
EDITOR'S FORUM

**DO PACIFIC ISLANDERS IN THE UNITED STATES
HOLD "GOOD" JOBS?**

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In the 1980s, the quality of the jobs held by Pacific Islander householders generally improved, while job quality declined for the average American householder. The factors that improved the economic position of a Pacific Islander household--education, work experience, and good English language skills--were the same as those that improved the position of other households in the United States. Over the decade, Pacific Islander householders generally acquired more of these productive attributes, which helped them to find employment, get access to better jobs, and increase their earnings.

AFTER GROWING STRONGLY in the 1960s and 1970s average real earnings in the United States stagnated in the 1980s and poverty rates, after falling since the mid-1960s began to climb. Income inequality, after improving modestly, also worsened. There was widespread concern that changes in the world economy were destroying "good" jobs, jobs that paid a "living wage" sufficient to support a household at a reasonable standard of living. Further, racial minorities, including Pacific Islanders, were thought to have suffered even greater declines than other groups in the United States.

Many Pacific Islanders in the United States started the decade in a weaker economic position than the average U.S. resident. For example, in 1979 mean household income in the United States, based on the 1980 census, was \$20,306, but for Pacific Islanders it was \$19,016 (U.S. Bureau of

the Census 1988). Because of the much larger size of Pacific Islands households, Pacific Islander groups had lower per capita household income: \$7,411 for all U.S. households and \$5,153 for Pacific Islander households. As a consequence of their lower incomes and larger family sizes, the incidence of poverty among Pacific Islanders (16.1 percent) was almost twice the U.S. average (9.6 percent; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1988).

Labor-force participation rates and employment rates of Pacific Islanders were similar to those of other U.S. residents; the lower incomes came from lower earnings rather than from lower participation in the workforce. The lower earnings were, in turn, related to a higher incidence of unemployment during the year than for all U.S. workers; holding a job lower on the occupational ladder; lower educational attainment than other U.S. residents; and a weaker command of spoken English among island-born persons compared to all Americans (about a 10 percentage point difference).¹

Given the weaker economic position of Pacific Islanders in 1980 and the adverse economic developments of the 1980s how did Pacific Islanders fare? This article investigates one dimension of the economic success of Pacific Islanders, namely, the proportion of jobs held by Pacific Islanders that are "good" jobs, and whether this changed over the 1980s. Finally, it will determine the factors that affect whether a Pacific Islands householder holds a "good" job.²

What Is a "Good" Job?

The first task is to define what is meant by a "good" job. Given a choice, a person will prefer a "good" job to a "bad" job. But what do these terms mean? A "good" job is likely to be described as challenging or interesting, as having social importance, as using a person's skills, as having prospects for promotion, as having variety and entailing responsibility, and, most likely, as paying well. A "bad" job is the opposite. The problem for research is how to capture the essence of these characteristics. The task is made more difficult because it is not clear that all individuals value the same characteristics or, if they do, that they value them equally. But most people value money--not necessarily for itself, but for what it allows individuals to provide for themselves or their families--and link high pay to a "good" job and low pay to a "bad" job. It is also likely that other "good" characteristics of a job are positively correlated with pay. There are exceptions to this. One reviewer of this article noted that some Samoans he or she has known have given up well-paid jobs for intermittent jobs at minimum wage, simply to be able to "go home" to family weddings and funerals. For these individuals, a "good" job was one that they could leave frequently and without permission. However,

such behavior does not appear to be widespread. The data in Table 1 below on income and weeks worked per year indicate that most Pacific Islander householders have strong, persistent ties to the labor market. By and large, it is pay that is most often used to differentiate a "good" job from a "bad" job, and for this reason it is used in this study.

The next issue to face is how much pay makes a job a "good" job? Again, there is no agreement, since it is not simply a statistical issue, but involves value judgments. The minimum wage and the poverty level are possible definitions of an income level sufficient for an individual to support a household. In 1993 the minimum wage was \$4.25 per hour or \$8,840 per year and the poverty level about \$7.00 per hour or \$14,350 for a single-earner family of four. Many would reject these levels as too low, since poverty-level income is associated with poorer health, less education, greater exposure to social stress and crime, and diminished economic prospects. Further, growing up in a poor family increases the chance that an individual will experience poverty as an adult (Gottschalk, McLanahan, and Sandefur 1994: 100).

In a national study of jobs and earnings carried out for the Urban Institute, Levy and Michel (1991) defined a "good" job as one that would support a "middle-class" living standard or as one that generates sufficient income to place the jobholder in the middle of the earnings distribution. In their study this income was somewhat above 150 percent of the poverty level for a family of four. This definition also makes the current poverty line comparable, in normative terms, to the original threshold established in the 1960s (Ruggles 1990). This value, about 150 percent of the poverty line, has been arrived at independently by other researchers (Schwartz and Volgy 1992; Scott 1993) and appears to represent something of a consensus definition of a "good" job.

In this study four income-based definitions of a "good" job are investigated: the most conservative definition of a "good" job is one that pays wages at least at the poverty line. Higher income requirements are also used to define a "good" job, namely 150 percent, 200 percent, and 300 percent of the poverty line figure. Each of these definitions is based on the poverty-level income. The poverty level is defined by the Office of Management and Budget as that amount of money required to sustain a family of a particular size and age composition. The core of the definition is the amount of money needed to purchase a least-cost nutritionally adequate food plan. Since families spend one-third of their budget on food, the poverty level is roughly three times the value of the core food budget. The poverty level varies for each household depending on its size, the presence of children under the age of eighteen, and the age of the householder. For a household of five in 1979, the poverty level was \$9,923; and in 1989 it was \$15,702.³ The poverty line seems to be a reasonable lower cutoff, because if a job is not

able to pay enough to keep a family out of poverty, it is unlikely to be considered by many to be a good job, no matter what its other characteristics.⁴ A somewhat higher threshold for defining a "good" job, 150 percent of poverty, indicates a fairly broadly accepted definition of a "good" job; and 200 percent and 300 percent of poverty would be accepted by most investigators as defining a "good" job, or even a "very good" job. These definitions would seem to embrace a reasonable span of income-based definitions of a "good" job.⁵

Pacific Islanders in the United States are part of American society, just as they are part of their home island society. As such, like other residents of the United States, their well-being and that of their family is affected by their income, although not necessarily defined by it. Low income in the United States makes it harder for them to meet the material demands placed on them by family and friends both in the United States and at home, so an income-based definition, although far from perfect, seems a reasonable approach.

Data

The data used in this study are taken from the computerized Public Use Micro Sample (PUMS) of the 1980 and 1990 censuses of the United States: The 1980 PUMS is a 1 percent sample of the U.S. population, and the 1990 PUMS a 5 percent sample. Pacific Islanders are defined in this study on the basis of the race question in the census. Since the focus of the study is on Polynesians, Micronesians, and Melanesians who came to the United States as migrants or are the descendants of migrants, Hawaiians are not included in the analysis. Further, since the economic position of Hawaiians is superior to that of other Pacific Islander groups (their 1989 household income is 10 percent to 30 percent higher and their poverty rate 50 percent to 90 percent of that of most groups) and Hawaiians are the largest Pacific Islander group, the inclusion of Hawaiians would cloud the situation of the other Pacific Islands groups.⁶

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1993), in the 1990 census Hawaiians were 58 percent of the total Pacific Islander population of 365,024; Samoans were 17 percent, Guamanians 14 percent, Tongans 5 percent, and Fijians 2 percent. Palauans, Northern Mariana Islanders, and Tahitians were each less than one-half of 1 percent of Pacific Islanders.⁷ The majority of Tongans (61 percent) and Melanesians (78 percent) were born outside the United States and can be considered first-generation migrants. Only 23 percent of Samoans and 18 percent of Micronesians were foreign-born, so most of these individuals are second- or higher order generation migrants. These percentages are biased down for at least two reasons. The first is the ten-

dency to report "born in the United States" to avoid immigration problems, and the second is a Bureau of the Census coding procedure that treats American Samoans and certain groups of Micronesians as born in the United States.⁸

The unit of observation is the householder. Because the focus of the study is "good" jobs, I have limited my investigation to householders between sixteen and sixty-five years of age. The 1980 PUMS contains 138 such households, 108 of which had an employed householder, and the 1990 PUMS contains 1,114 such households, 884 with an employed householder. I focus on the householder because the concern over the disappearance of "good" jobs addresses the question "can a job support a household?" not "can **all** of the jobs held by members of a household support that household?" The focus on the earnings of just the householder gives a somewhat grimmer picture of the economic position of Pacific Islander households than would a focus on the income of all earners in the household. But other members of the household may work because the head is unable to earn sufficient income and would choose not to work if the head had a "good" job. There are a number of interesting questions that can be asked about the jobs, pay, income, and standard of living of Pacific Islanders in the United States. Each requires a somewhat different approach or treatment of available data, and some cannot be answered with existing data.

Empirical Results

While I refer to Pacific Islanders collectively, there are sizable differences among groups and also among different locations for a particular group. For example, the poverty rate of Guamanians, Melanesians, and Micronesians in 1989 was only 50 percent of that of Samoans and Tongans, and poverty rates of Pacific Islanders in Hawai'i were about twice those in California. Thus, in the analysis to follow, the situation for Samoans and Tongans will be below the average for all Pacific Islanders, and the situation in Hawai'i will be worse than that in California. The size of the PUMS sample is too small to carry out a separate analysis for each group and each location.

Table 1 reports some descriptive statistics on the samples of employed householders for 1980 and 1990. The sample for 1990 is quite large, but that for 1980 is small. Since there is so little information available about Pacific Islanders in the United States, I have decided to present the information for 1980, recognizing that it may lack precision and that differences between 1980 and 1990 in individual characteristics may reflect sampling bias in the 1980 sample.⁹ Between 1980 and 1990 the average age of Pacific Islander householders rose almost a year, work experience rose by a half-year,

TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics on Pacific Islander Householders: 1980 and 1990

	1980	1990
Age (years)	35.8	36.6
Education (years)	12.2	12.6
Work experience (years)	17.6	18.1
Disability (%)	5.5	4.2
Speak English well or very well (%)	97.2	95.1
Female (%)	9.3	18.2
Occupations (%)		
Service	18.5	16.9
Farm	1.9	4.0
Blue collar	39.8	41.0
White collar	39.8	38.1
Weeks worked	47.0	46.5
Hours per week	40.7	41.0
Annual hours	1,942	1,988
Sample size	108	884

Sources: Calculated by the author from data in the computerized 1980 and 1990 Public Use Micro Samples, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C.

Note: Employed household heads aged sixteen to sixty-five years.

and years of education rose by one-third of a year. The incidence of a work disability dropped nearly one and one-half percentage points, and the percentage who spoke English well or very well dropped by two percentage points. This last change was the only one discussed thus far that would tend to worsen the economic position of the household. Changes in the occupational distribution were slight: almost 40 percent were blue-collar workers (farming, forestry, fisheries, operators, fabricators, laborers, precision production, craft, and repair), 40 percent white-collar workers (managerial, professional, technical, sales, and administrative), and almost 20 percent service workers. Although weeks worked in 1989 were slightly lower than in 1979, hours worked per week were higher, yielding a larger number of hours worked in 1989 than in 1979.

What Proportion of Pacific Islanders Hold a “Good” Job?

The debate over the disappearance of “good” jobs is primarily a debate over the quality of the jobs that exist. As a consequence, the “quality” of the jobs held by people who have them will be discussed first. That is, a distinction is made between jobholders with a “good” job and those with a “bad” job. Often combined with the debate on the quality of jobs is a concern over the disap-

TABLE 2. Percentage of Pacific Islander Householders Who Hold a "Good" Job: 1980 and 1990

Earnings	Employed		All	
	1980	1990	1980	1990
Less than poverty	28	31	44	45
Greater than or equal to poverty but less than 150% poverty	28	23	22	18
Greater than or equal to 150% poverty but less than 200% poverty	19	13	14	11
Greater than or equal to 200% poverty but less than 300% poverty	13	19	11	15
Greater than or equal to 300% poverty	12	14	9	11

Sources: See Table 1.

pearance of jobs no matter what they pay. Thus, data on jobholding among Pacific Islanders will also be discussed. Information on the two concerns--whether a householder has a job and whether that job is a "good" job--will then be combined to estimate the proportion of all householders that hold a "good" job. That is, I distinguish among those that hold a "good" job and those that either hold a low-paying job, are unemployed, or are not in the labor force at all.

The percentages of employed Pacific Islander householders who hold a "good" job are reported in the first two columns of Table 2. There are several things to note. First, almost one-third of Pacific Islander householders are "working poor." That is, the job the householder has pays insufficiently to bring the household above the poverty line. That does not necessarily mean that such a household is in poverty. Other household members may work and earn enough to bring the family above the poverty line. Second, if we accept 150 percent of poverty level as the most widely accepted definition of a "good" job, in 1980 only 44 percent of employed Pacific Islander householders (excluding Hawaiians) held "good" jobs, and in 1990, 46 percent did so. Third, in 1980 about one in eight employed Pacific Islander householders held a job that paid more than 300 percent of poverty level. In 1990 the figure was one in seven. Fourth, the overall picture is one of improvement. Although the percentage of working poor rose by three percentage points, improvement occurred at other levels of the distribution. Especially notable are the declines in the percentage of householders earn-

ing between poverty-level income and 200 percent of poverty level and the gain in the percentage earning above 200 percent of the poverty line. Thus, for most employed Pacific Islander householders, the difficult decade of the 1980s saw economic improvement.

The two-point increase in the percentage of Pacific Islander householders with “good” jobs, paying greater than or equal to 150 percent of poverty level, can be decomposed into a part due to changes in the characteristics of the householders (education, experience, disability, and so on) and a part due to the returns to these characteristics. When this is done, we find that one-half of the increase was due to changes in the characteristics of the householders and one-half to changes in the returns to these characteristics.¹⁰ Increases in education and work experience contributed importantly to the improved situation. If they had not increased over the decade, the percentage of householders with jobs paying at least 150 percent of poverty would have remained at 44 percent.¹¹

It is possible that households headed by men and by women fared differently over the 1980s. For the nation as a whole, Levy and Michel (1991) found evidence of a decline in the number of “good” jobs for males but an increase for women. When male- and female-headed Pacific Islander households, are examined separately, it is clear that male-headed households were in a much better economic position than those headed by women: 29 percent of male-headed householders were working poor in 1990, while 42 percent of female-headed households were in this category (Table 3). Over the 1980s female-headed households exhibit the same pattern as males, a larger proportion of working householders earn below poverty but a larger percentage earn more than 150 percent of poverty (not shown). Changes for females need to be handled with caution, since the 1980 sample contains only ten

TABLE 3. Percentage of Pacific Islander Householders Who Hold a “Good” Job by Sex: 1980 and 1990

Job Pays	1980		1990	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Greater than or equal to poverty	72	70	71	58
Greater than or equal to 150% poverty	46	30	48	37
Greater than or equal to 200% poverty	26	20	35	27
Greater than or equal to 300% poverty	12	10	15	10
Sample size	98	10	723	161

Sources: See Table 1.

households. However, the improvement for Pacific Islands women noted here is consistent with the improvement found for female-headed householders in the United States (see Ahlburg, Song, and Leitz 1995).

While the economic position of Pacific Islander householders improved over the 1980s, it is still below that of other U.S. residents. Although I am not aware of comparable data for the entire United States, a similar study has been carried out for the state of Minnesota (Ahlburg, Song, and Leitz 1995). In 1980 and 1990, only 15 percent of Minnesota householders were working poor, half the percentage of Pacific Islanders, while 30 percent earned more than 300 percent of poverty, more than twice the Pacific Islander figure. The figures for Pacific Islander working poor are better than those for Native Americans in Minnesota but worse than those of "Blacks." Pacific Islanders held "very good" jobs at about the same rate as Native Americans in Minnesota, but at only half the rate of Blacks. The Minnesota figures are a reasonable basis for comparison, since the Minnesota and U.S. data on average annual pay, disposable personal income, and median household income were almost identical in 1990. Poverty was a little higher in the United States, 13 percent, than the 10 percent in Minnesota (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993).

Who Has a "Good" Job?

Methodological Issues

In this section the characteristics of employed heads of Pacific Islander households that are associated with holding a "good" job are discussed. These determinants are identified by regression analysis. The regression equations that identify variables that are associated with an employed head of household holding a "good" job are reported in the Appendix. These regressions are probit regressions, not ordinary least squares regressions. Because the variable of interest is a zero-or-one variable (you either have a "good" job or you do not), ordinary least squares regression is not appropriate (Griffiths, Hill, and Judge 1993). Table 4 reports the effects of each variable on the probability that a householder will hold a "good" job (these are called "marginal effects" and are calculated from the regression coefficients but are not equal to them, because the probit regressions are nonlinear).

For example, the marginal effect of years of education in 1990 in the first column of results in Table 4 means that for each extra year of education completed, the probability of a householder having a job that paid above the poverty level increased by 3.4 percentage points. A Pacific Islander householder with an eighth-grade education was thus 27 percent less likely to have a good job in 1990 than was a college graduate. The marginal effect of dummy variables such as sex, English language facility, presence of a disabil-

TABLE 4. Percentage Effects of Determinants of Having a "Good" Job: 1990

	Definitions of a "Good" Job			
	Greater than or Equal to Poverty	Greater than or Equal to 150% Poverty	Greater than or Equal to 200% Poverty	Greater than or Equal to 300% Poverty
Years of education	3.4**	5.4**	4.5**	2.3**
Years of work experience	1.8**	1.1	0.1	0.2
Years of experience squared	-0.0**	0.0	0.0	0.0
Sex	-14.4**	-10.6*	-10.2**	-5.3*
Disability	1.5	-13.0	-8.1	3.6
Speak English	16.1*	20.6*	28.4**	10.3
Service occupation	-25.3**	-24.3**	20.0**	-7.9**
Farm occupation	-14.5	-23.6*	-30.7**	-71.0
Blue-collar occupation	-10.0**	-2.4	-6.8	-4.3*

Source: Calculated from regressions in the Appendix.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

ity, and job type are measured relative to the effect of the category omitted from the regression. For sex, the effect is for being a female householder rather than a male; for English language, it is speaking English well or very well relative to speaking it less well or not at all; for service, farm, and blue-collar occupations, it is being in these occupations rather than in white-collar occupations; and for disability, it is the impact of having a disability that limits work relative to having no disability. For example, in the first column of regression results in Table 4, a female householder of the same experience, education, job sector, disability status, and English language ability as a comparable male householder was 14.4 percentage points less likely to hold a job paying above the poverty line than that comparable male householder. These estimates assume that the factors that affect the probability of holding a "good" job are those shown in the tables. If there are other factors that affect this probability and are correlated with the factors we are considering in Table 4, gender for example, then our estimates are biased. That is, they are either too big or too small.

Regression Results

So what affects the probability that an employed Pacific Islander householder held a "good" job, that is, one paying more than the poverty level?

Table 4 reports the regression results for 1990 only. Few of the variables were statistically significantly related to holding a "good" job in 1980. This result probably reflects the small size of the sample of households. In 1990 each additional year of education was associated with a 3.4 percentage point higher probability of holding a job paying above the poverty level. This finding is consistent with evidence on the importance of education to economic success in the United States, an importance that increased during the 1980s (Levy and Michel 1991:28). Education is even more important in holding a job paying 150 percent of poverty level. Each year of education increases the probability by a little over five percentage points. The impact is somewhat smaller for even better paying jobs. The message of these findings is clear: without adequate education the chances of earning an adequate income are very slim.

Also important to obtaining a good job is a good command of English. A householder who speaks English well or very well is 16 percent more likely to have a job paying above poverty level, 21 percent more likely to have a job paying at least 150 percent of poverty level, and 28 percent more likely to have a job paying at least 200 percent of poverty level than is a householder who speaks English less well. English proficiency is not statistically significant for a definition of a "good" job at 300 percent of poverty-level income. There are a few possible explanations for the latter finding: first, some individuals possess unique skills that are in such great demand that employers ignore language deficiencies; second, these individuals are employed in racial/ethnic labor markets where English is not required; or third, the sample is too small to yield a precise estimate of the effect.

Additional years of work experience increased the probability of having a job that paid above the poverty level by about 2 percent per year of experience but did not significantly affect the probability of holding an even higher paying job. Having a work-limiting disability did not affect the probability of having a "good" job once employed, although it may decrease the probability of being in the labor force. Indeed, this turned out to be the case. In a regression with labor-force participation as the dependent variable, disability reduced the probability of being in the labor force by 23 percent, controlling for other variables that affect participation.

The occupation of the householder matters. Those in services were 25 percent less likely to hold a job paying above poverty level than those in white-collar occupations, while those holding agricultural jobs were 15 percent less likely to do so. Blue-collar workers were 10 percent more likely than comparable white-collar workers to be "working poor." The penalty for being in a service occupation was similar for jobs paying greater than 150 percent or greater than 200 percent of poverty level, and the penalty for being an agri-

cultural worker was about double that for poverty-level jobs. The occupational differences for “very good” jobs are small and those for farm workers imprecisely estimated. It is possible that individuals in high-paying blue-collar or service occupations are well-placed managers or owners of blue-collar businesses.

Gender effects were large and statistically significant (Table 4). Female householders were 14 percent less likely than comparable men to hold a job paying above the poverty level. The gender differentials were smaller for higher-paying jobs: 10 percent for 150 percent and 200 percent of poverty level, and 5 percent for 300 percent of poverty level.

What Proportion of All Householders Hold a “Good” Job?

To determine the proportion of all householders with a “good” job, we need to know the percentage who are employed, that is, the employment ratio, as well as the percentage of the employed who have “good” jobs. The employment ratios are shown in Table 5, along with the percentage of all householders in the labor force. In 1990 most male and two-thirds of female householders were in the labor force, and the vast majority of these were employed. The percentage of males in the labor force was greater than in 1980 but the percentage employed was lower. The small sample size for females in 1980 makes the reliability of the estimates for women doubtful.

The second panel of Table 2 presents data on the percentage of all householders sixteen to sixty-five years of age who hold a “good” job, obtained by multiplying the percentage of employed householders with “good” jobs by the percentage of all householders with a job (the employment ratio). That is, this panel distinguishes those with a “good” job from those who have a “bad” job, are unemployed, or who are out of the labor force. The data show that a slightly larger percentage of Pacific Islander householders had a job paying above poverty in 1990 than in 1980, because although 3 percent of

TABLE 5. Percentage of Pacific Islander Householders in the Labor Force and Employed, by Sex: 1980 and 1990

	1980			1990		
	All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female
Percent in the labor force	80	89	42	84	91	65
Percent employed (employment ratio)	78	88	38	79	86	60

Sources: See Table 1.

jobholders saw earnings slip below poverty, there was a small increase in the percentage of householders who were employed, from 78.3 percent in 1980 to 79.4 percent in 1990. The percentages of all householders with "good" jobs at other definitions are lower than among employed householders, because the data now include nonemployed householders.

In considering these data, it should be kept in mind that the group that does not have a "good" job is diverse. Some members of the group are not in the labor market and so are not even looking for a job. Some of these people may have once looked but have since given up. Many have not. Some are unemployed and are thus actively seeking work. Others are employed, but the jobs they hold do not pay well. Finally, it cannot be assumed that all of these people could acquire "good" jobs even if those jobs became available tomorrow.

In addition to the gains made by the householder, the economic position of the household was further enhanced by an increase in the number-of workers per household: a one point decline in the percentage of families with no workers, a six point decline in the percentage with only one worker, and a commensurate 3.6 point increase for two workers and 3.5 point increase for families with three or more workers (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1988, 1993).

Conclusion

Although the economic position of employed Pacific Islander heads of households still compares unfavorably with that of the average American householder, Pacific Islander householders saw an improvement in their economic position over the 1980s, while the average American householder experienced a decline. While the percentage of workers earning less than the poverty level increased slightly, there were marked increases in the percentage of householders earning well above the poverty level. There was also a slight increase in the percentage of householders who were employed. When data on jobholding and the quality of jobs are combined, the improvement in the economic position of many Pacific Islander households is clear: in 1980 34 percent of all householders earned more than 150 percent of the poverty level; by 1990 37 percent did. Gains were especially marked above 200 percent of poverty: 20 percent of households in 1980 and 26 percent in 1990. Offsetting these gains was the fact that a slightly higher percentage of all householders had income below the poverty line in 1990 than in 1980.¹² As a consequence of these shifts, earnings inequality among Pacific Islanders grew, as it did in the nation as a whole.

The factors that improved the economic position of a household within

all Pacific Islander households--education, work experience, and good English language skills--are the same as those that improve the position of a household in the overall society. Over the 1980s, Pacific Islander households acquired more of these productive attributes, which helped them to find employment, get access to better jobs, and increase their earnings in the kinds of jobs they had been holding, all of which improved the position of their households. Not only have some productive characteristics increased, but the importance of at least one of these--education--and possibly others increased over the 1980s in the United States. Thus, while many Americans saw their economic position weaken in the 1980s this does not appear to have been the case for many Pacific Islanders.

APPENDIX
Results of Regression Equations for Determinants of "Good" Jobs:
1990

	"Good" Job Paying			
	Greater than or Equal to Poverty	Greater than or Equal to 150% of Poverty	Greater than or Equal to 200% of Poverty	Greater than or Equal to 300% of Poverty
Education	0.099 (0.025)**	0.137 (0.025)**	0.126 (0.025)**	0.139 (0.030)**
Experience	0.052 (0.016)**	0.027 (0.015)	0.003 (0.016)	0.013 (0.019)
Experience squared	-0.001 (0.000)**	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Sex	-0.414 (0.123)**	-0.267 (0.122)*	-0.288 (0.128)*	-0.318 (0.161)*
Disability	0.042 (0.236)	-0.328 (0.234)	-0.230 (0.244)	0.217 (0.216)
English	0.462 (0.210)*	0.521 (0.237)*	0.800 (0.306)**	0.621 (0.438)
Service	-0.727 (0.137)**	-0.615 (0.139)**	-0.562 (0.147)**	-0.473 (0.186)**
Farm	-0.416 (0.243)	-0.596 (0.253)*	-0.866 (0.298)**	-4.258 (35.000)
Blue collar	-0.288 (0.113)**	-0.061 (0.104)	-0.191 (0.106)	-0.258 (0.127)*
Constant	-1.317 (0.414)**	-2.481 (0.424)**	-2.677 (0.474)**	-3.497 (0.627)**
Chi-square	94.5**	100.7**	85.5**	65.3**
Log likelihood	-503	-559	-520	-322

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

NOTES

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1. See Ahlburg and Levin 1990 for a detailed discussion of the economic position of Pacific Islanders in the United States in 1980.

2. The Bureau of the Census designates one person in each household as the "householder." This terminology has replaced "head of household." The householder is, in most cases, the person or one of the persons in whose name the residence is owned, mortgaged, or rented and whose name is listed as person 1 on the census questionnaire. If there is no such person in the household, any adult household member aged fifteen years or over could be designated the householder. Households are classified by type according to the sex of the householder and the presence of relatives. A family household is composed of persons living together who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption. Nonfamily households are composed of a householder living alone or with nonrelatives only.

3. This definition of poverty has been criticized for overestimating poverty, because it does not include noncash benefits such as food stamps and Medicaid; for underestimating poverty, because families now spend less than one-third of their income on food, indicating that a larger multiplier should be used; and for using the wrong metric: writers such as Amartya Sen have argued that poverty is lacking "capabilities" such as being able to live long, being well nourished, being healthy, being literate, having personal and political freedom, and the like. The official measure of poverty is thus a useful, although imperfect, measure of "poverty" and, by implication, a useful though imperfect measure of a "good" job.

4. A reviewer of this article noted that the definition of poverty is not sensitive to geographic differences in cost of living, leading to poverty being understated in places like Hawai'i, which have high costs of living. However, incomes should, at least to some extent, reflect costs of living. For example, the per capita personal income in Hawai'i in 1992 was 8.3 percent higher than that in the United States as a whole (State of Hawai'i 1994:318). To what extent this difference reflects differences in cost of living is unknown. To the extent that poverty is underestimated in Hawai'i and California, the states with the majority of Pacific Islanders, the estimates in this study of "good" jobs held by Pacific Islanders are too high.

5. One implication of defining a "good" job in this way is that, because Pacific Islander households are larger than other households, for two individuals, one a Pacific Islander and one not, holding the same job paying the same income, the Pacific Islander may not be classified as holding a "good" job while the non-Pacific Islander would be classified as holding a "good" job. This point clearly emphasizes that my definition of a "good" job is based on the adequacy of income from the job. Some readers may find this an unappealing characteristic of such a definition. Whether it is quantitatively important depends on what proportion of households are close to the cutoff for each definition and their size.

6. The economic position of Native Hawaiians is, however, below that of other groups in Hawai'i: incomes are lower, unemployment rates higher, and poverty rates higher.

7. These data are based on the census race question, but some groups so identified, such as Northern Mariana Islander, are not distinct racial groups. Individuals of mixed race are assigned to one of the single-race groups based on self-identification or mother's race.

8. Thanks to Michael Levin for pointing this out to me.

9. It is difficult to compare the sample data to the published census data, because the latter are for all Pacific Islanders, not just for householders, and the published data generally present distributions, not means or medians. Average education of householders is the same as that for Pacific Islanders aged twenty-five years and over. Since education is a critical determinant of earnings, this figure gives some confidence in the 1980 sample despite its small size. The percentage of female-headed households in the 1980 sample is lower than in the published census figures, 9 percent rather than 13 percent, and in 1990 a little higher, 18 percent versus 16.5 percent.

10. This approach takes the regression equations reported in the Appendix and asks the question, 'What would the percentage of 'good' jobs held have been in 1989 if Pacific Islander householders had the same average characteristics as in 1979 but were compensated at the 1989 rates?' The difference between the actual figure and this estimate divided by the change between 1989 and 1979 is the proportion attributable to changes in the rates, and the remainder the proportion due to changes in characteristics. See Acs and Danziger 1993 for a discussion of the methodology.

11. There is some debate over whether increases due to increased education and experience should be counted as an increase in "good" jobs. The debate over "good" jobs tends to be over the wages that jobs pay, not the earnings from jobs. This research uses data on earnings to make inferences about the pay levels of jobs. As Levy and Michel point out, such inferences involve a "big leap of faith," because the distribution of annual earnings can be influenced by a number of factors besides wage rates (1991:17). One is the distribution of the labor force by education and experience. Even if workers with a given level of education and experience in 1990 earn the same amount as their education/experience counterparts did in 1980, the distribution of earnings will be higher in 1990 than in 1980 if average education and experience increase. That is, it will appear that jobs in 1990 are better than in 1980 although wages (for given education and experience) have not changed. Since my concern is primarily with the quality of jobs held by Pacific Islanders, not with the quality of jobs per se, it is significant that education and experience have moved Pacific Islanders into better jobs even though the quality of all jobs may not have improved.

12. However, the percentage of all Pacific Islanders in poverty declined over the 1980s because of offsetting changes in the number of workers per household and average household size. I have estimated that poverty decreased from 30 percent in 1980 to 21 percent in 1990 (Ahlburg 1995). However, the number of Pacific Islanders in poverty increased because of a growth in the number of Pacific Islanders.

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