), which serves eligible individuals regardless of specific tribal membership. United American Indian Involvement, Inc., is a designated UIHP. Some American Indians receive health services from tribal governments that may be funded by IHS. Information on the geographic distribution of AIHS enrollees is adapted from a report titled “An Analysis of American Indian Health Service Enrollees in Los Angeles County” by Doug Houston, Paul M. Ong, and Jennifer S. Wang (An unpublished report by the UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies).

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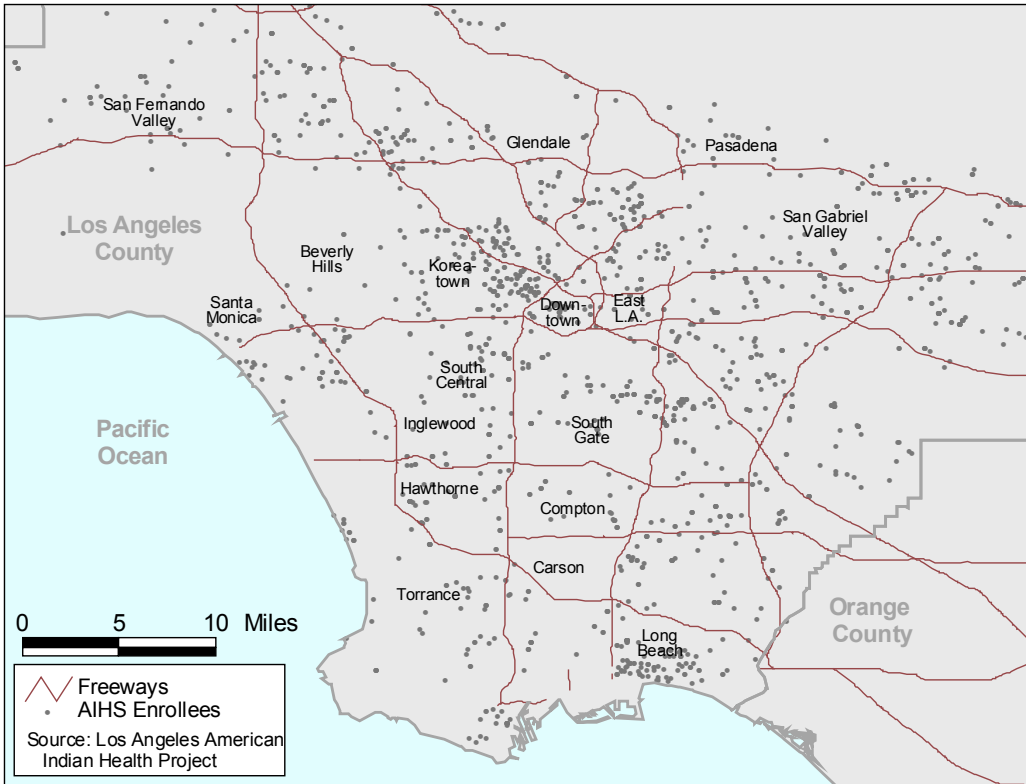


Figure 10. American Indian Health Service Enrollment, Los Angeles County, 1995-2000

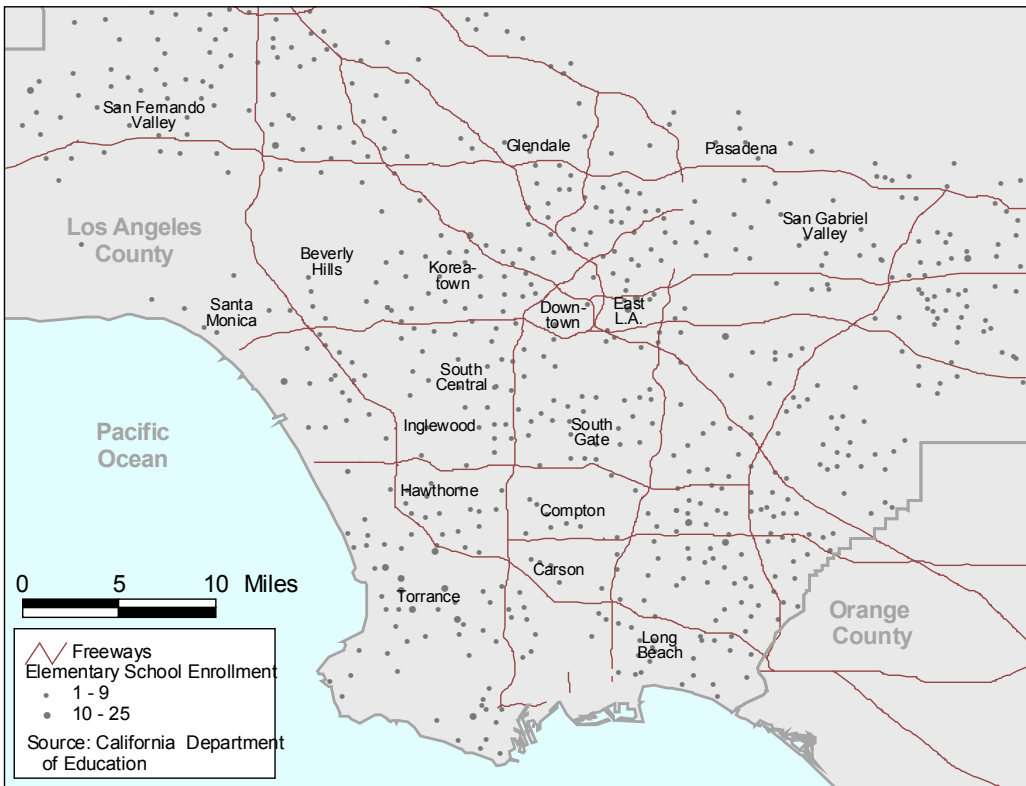


Figure 11. American Indian School Enrollment, Los Angeles County, 1999/2000

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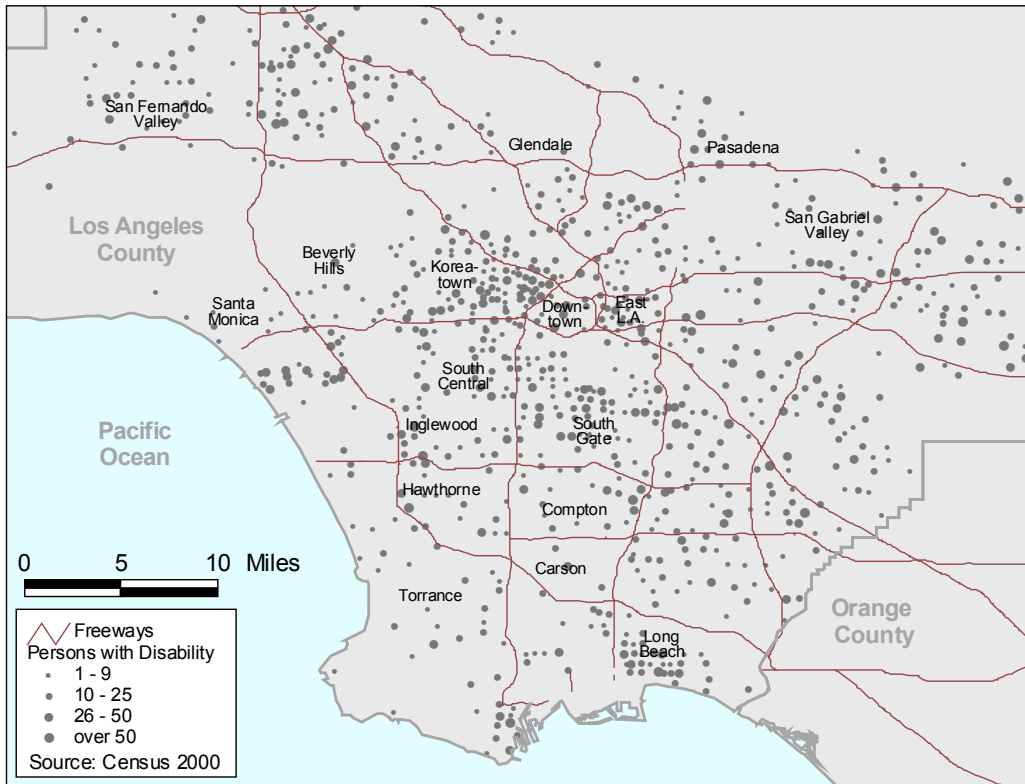


Figure 12. Disabled American Indians, Los Angeles County, 2000

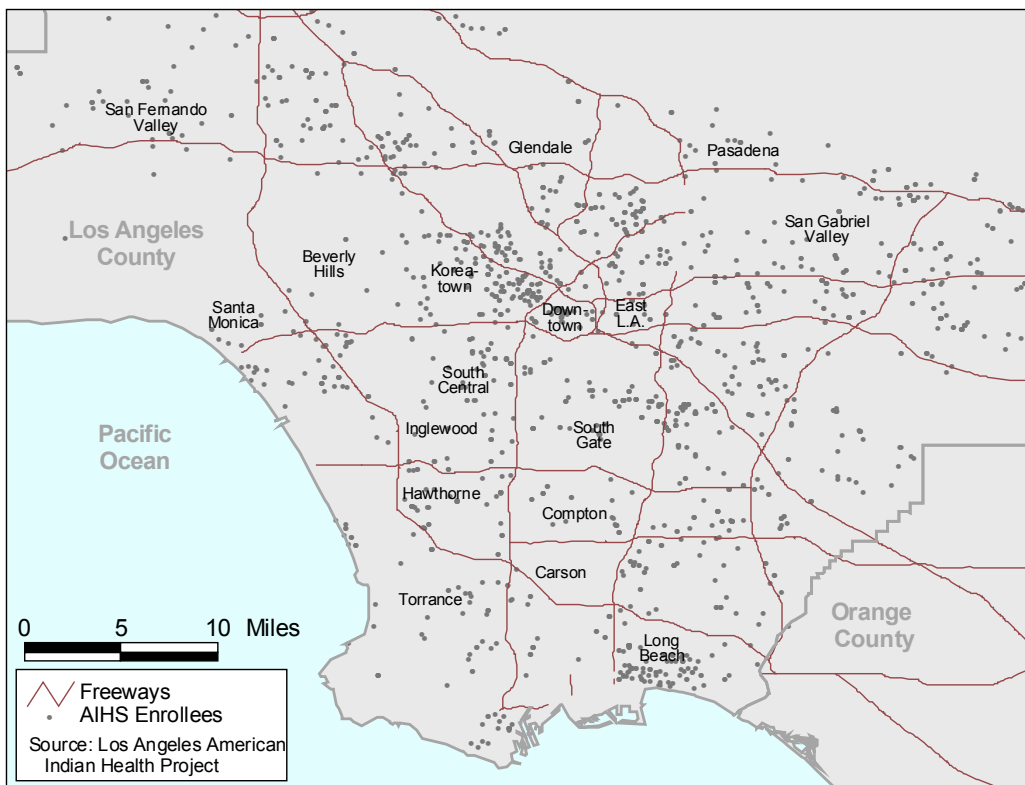


Figure 13. American Indians in Poverty, Los Angeles County, 2000

Figure 14 shows the relative concentration of American Indians in the top 10% of census tracts (schools in case of students) with the largest numbers of American Indians of each subgroup. The relative concentration of the inclusive count of American Indians is included for comparison. According to this measure, American Indians in poverty are nearly three times more concentrated than the overall American Indian population. Over three-fifths of American Indians resides in the 206 tracts with the largest number of poor American Indians.¹⁸ Despite this concentration, the absolute number of poor American Indians per tract is very small. The average for the 206 tracts is only 46, and the tract with the largest number of poor American Indians had only 152. The comparable numbers for students and the disabled are even smaller.¹⁹ The subgroup with the highest concentration is comprised of those enrolled in American Indian Health Services (AIHS), and this is likely due to self-selection. However, it should be noted that there was no tract with more than two dozen AIHS enrollees.²⁰

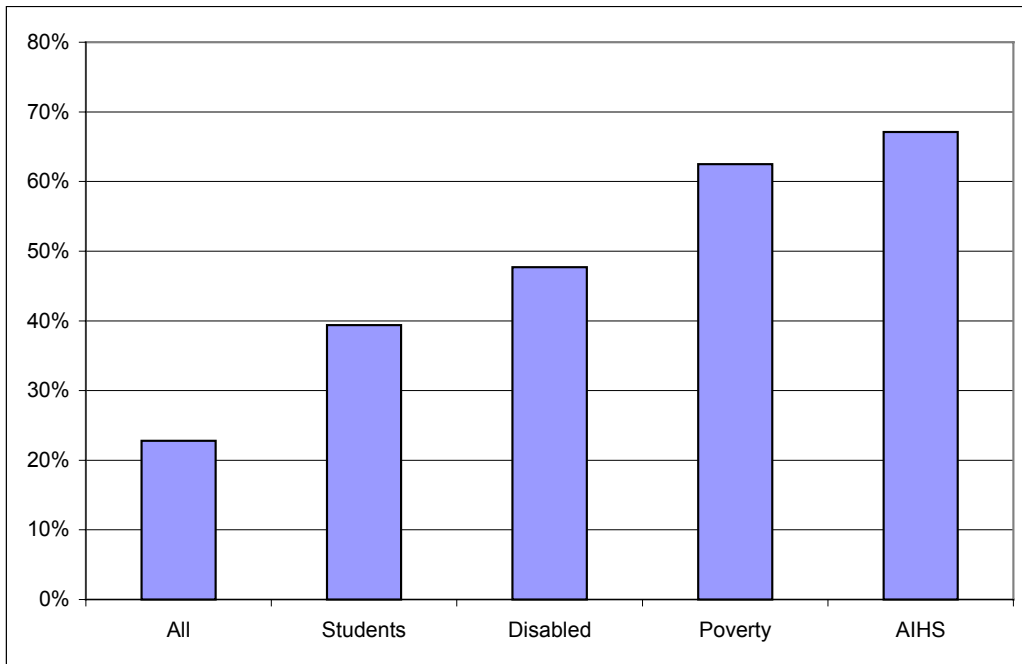


Figure 14. Concentration of American Indian Subgroups, 2000

¹⁸ Los Angeles County has a total of 2054 tracts.

¹⁹ The comparable averages are 8 for students and 35 for disabled. The comparable maximums are 25 for students and 88 for disabled.

²⁰ This low number may be due partly to the difficulty of locating the residence of enrollees because of bad, incomplete or missing addresses. Also, figures do not include information on the location of American Indian homeless populations.

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this report provides useful information on the challenges facing American Indians in Los Angeles. Findings show that this population is diverse, economically disadvantaged, and geographically dispersed. For these reasons, addressing the needs of this community is not easy.

The lack of accurate and appropriate data on American Indians remains a problem when analyzing the socioeconomic patterns and needs of this population. Census and school data do not correspond perfectly with the detailed information needed for policy formation, program planning, and implementation. Many services are targeted specifically to American Indians indigenous to the United States.²¹ Given this very narrow definition of service population, the availability of accurate data for this population is particularly important.²²

The availability of information on multi-racial individuals in the 2000 census has important implications for the strategic planning and outreach of agencies and groups that serve American Indians. Previous census counts required a respondent to select only one racial selection. Many American Indians are of a multi-racial heritage and, when forced to select only one racial category, may have reported one of their other races such as White or African American. Therefore, previous census counts represent an exclusive racial categories (that is, a person is assigned to only one race). Since eligibility does not require a person to be full American Indian, the 2000 inclusive count of American Indians (including multi-racial American Indians) appears to be more appropriate for service planning and outreach over previous single-race counts of American Indians.

Despite the limitations of available data, findings clearly document the wide geographic dispersion of the American Indian population in Los Angeles County. This pattern could present a sizeable barrier to providing services to this community. It is hard to achieve economies of scale because it is difficult to serve a large proportion of the population with just a few centralized facilities. Traditional place-based strategies such as neighborhood-based community development are less effective with the dispersed client base. Even though the most disadvantaged American Indians (e.g., those in poverty) are relatively more concentrated, the small numbers in any particular location make it difficult and costly to design culturally appropriate programs to address their needs.²³

²¹ Unlike other minority groups, American Indians have a unique legal standing because of the nation-to-nation relationship between Indian tribes and the United States. Census tabulations could be more useful to the planning purposes if they included detailed breakdowns of the socioeconomic characteristics for American Indians indigenous to the United States (that is, without Indians indigenous to Latin America) since this subgroup is eligible to receive federally funded services for American Indians.

²² Unfortunately, available census data and information on American Indian school and service enrollment is based on self-reporting, which may not always overlap with eligibility.

²³ This can be seen in the educational system. In recent years, public schools have recognized the importance of including minority-oriented materials in the curriculum and celebrating the history and

Given the unique spatial patterns of American Indians, addressing their needs requires alternative approaches that can overcome physical distance. Service areas for many activities must encompass larger geographic units than typically used for other populations. The greater physical area requires overcoming transportation problems, developing a better communication infrastructure and improving outreach efforts. Services must also incorporate community networks and connections. A community is not necessarily territorial, but is based on a shared sense of identity, history and fate, is tied together by social networks and institutions, and is reinforced by periodic events that celebrate a group's culture. These elements are critical to the success of meeting the needs of American Indians in Los Angeles.

contributions of minority groups. It is much more difficult to do this for American Indian students because no elementary school has more than 25 American Indians. Consequently, it is hard for a school to design and implement educational programs and events for American Indian students.