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PEW RESEARCH STUDY IGNORES SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DIVERSITY WITHIN ASIAN AMERICAN GROUPS

LOS ANGELES – The Asian American Center for Advancing Justice (Advancing Justice) is deeply concerned about how findings from a recent study by the Pew Research Center have been used to portray Asian Americans. While the report, “The Rise of Asian Americans,” should be applauded for the attention it provides an often misunderstood racial group, its narrative largely ignores the tremendous social and economic diversity within Asian American communities. Failure to fully recognize the challenges many Asian Americans face means that the educational, economic, and social service needs of America’s fastest growing racial group will not be fully understood or addressed by policy makers.

Authors of the “The Rise of Asian Americans,” as well as many mainstream media outlets covering its release, paint a picture of Asian Americans as a model minority, having the highest income and educational attainment among racial groups. These portrayals are overly simplistic.

The Pew Research Center report holds up Asian Americans as the most educated. Yet data from the U.S. Census Bureau show that Asian American adults are less likely than Whites to have finished high school and that Chinese and Vietnamese Americans are among seven Asian American ethnic groups to have *below average* attainment of a high school diploma. These same data show that Southeast Asians, including Hmong, Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese Americans, are among those *least* likely to hold a college degree.

The Pew Research Center report also notes that Asian Americans have the highest median household income. Yet household income is a poor measure when applied to immigrant communities, which feature a greater number of workers per household and include a greater number of persons who rely on the income those workers produce. Census Bureau data on per capita income indicate that Asian American incomes fall *below* those of Whites nationwide. Per capita income data by ethnic group further show that Hmong, Cambodian, Laotian, and Bangladeshi Americans have incomes more similar to those of African Americans and Latinos than Whites.

Findings such as these are included in Advancing Justice’s recent report, “A Community of Contrasts: Asian Americans in the United States, 2011,” which documents the social and economic diversity within Asian American communities across a variety of indicators. It provides valuable portraits of the most disadvantaged Asian American ethnic groups, nearly all missing from the Pew Research Center report. “A Community of Contrasts” can be found online at www.advancingjustice.org.

One-dimensional portrayals of Asian Americans as universally successful have serious consequences, rendering invisible the needs of some of the most vulnerable families in the United States. The myriad of Asian American experiences demand a more nuanced and sophisticated narrative than “The Rise of Asian Americans” provides.

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The Asian American Center for Advancing Justice (www.advancingjustice.org) is comprised of the Asian American Justice Center in Washington, DC(www.advancingequality.org), the Asian American Institute in Chicago (www.aaichicago.org), the Asian Law Caucus (www.asianlawcaucus.org) in San Francisco and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (www.apalc.org) in Los Angeles. The mission of the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice is to promote a fair and equitable society for all by working for civil and human rights and empowering Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other underserved communities.