

## **Immigration: Going the distance**

### **Asians overtake Hispanics as America's biggest group of new immigrants**

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ASIAN-AMERICANS, whether born in the United States or abroad, still make up a mere 6% of the country's population. They are a mixed lot, ethnically and culturally: the largest sub-group, the Chinese, make up less than a quarter of the total Asian-American population. But in 2010, according to a recent report from the Pew Research Centre that counts both authorised and unauthorised migrants, Asians were America's biggest migrant group. That year 430,000 Asians arrived, compared with 390,000 Hispanics.

The main reason for this was that the rate of Hispanic migration to the United States plummeted with the economic downturn, falling by half between 2005 and 2010. Still, the number of Asian immigrants has been growing steadily for the past ten years. The rise is most noticeable in cities. Glenda Joe, the CEO of a communications firm, says that when her Cantonese father arrived in Houston in 1930, only about a dozen Chinese lived in the city. His subsequent marriage, to her Irish mother, was illegal. Today the Houston metropolitan area is the most racially diverse in the country, according to an analysis in March from Rice University. Its basketball team has just signed Jeremy Lin, the league's biggest Chinese-American star, to much excitement. Perhaps 15% of the city's small businesses are Asian, and several restaurants offer Cajun-Vietnamese fusion.

Distance and policy used to be the big barriers to Asian immigration. In 1965 long-standing racial quotas were removed, and Asians soon proved their value. "In an economy that increasingly relies on highly skilled workers", notes the Pew report, "[Asians] are the best educated, highest-income, fastest-growing race group in the country." Nearly half of Asian-American adults over 25 have a bachelor's degree, compared with 28% of all Americans. So whereas Hispanic immigrants, most of whom have less than a college education, are often accused of taking jobs from native-born Americans, Asian immigrants are less likely to face that sort of complaint.