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# Living Below the Line: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Economic Security among Older Americans, 2020

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# LIVING BELOW THE LINE:

**Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Economic Security among Older Americans | 2020**



CENTER FOR SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH ON AGING

Images are from  
**“The Day After Yesterday: Portraits of Dementia”**  
a traveling exhibit and upcoming book  
by **Joe Wallace**



**Previsteria Sanchez**

*My goal is to destigmatize those living with dementia. To use empathy as a means for connection and understanding and to tell a more complex and complete story of those with the disease and its effect on their families and loved ones.*

*Dementia is often a taboo subject with limited public awareness or discourse. A diagnosis can become a mechanism for segregating those affected from society, making it easy to see only the label instead of the individual.*



**Bob Lowe**

*The typical narrative about dementia tends to focus on the clinical diagnosis or medical status of an individual, and is all too often depicted using fear, despair and vulnerability. This narrow and incomplete view of dementia quickly becomes a powerful means to distance oneself from their humanity. By focusing only on the narrowest of views, the narrative does little to change the stigma of those living with the disease. In many ways, showing the stereotypical perspectives only makes it easier to continue ignoring the burgeoning health crisis and the individuals themselves.*



**Alice Chin**

*Subjects were photographed and interviewed individually or with their care partner. Each portrait is paired with a second photograph from the subject's youth and is presented with anecdotes or stories from the interview.*



**Barbara-Jean Fox**

– Joe Wallace

# LIVING BELOW THE LINE:

## Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Economic Security among Older Americans

### 2019 Elder Index

New estimates from the 2019 Elder Index™ highlight the risk of economic insecurity experienced by older adults, a risk that is especially high for persons of color. The Gerontology Institute compares the household incomes for adults age 65 and above living in one- and two-person households to the 2019 Elder Index for each state and Washington, DC to calculate Elder Economic Insecurity Rates (EEIRs), the percentage of independent older adults age 65 or older living in households with annual incomes that do not support economic security. ***National averages suggest that among people living alone, 48% of older people who are White, 59% of those who are Asian, 64% of older people who are Black, and 72% of those who are Latino have annual incomes below the Elder Index.***<sup>1</sup> The risk of economic insecurity is lower among couples than among singles, but is still substantially higher for persons of color than for Whites.<sup>2</sup> These estimates suggest that nationally, at least 11 million adults age 65 or older struggle to make ends meet, facing financial challenges in their efforts to age in place and in community. In comparison to older Whites, disparities in economic security are especially high for Blacks and Latinos.

### Introduction

Economic security is a highly valued goal, supporting older people's efforts to stay in their homes, live independent lifestyles, and secure health-promoting medical care. An individual or family is considered to be economically secure if they are able to stay in their own homes and pay for necessities without relying on needs-based support programs. To the extent that an older person receives income from Social Security, pensions, savings, earnings, or other sources sufficient to cover necessary living expenses, they may be considered to have achieved economic security. However, when incomes fall short of necessary expenses, economic insecurity occurs, requiring adjustment in terms of income (e.g., finding a part-time job), expenses (e.g., downsizing to a less expensive

home or apartment), or both. For many older adults, the consequences of not having sufficient income to cover expenses involve falling into debt, being unable to keep up with bills, or foregoing necessary medical care.

The Elder Index™ is a publicly available tool that can be used to gauge economic security among older people in the U.S. The Elder Index measures the cost of covering basic needs for people age 65 or older who live independently in one- or two-person households, calculated county-by-county for the entire United States (Mutchler et al., 2015). Costs are stratified based on whether a person lives alone (single) or with another older adult (couple); whether the residence is rented or owned (with or without a mortgage); and also based on health status (excellent, good, or poor).

<sup>1</sup> In this report we use the term *White* in referring to people who report their race as White alone and do not report Latino ethnicity; *Black* refers to people reporting Black race alone and not Latino ethnicity; *Asian* refers to people reporting Asian race alone and not reporting Latino ethnicity, and *Latino* refers to everyone reporting Latino/Hispanic background regardless of race. This classification covers 98.5% of people age 65 and older. Included in the "all race" estimates but not calculated separately due to data limitations are the remaining 1.5% of people who are Native American, some other race, or reporting multiple races.

<sup>2</sup> In this report, we use the term *singles* to refer to households that include one person living alone who is age 65 or older. We use the term *older couple* to refer to households that include just two persons, both of whom are age 65 or older. A large majority of these couple households are married couples, and the remaining households include unmarried partners and older adults living with another older adult (such as siblings, an older adult with a parent, or other relationship).

**Table 1: The Elder Index for the United States, 2019**

	Older Person			Older Couple		
Expense	Owner without Mortgage	Renter	Owner with Mortgage	Owner without Mortgage	Renter	Owner with Mortgage
Housing	\$548	\$915	\$1,469	\$548	\$915	\$1,469
Food	\$257	\$257	\$257	\$471	\$471	\$471
Transportation	\$259	\$259	\$259	\$399	\$399	\$399
Health Care	\$395	\$395	\$395	\$790	\$790	\$790
Miscellaneous	\$292	\$292	\$292	\$442	\$442	\$442
<b>Elder Index Per Month</b>	<b>\$1,751</b>	<b>\$2,118</b>	<b>\$2,672</b>	<b>\$2,650</b>	<b>\$3,017</b>	<b>\$3,571</b>
<b>Elder Index Per Year</b>	<b>\$21,012</b>	<b>\$25,416</b>	<b>\$32,064</b>	<b>\$31,800</b>	<b>\$36,204</b>	<b>\$42,852</b>

Source: Elder Index (2019).

The 2019 U.S. average Elder Index is shown in **Table 1**, and indicates that people living in their owned homes without a mortgage require \$21,012 annually to cover necessary expenses if they live alone, and \$31,800 if an older couple. Relative to costs for owners without a mortgage, estimated costs are higher for renters (\$25,416 for singles and \$36,204 for couples) and for those who are paying off a mortgage (\$32,064 for singles and \$42,852 for couples).

Assessing economic security based on the Elder Index involves comparing income to the local cost of living for an older person or couple, which varies considerably across states and localities (Mutchler, Li & Velasco Roldán, 2019). Some people have incomes that fall below the federal poverty level (FPL) while many others have incomes that fall between the FPL and the Elder Index (referred to as “in the gap”—see **Figure 1**). Individuals falling in the gap have

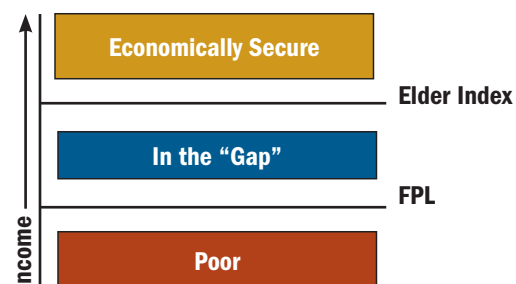
incomes that are too low to achieve economic security, but frequently too high to qualify for programs that are meant to offset shortfalls in income.

### Disparities in economic security across race and ethnic groups

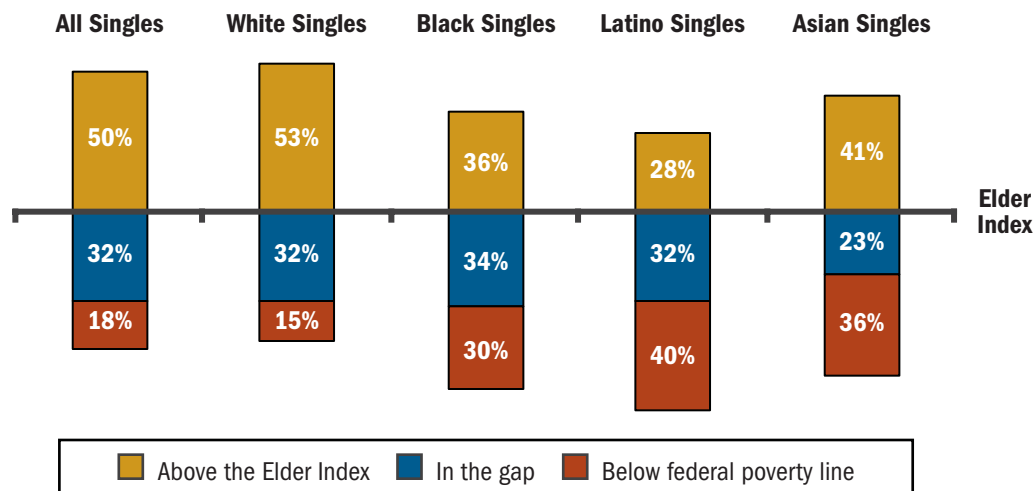
Economic insecurity is a particular problem for many older persons of color. Early in life, patterns of structural disadvantage yield poorer access to higher education and elevated likelihoods of holding low-wage or unstable jobs with fewer benefits. Moreover, in the U.S. many older persons of color are immigrants, especially among those who are Asian or Latino. Although many older immigrants have lived in the U.S. for decades, a sizable share arrived at an older age and some may not have worked long enough in the U.S. to be eligible for Social Security benefits, or be eligible for programs requiring citizenship. In addition, persons of color accumulate far lower levels of wealth than their White counterparts on average, adding to disparities in intergenerational transmission of financial resources. The accumulation of life-course experiences shaped by inequity result in persons of color being at higher risk of entering later life with few financial resources, little wealth, and little or no pension income (Carr, 2019; Kijakazi, Smith & Runes, 2019; Koma et al., 2020; Mutchler et al., 2015).

Comparing income to the Elder Index reveals that older people are at high risk of economic insecurity, especially those living alone and particularly persons of color. As shown in **Figure 2**, the rate of economic insecurity among all older singles living alone, at 50%, is just slightly lower among those who are White (47%). Higher rates of

**Figure 1:  
Assessing Economic Insecurity  
Using the Elder Index**



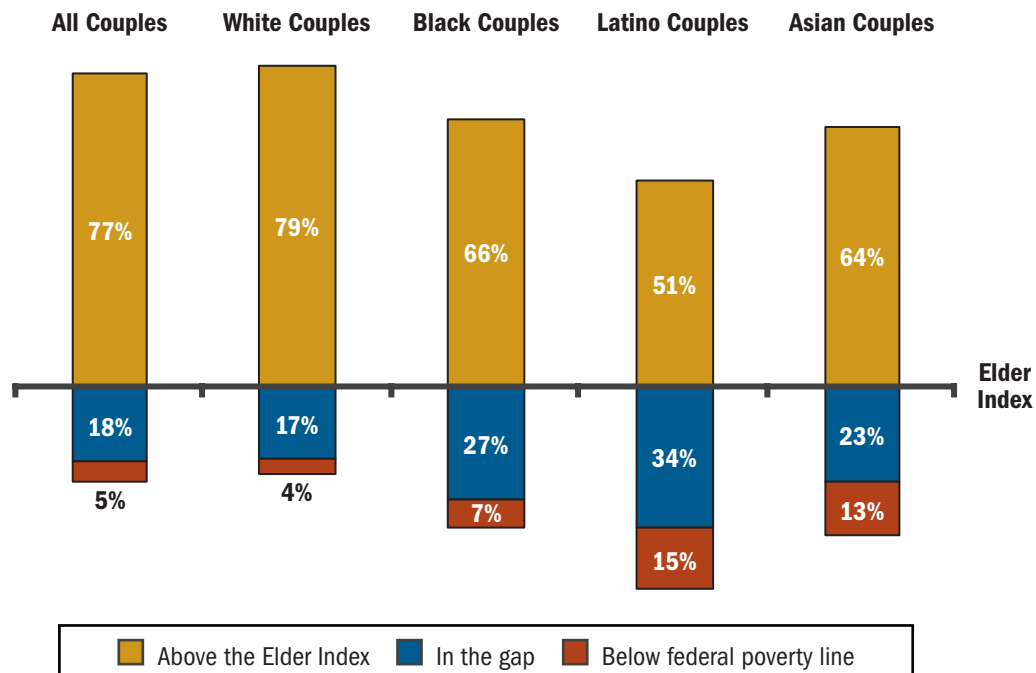
**Figure 2.**  
**Economic Security and Insecurity Rates among Older Singles, by Race Group, 2019**



Source: Elder Index (2019) and American Community Survey (2014-2018, retrieved from the IPUMS).

Note: Whites, Blacks, and Asians include only those who are not Latino. Latino are of any race. "All" includes aforementioned groups plus those who are Native American or Alaska Native, some other race, or those who report multiple races.

**Figure 3.**  
**Economic Security and Insecurity Rates among Older Couples, by Race Group, 2019**



Source: Elder Index (2019) and American Community Survey (2014-2018, retrieved from the IPUMS).

Note: Whites, Blacks, and Asians include only those who are not Latino. Latino are of any race. "All" includes aforementioned groups plus those who are Native American or Alaska Native, some other race, or those who report multiple races. Racial classification of couples is based on the race reported by the householder within the two-person household.

economic insecurity are observed among singles who are Black (64%), Latino (72%) or Asian (59%). Rates of economic insecurity are considerably lower among couples (see **Figure 3**), among whom 23% have incomes below the Elder Index. But again, rates among couples who are Black (34%), Latino (49%) or Asian (36%) are far higher than among couples who are White (21%).<sup>3</sup> Together, these findings suggest that about one-third of people age 65 or older who live alone or as an older couple are economically insecure, amounting to at least 11 million people. These disparities in economic security reflect the structural inequities and disadvantages faced by many older adults of color, who not only encounter poorer access to opportunities and benefits earlier in life, relative to their White counterparts, but are also exposed to disproportionately high risk of being economically insecure later in life, compounding other challenges confronted in old age.

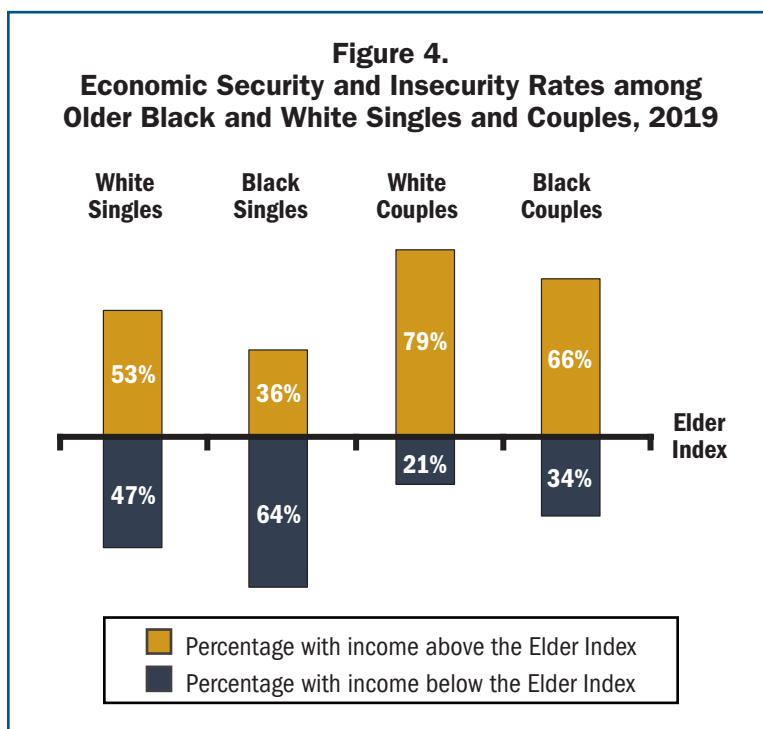
### Economic security among older Blacks

Negative experiences with discrimination and lack of opportunity contribute to economic disadvantage among people who are Black, and the intersection of racial background and age plays out in dramatic terms in later life. Older Blacks have lower household incomes than Whites on average, with far lower levels of wealth (Kijakazi et al., 2019). These disparities reflect higher risks of unemployment and lower median wages for Blacks compared to Whites that span the life course. As well, Black workers are less likely to hold jobs in which an employer offers a retirement plan, and they are less likely to have earnings adequate to support participation in an IRA (Carr, 2019). These experiences contribute to Blacks having elevated rates of economic insecurity in later life.

Among singles and couples, older Blacks are at higher risk than their White counterparts of being economically insecure. Black singles have a rate of economic insecurity (64%) that is 17 percentage points higher than the rate for White singles (47%, see **Figure 4**). While rates for couples are lower than those for singles across the board, among couples the disparity in economic insecurity is also sizable, with

the rate for Black couples being 13 percentage points higher than the rate for White couples.

Blacks are at higher risk of economic insecurity than are their White counterparts in virtually every state in which data are sufficient to calculate these risks. As depicted in **Map 1**, the rate of economic insecurity for Black singles ranges from 46% (in West Virginia) to 80% (in Rhode Island).<sup>4</sup> The highest rates of economic insecurity are shaded in red and include states in the Deep South<sup>5</sup> along with Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Also noted on the map (marked with the symbol +) are states where the Black-White disparity in economic insecurity is higher than the national average. As noted above, the rate of economic insecurity is 17 percentage points higher for Black singles than for White singles nationally. Sixteen states plus the District of Columbia have disparities greater than the national average, with the largest gaps observed in the District of Columbia (with a Black-White gap of 39 percentage points), Rhode Island (at 29



Source: Elder Index (2019) and American Community Survey (2014-2018, retrieved from the IPUMS).

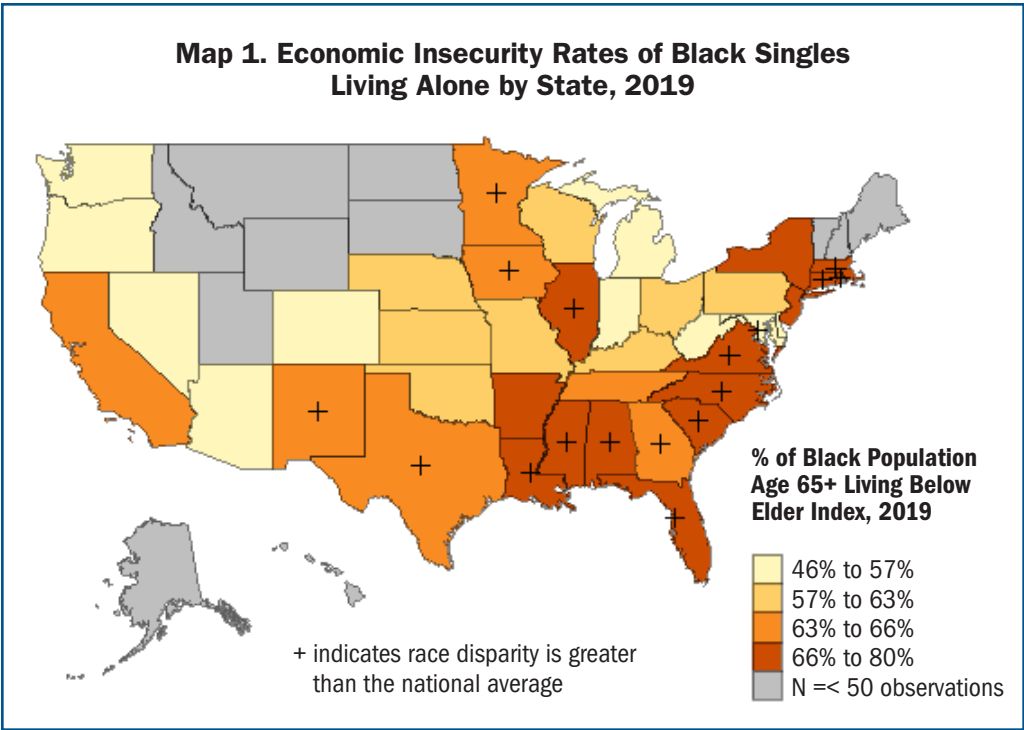
Note: Whites and Blacks include only those who are not Latino. Racial classification of couples is based on the race reported by the householder within the two-person household.

<sup>3</sup> These figures refer to people who live alone in a one-person household, and people who live in a two-person household including just one other person who is also age 65 or older. These two categories cover approximately two-thirds of people age 65 and older. The remaining third live in households that include more than two people or households that include at least one person under the age of 65, who may be a younger spouse, an adult child, or a minor child. Persons of color are more likely to live in larger households and in households that include younger people and outside the scope of this analysis.

<sup>4</sup> Rates of economic insecurity among Blacks were calculated using the 5-year 2014-2018 American Community Survey data from IPUMS, for every state that had at least 50 unweighted cases of older Blacks living alone. The cutoff of 50 cases was chosen in an effort to produce stable estimates of insecurity rates. Based on this criterion, rates were calculated for all but 11 states. States shaded in gray are those lacking sufficient cases to calculate rates of economic insecurity for older Blacks.

<sup>5</sup> Most descriptions of the Deep South include Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. Some definitions also include Texas and Florida, and more rarely bordering states such as Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina.

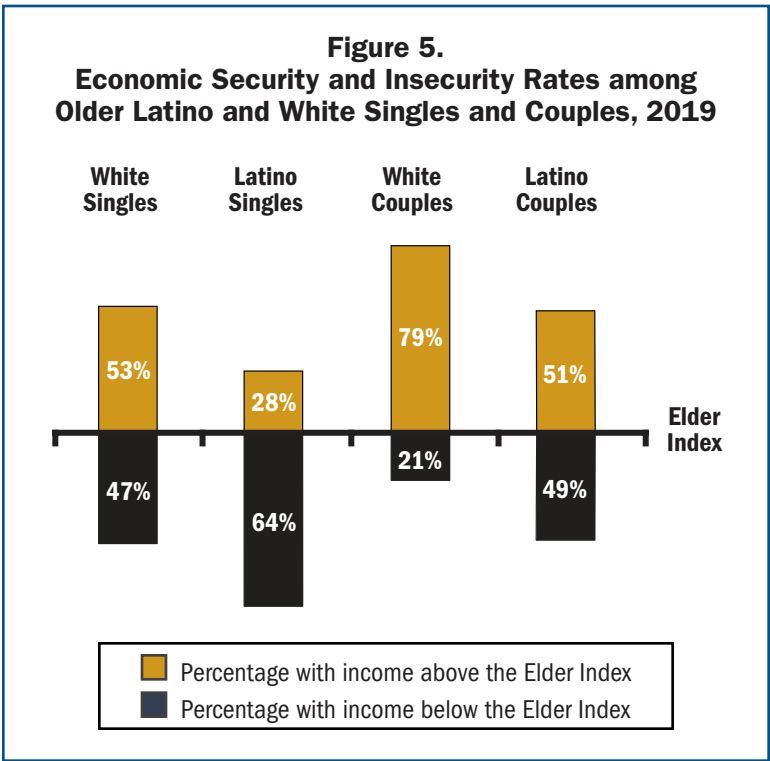
points), and Mississippi and South Carolina (at 26 points). These findings illustrate that although the risk of economic insecurity among Blacks is higher than among Whites in every state, disparities between Black and White singles are substantially greater in some states than in others. Most of the states with high disparities also have high rates of insecurity among Blacks, as illustrated by the overlap in states shaded in red (noting economic insecurity rates in the top quartile for Blacks) and marked with the symbol + (signaling a Black-White disparity greater than the national average). These may be locations where experienced disadvantage is especially sizable. See **Appendix Tables A-1** and **A-2** for the economic insecurity rates state by state, by racial group, for singles and for couples.



### Economic security among older Latinos

A large and growing share of the older U.S. population has Latino heritage, amounting to more than 4 million people age 65 or older as of 2018 (Ruggles et al., 2020). Although eight out of ten older Latinos are U.S. citizens, more than half were born outside of the U.S. Diverse backgrounds and experiences are embedded within the older Latino population, with half reporting Mexican origin, 12% indicating Puerto Rican background, 9% indicating Cuban origin and the remaining 27% largely reporting Central or South American origins. Many older Latinos struggled throughout the life course to secure education and employment, encountering discriminatory practices and blocked opportunities. As a result, older Latinos have less income and wealth and are less likely to be covered by a retirement plan that would help support an adequate retirement (Johnson, Mudrazija & Wang, 2016).

Among singles and couples, older Latinos are at higher risk than their White counterparts of being economically insecure. Latino singles have a rate of economic insecurity (72%) that is far higher than the rate for White singles (47%) (see **Figure 5**), resulting in a disparity of 25 percentage points. While rates for couples are lower than those for singles, nearly half (49%) of Latino couples have incomes below the Elder Index, more than twice the share among older Whites (21%), reflecting a disparity of 28 percentage points.



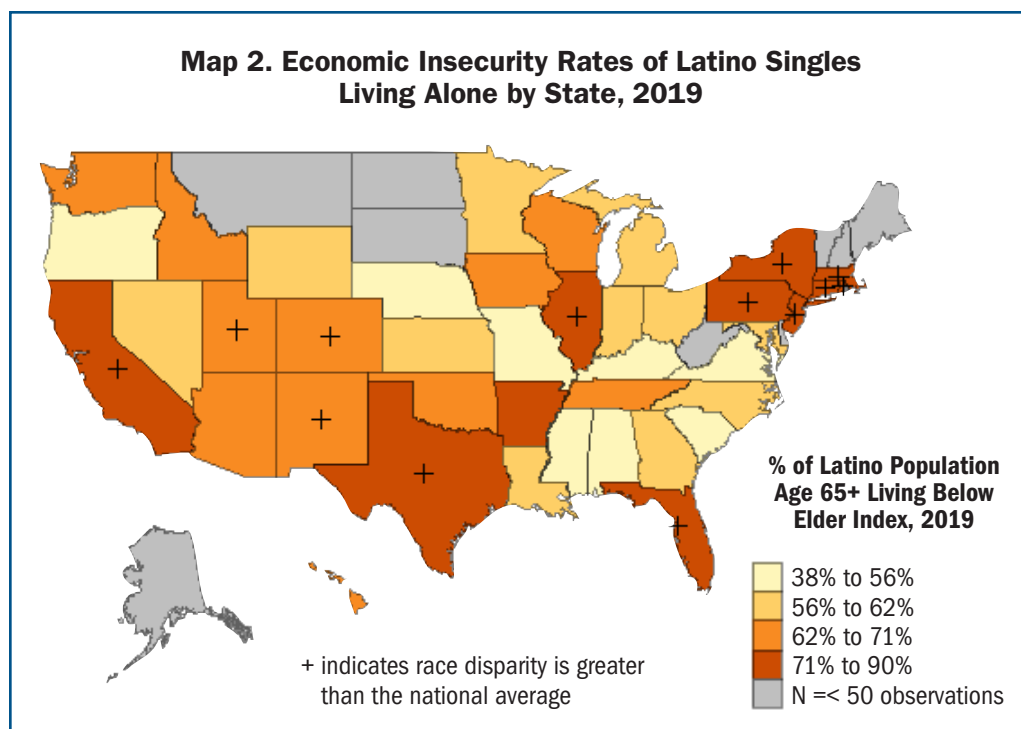
**Source:** Elder Index (2019) and American Community Survey (2014-2018, retrieved from the IPUMS).

**Note:** Whites and Blacks include only those who are not Latino. Racial classification of couples is based on the race reported by the householder within the two-person household.

Latinos are at higher risk of economic insecurity than are their White counterparts in nearly every state in which data are sufficient to compare these risks. As depicted in **Map 2**, the rate of economic insecurity for Latino singles ranges from 38% (in Kentucky) to 90% (in Massachusetts).<sup>6</sup> The highest rates of economic insecurity are shaded in red and, among Latinos, these cluster in the Northeast and in states with large Latino populations, including California, Texas, Illinois, and Florida. Also noted on the map (marked with the symbol +) are states where the Latino-White disparity in economic insecurity is higher than the national average. As noted above, the rate of economic insecurity is 25 percentage points higher for Latino singles than for White singles nationally. Thirteen states have disparities greater than 25 percentage points, most of which are states where the elder economic insecurity rates for Latinos are especially high. For example, in Rhode Island the rate of economic insecurity among Latinos is 88%, which is 37 percentage points higher than the rate for White singles in that state (at 51%). **Appendix Tables A-1 and A-2** present the economic insecurity rates state-by-state, by racial group and for singles and for couples. These findings illustrate that although the risk of economic insecurity among Latinos is higher than among Whites, White-Latino disparities in economic insecurity are substantially greater in some states than in others.

### Economic security among older Asians

The economic profile of older Asians in the U.S. is shaped by educational and employment opportunities across the life course, as well as by immigrant status. Although most older Asians in the U.S. are citizens, nearly nine out of ten Asian Americans age 65 or older are immigrants. Some arrived late in life and accumulated few work experiences in the U.S., limiting their eligibility for Social Security



benefits and other programs. The Asian population is highly diverse in itself, including national origin groups that rank highly on average economic well-being (such as Indians and Filipinos), along with other groups that have lower than average socioeconomic status (such as Hmong and Bangladeshi) (López, Ruiz & Patten, 2017). Overall, older Asians have lower incomes and fewer assets than their White counterparts on average, due in part to experiences relating to immigration (Waid, 2016).

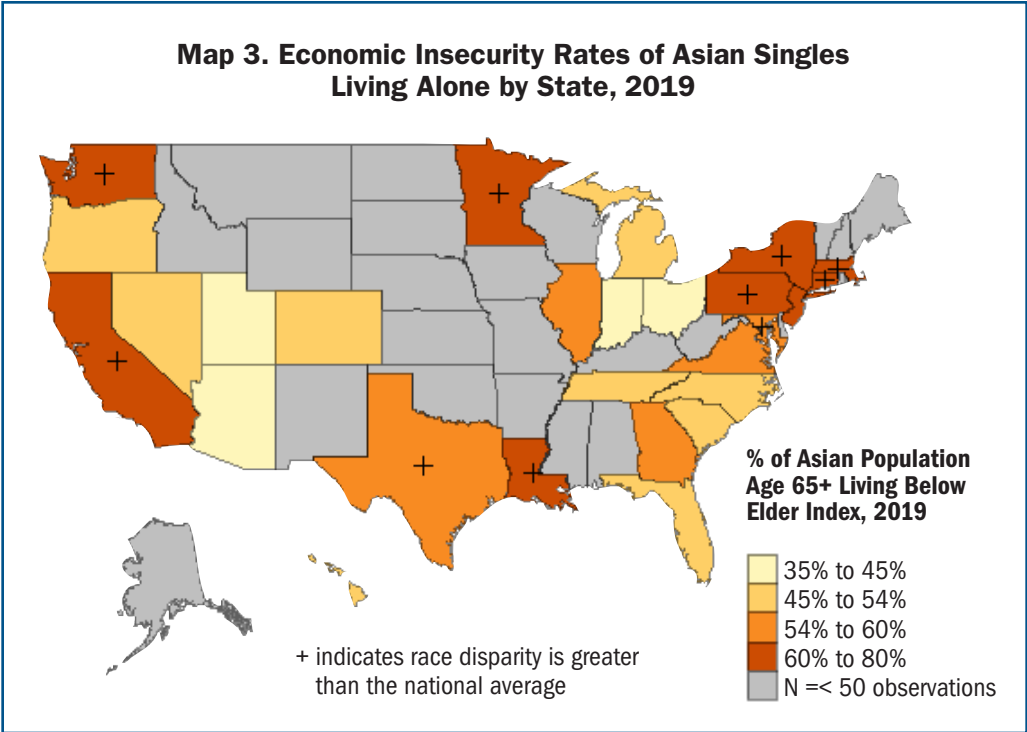
Older Asians are at higher risk than their White counterparts of being economically insecure, among singles as well as couples. At the national level, Asian singles have a rate of economic insecurity (59%) that is **12 percentage points higher** than the rate for White singles (47%) (see **Figure 6**). While rates for couples are lower than those for singles, among couples the White-Asian disparity in economic insecurity is even greater, with the rate for Asian couples being 15 percentage points higher than for Whites.

Single Asians living alone are at higher risk of economic insecurity than are their White counterparts in most but not all states in which data are sufficient to compare these risks. As depicted in **Map 3**, the rate of economic insecurity for Asian singles ranges from 35% (in Indiana) to 80% (in Massachusetts).<sup>7</sup> The highest rates of economic

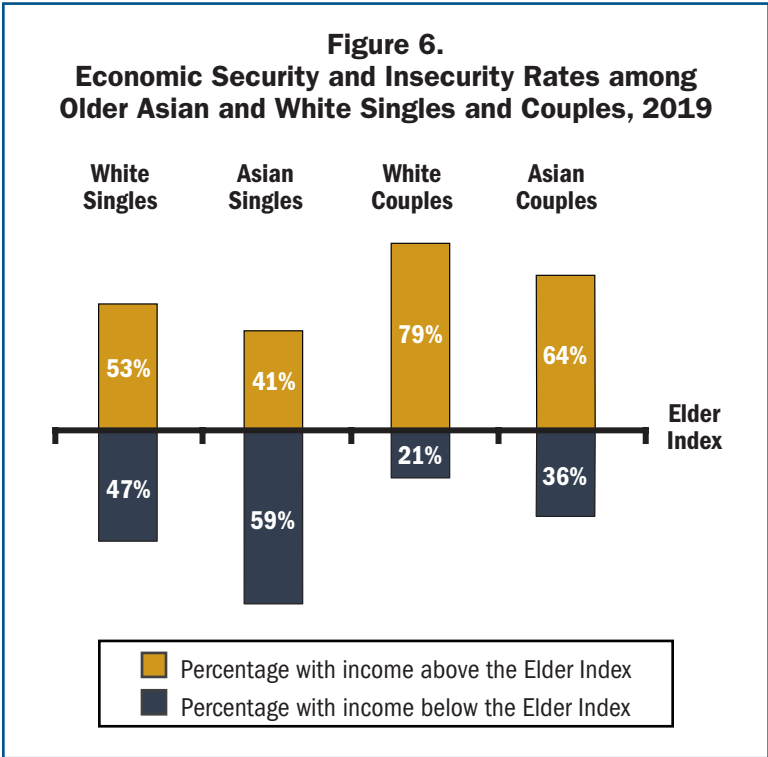
<sup>6</sup> Latino rates of economic insecurity were calculated using the 5-year 2014-2018 American Community Survey data from IPUMS, for every state that had at least 50 unweighted cases of older Latinos living alone. The cutoff of 50 cases was chosen in an effort to produce stable estimates of insecurity rates. Based on this criterion, rates were calculated for 41 states. States shaded in gray are those lacking sufficient cases to calculate rates of economic insecurity for older Latinos.

<sup>7</sup> Asian rates of economic insecurity were calculated using the 5-year 2014-2018 American Community Survey data from IPUMS, for every state that had at least 50 unweighted cases of older Asians living alone. The cutoff of 50 cases was chosen in an effort to produce stable estimates of insecurity rates. Based on this criterion, rates were calculated for 27 states. States shaded in gray are those lacking sufficient cases to calculate rates of economic insecurity for older Asians.

insecurity are shaded in red and, among Asians, these cluster in the Northeast (see Massachusetts, New York and Pennsylvania) along with California, Washington, Minnesota and Louisiana. Also noted on the map (marked with the symbol +) are states where the Asian-White disparity in economic insecurity is higher than the national average. As noted above, the rate of economic insecurity is 12 percentage points higher for Asian singles than for White singles nationally. Ten states have disparities greater than the national average, most of which are states where the elder economic insecurity rates for Asians are especially high. For example, in Minnesota the economic insecurity rate is 76% for single Asians, compared to a rate of 45% for White singles, yielding a disparity of 31 percentage points.



**Appendix Tables A-1 and A-2** present the economic insecurity rates state-by-state, by racial group and for singles and for couples. These findings illustrate that although the risk of economic insecurity among Asians is higher than among Whites in most states, White-Asian disparities in economic insecurity are substantially greater in some states than in others. Notably, in four states for which calculations are available the rate of insecurity is *lower* among Asian than White singles, including North Carolina, Tennessee, Ohio and Indiana.



**Source:** Elder Index (2019) and American Community Survey (2014-2018, retrieved from the IPUMS).

**Note:** Whites and Asians include only those who are not Latino. Racial classification of couples is based on the race reported by the householder within the two-person household.

### Conclusion

Rates of economic insecurity are high among older adults, with far-reaching consequences for health and well-being (Mutchler, Li & Xu, 2018). Estimates from the Elder Index suggest that at least 11 million U.S. adults age 65 or older struggle to make ends meet, facing financial challenges in their efforts to age in place and in community. Older persons of color are at elevated risk of economic insecurity, with disparities especially sizable among Blacks and Latinos in comparison to Whites.

Compared to Whites, older persons of color have higher rates of economic insecurity in nearly every state, but the disparity is far greater in some locations than in others. In general, we find that especially high disparity levels cluster in states with high rates of economic insecurity, meaning that gaps between Whites and persons of color

are larger in areas where people are struggling the most. High inequality levels observed in locations where cost of living is already high relative to income may amplify the experienced consequences for financial and health challenges, including being unable to keep up with bills or forgoing medical care. These persistent patterns of disparities call for multi-pronged interventions that address structural disadvantages confronted by persons of color earlier in life; as well, strengthened efforts to ameliorate the consequences of being economically insecure later in life are essential.

The economic downturn associated with COVID-19 is already elevating the disparities described here. Now more than ever, policies and programs that address the concerns of older singles or couples living on their own are essential, including not only key federal programs like Social Security and Medicare but also state and local programs focusing on nutrition, transportation, employment and training. Older persons of color are especially in need of these programs, and as a result it is essential that outreach and educational efforts are tailored to reach diverse segments of the older population.

### **THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND DISPARITIES IN ECONOMIC SECURITY IN LATER LIFE**

The turmoil created by COVID-19 has brought wider attention to the breadth and depth of inequality in the U.S., disproportionately impacting both older people and persons of color. Initial evidence indicates that social determinants of health over the life course impact vulnerability and contribute to the disparities observed in infection and death rates. People who live in congested living situations, have preexisting health conditions, or lack the resources to keep themselves safer are at higher risk. Risks are amplified through mechanisms of structural racism shaping disparities in exposure, physical vulnerability, and access to quality health care, contributing heavily to the disproportionately high rates of COVID-19 infection and death among older Blacks and Latinos (Garcia et al., 2020).

These factors also magnify the disparate impacts associated with the economic fallout of the COVID-19 crisis. Early indicators show that like their younger counterparts, older people are experiencing cascading financial consequences, with older persons of color being hit harder than their White neighbors by loss of employment income. In addition, older persons of color are more frequently struggling to make rent or mortgage payments, and are more

often experiencing food insecurity (Bui et al., 2020). With unemployment rates reaching historic highs during the pandemic (Cubanski, Neuman & Koma, 2020), many older adults are being forced to draw on savings to get by, and some are being pushed into retirement in order to begin receiving Social Security benefits. These actions have lifelong implications for retirement security (Li & Mutchler, 2020), with cascading consequences for health, longevity, and well-being.

As described in this report, disparities in economic security were substantial even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Inequality in access to education and jobs, disparities in access to housing and quality health care, and experiences of structural racism and discrimination have lifelong consequences. As the pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis continue, we can expect economic insecurity levels to increase across the board, with potentially devastating impacts on older persons of color. Protecting Social Security and other entitlements, strengthening state and local programs and services that support financial security, and tailoring outreach and educational efforts to reach every segment of the older population are more important than ever.

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## Appendix

**Table A-1.**  
**Economic insecurity rates (percentage with income below the Elder Index)**  
**for singles age 65+, by racial group and state\***

STATE	WHITE	BLACK	ASIAN	LATINO
National	47%	64%	59%	72%
Alabama	44%	67%	–	46%
Alaska	37%	–	–	–
Arizona	41%	53%	43%	62%
Arkansas	51%	66%	–	73%
California	47%	63%	67%	73%
Colorado	44%	55%	50%	70%
Connecticut	45%	68%	60%	79%
Delaware	42%	54%	–	–
District of Columbia	25%	64%	–	–
Florida	43%	67%	52%	76%
Georgia	45%	64%	57%	59%
Hawaii	49%	–	53%	69%
Idaho	49%	–	–	66%
Illinois	45%	66%	55%	71%
Indiana	43%	56%	35%	57%
Iowa	45%	64%	–	62%
Kansas	43%	59%	–	61%
Kentucky	49%	58%	–	38%
Louisiana	48%	71%	76%	57%
Maine	54%	–	–	–
Maryland	44%	56%	58%	58%
Massachusetts	58%	76%	80%	90%
Michigan	42%	54%	49%	56%
Minnesota	45%	64%	76%	56%
Mississippi	48%	74%	–	44%
Missouri	43%	57%	–	44%
Montana	48%	–	–	–
Nebraska	45%	58%	–	44%
Nevada	38%	47%	46%	56%
New Hampshire	52%	–	–	–
New Jersey	49%	66%	60%	79%

## Appendix

**Table A-1.** (Cont.)

STATE	WHITE	BLACK	ASIAN	LATINO
<b>National</b>	47%	64%	59%	72%
<b>New Mexico</b>	39%	63%	–	67%
<b>New York</b>	53%	68%	74%	84%
<b>North Carolina</b>	46%	66%	45%	61%
<b>North Dakota</b>	48%	–	–	–
<b>Ohio</b>	42%	58%	39%	57%
<b>Oklahoma</b>	46%	60%	–	66%
<b>Oregon</b>	48%	53%	53%	55%
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	48%	62%	62%	76%
<b>Rhode Island</b>	51%	80%	–	88%
<b>South Carolina</b>	44%	70%	45%	47%
<b>South Dakota</b>	47%	–	–	–
<b>Tennessee</b>	47%	63%	45%	64%
<b>Texas</b>	41%	63%	58%	73%
<b>Utah</b>	40%	–	41%	68%
<b>Vermont</b>	57%	–	–	–
<b>Virginia</b>	43%	66%	54%	54%
<b>Washington</b>	47%	49%	61%	66%
<b>West Virginia</b>	51%	46%	–	–
<b>Wisconsin</b>	45%	59%	–	63%
<b>Wyoming</b>	45%	–	–	61%

\*Rates of economic insecurity were calculated using the 5-year 2014-2018 American Community Survey data from IPUMS, for every state that had at least 50 unweighted cases of older people living alone within the specified race group. The cutoff of 50 cases was chosen in an effort to produce stable estimates of insecurity rates. States without an entry lack sufficient cases to calculate rates of economic insecurity for the specified group.

## Appendix

**Table A-2.**  
**Economic insecurity rates (percentage with income below the Elder Index)**  
**for couples age 65+, by racial group and state\***

STATE	WHITE	BLACK	ASIAN	LATINO
<b>National</b>	21%	34%	36%	49%
<b>Alabama</b>	20%	36%	–	18%
<b>Alaska</b>	15%	–	–	–
<b>Arizona</b>	17%	18%	29%	40%
<b>Arkansas</b>	24%	43%	–	–
<b>California</b>	20%	28%	43%	51%
<b>Colorado</b>	18%	22%	32%	38%
<b>Connecticut</b>	18%	26%	30%	47%
<b>Delaware</b>	18%	29%	–	–
<b>District of Columbia</b>	5%	38%	–	–
<b>Florida</b>	19%	35%	27%	54%
<b>Georgia</b>	20%	34%	31%	37%
<b>Hawaii</b>	23%	–	28%	–
<b>Idaho</b>	22%	–	–	39%
<b>Illinois</b>	19%	31%	29%	49%
<b>Indiana</b>	17%	27%	32%	25%
<b>Iowa</b>	20%	–	–	–
<b>Kansas</b>	20%	32%	–	32%
<b>Kentucky</b>	24%	23%	–	–
<b>Louisiana</b>	23%	41%	43%	34%
<b>Maine</b>	26%	–	–	–
<b>Maryland</b>	20%	27%	34%	23%
<b>Massachusetts</b>	27%	40%	58%	68%
<b>Michigan</b>	18%	24%	21%	35%
<b>Minnesota</b>	20%	–	–	–
<b>Mississippi</b>	26%	50%	–	–
<b>Missouri</b>	20%	24%	37%	33%
<b>Montana</b>	20%	–	–	–
<b>Nebraska</b>	19%	–	–	43%
<b>Nevada</b>	16%	16%	23%	40%
<b>New Hampshire</b>	22%	–	–	–
<b>New Jersey</b>	19%	30%	34%	54%

## Appendix

**Table A-2.** (Cont.)

STATE	WHITE	BLACK	ASIAN	LATINO
<b>National</b>	21%	34%	36%	49%
<b>New Mexico</b>	18%	–	–	44%
<b>New York</b>	26%	39%	57%	57%
<b>North Carolina</b>	20%	36%	17%	43%
<b>North Dakota</b>	26%	–	–	–
<b>Ohio</b>	18%	23%	31%	35%
<b>Oklahoma</b>	22%	24%	–	27%
<b>Oregon</b>	22%	–	33%	37%
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	21%	28%	32%	56%
<b>Rhode Island</b>	21%	–	–	–
<b>South Carolina</b>	18%	40%	29%	23%
<b>South Dakota</b>	23%	–	–	–
<b>Tennessee</b>	22%	29%	23%	32%
<b>Texas</b>	17%	34%	39%	52%
<b>Utah</b>	16%	–	–	44%
<b>Vermont</b>	34%	–	–	–
<b>Virginia</b>	18%	30%	28%	21%
<b>Washington</b>	19%	14%	37%	37%
<b>West Virginia</b>	24%	29%	–	–
<b>Wisconsin</b>	21%	31%	–	41%
<b>Wyoming</b>	23%	–	–	–

\*Rates of economic insecurity were calculated using the 5-year 2014-2018 American Community Survey data from IPUMS, for every state that had at least 50 unweighted cases of older couples within the specified race group. The cutoff of 50 cases was chosen in an effort to produce stable estimates of insecurity rates. States without an entry lack sufficient cases to calculate rates of economic insecurity for the specified group.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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## ABOUT THE ELDER INDEX

The Elder Index™ is a one-of-a-kind, county-by-county measure of the income needed by older adults to maintain independence and meet their daily living costs while staying in their own homes. Developed by the Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston in collaboration with a national Advisory Board, the Elder Index defines economic security as the income level at which older people can cover basic and necessary living expenses and age in their homes, without relying on means-tested income support programs, loans or gifts. The Congressional Budget Office (2017) cites the Elder Index as the only retirement adequacy measure that is oriented specifically to older people and takes into account the unique demands of housing and medical care on older budgets.

Elder Index and Elder Economic Security Standard Index are service marks of the University of Massachusetts.

For more information about the Elder Index, including county-level Elder Index values for renters and homeowners, and values for older adults in poor or in excellent health, see [ElderIndex.org](http://ElderIndex.org) and the Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging ([umb.edu/demographyofaging](http://umb.edu/demographyofaging)).

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## ABOUT THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH ON AGING

The Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging (CSDRA) conducts research that informs communities and organizations as they plan for aging populations. Our mission is pursued in part by developing collaborations with community partners, advocacy groups, and aging services organizations. Areas of special interest include economic security in later life; well-being and quality of life; community supports for older adults; evaluating programs designed for older adults; and demography and diversity of the aging population. For more information, visit [www.umb.edu/demographyofaging](http://www.umb.edu/demographyofaging).

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## ABOUT THE GERONTOLOGY INSTITUTE AT UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

Created by the Massachusetts Legislature in 1984, the Gerontology Institute conducts research and policy analysis in the field of aging, and offers lifelong learning and pension protection services to older adults. The Institute's priorities include income security, long-term services and supports, healthy aging, age-friendly communities and social and demographic research on aging.

Located within the McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies at UMass Boston, the Institute furthers the University's educational programs in Gerontology, including a Ph.D. program in Gerontology, a Master's program in the Management of Aging Services, and undergraduate programs in Gerontology.

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Nationally recognized as a model for public service schools, the John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies is committed to social justice and equity. The School offers an interdisciplinary education and conducts cutting edge research that seeks to understand and remedy some of the most important social, political, economic, and environmental issues of our time. Home to world-renowned institutes and entrepreneurial centers, McCormack scholars critically explore better policies and practices in fields of aging, climate change, democracy reconstruction, public management, social policy, and women's political advancement.

*Living Below the Line:  
Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Economic Security  
among Older Americans, 2020*

**Jan E. Mutchler, Nidya Velasco Roldán and Yang Li**

**AUGUST 2020**

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