

On the day before the first day of classes, hundreds of students set up tables and booths around the University of Virginia for one reason and one reason only - to attract as many students to sign up for their club as possible. During my first activities fair, I remember sweating buckets while walking around, holding at least ten flyers that had been hastily shoved in my direction. At one point, I stumbled into the political section of the fair, although I had never had any political inclinations prior to college. To my surprise, I saw a sign that said Asian Student Union at UVA in the midst of the booths advertising the Young Democrats and the College Republicans. Asians in politics? I decided to take a leap of faith and apply, and it turned out to be one of the best decisions of my collegiate career.

Three years later, I have experienced countless meetings, organized and attended many events on topics ranging from the Model Minority Myth to Asian fetishization in America, and I have even held the role of President for the Asian Student Union. My journey of becoming involved in advocacy and learning about civic engagement has led me to encourage other students to also learn about civic participation, both political and non-political. In a time where engagement with democracy has become essential for our country, one of my biggest goals is to encourage everyone around me to think about their identity and how they can be a part of the bigger picture.

Asians have been an integral part of American history, most notably as a part of the construction of the transcontinental railroad. Although we have this shared history, Asian Americans still tend to be treated as the perpetual foreigner, always told to “go back to where you belong”, even though a majority of us are second generation immigrants. I remember my rage upon learning of the Rock Springs massacre in 1885, when rioters murdered and burned down the houses of Chinese miners in Wyoming and have faced no punishment to this day. The more recent murder of Vincent Chin yielded similar results, and his killer still walks free right now. Why does this keep happening to Asian Americans, and why are these issues not touched upon in our regular education?

Unfortunately, a majority of Asian Americans face political and civic apathy. We are taught from a young age to care only about our grades, our future, and our work ethic, and to ignore anything that would cause a distraction. Chinese Americans in particular tend to have a higher socio-economic status, leading to political apathy and an absence of our voice in the government due to a dearth of political participation. If we cannot show solidarity for other Asian Americans or recognize our own community leaders, there is no way for us to make our presence known to all Americans, in either the political or social realm. The lack of attention towards Asian American history from our own community perpetuates apathy which will continue to trickle down through generations unless we can show our children the importance of civic engagement and making our voices known through initiating dialogue.

My own journey to becoming an advocate for Asian American voices led me to the discovery of the Asian American Student Survey, a small-scale survey that was conducted in 1988, 1993, and 2005 at the University of Virginia on Asian students. The UVA administration does not keep track of disaggregated data, meaning that they do not know how many students are Thai Americans or Vietnamese Americans. Instead, they lump all Asian students together into one category, so this unofficial survey is the only way of keeping a record of Asian student statistics. I realized that it had been over ten years since this survey was last conducted, and set out with a friend to conduct a refurbished 2020 Asian/Asian American Student Survey. This process prepared me for the 2020 Census as well, as I learned the importance of counting every person for accurate numbers, the consequences of undercounting, and why disaggregation, especially among Asians, is important. Our collective participation in the Census can lead to necessary programs being funded, more attention towards our community, and translations for non-English speakers in government instructions.

The Census is not the only important civic engagement event happening this year, seeing as this is also the year of the 2020 Elections. This year's upcoming elections are one of the most important to our community, especially since we have seen blatant racism from top officials

during the coronavirus pandemic. Our own President's continued anti-Asian remarks concerning COVID-19 should not be tolerated, and we should use this election as a chance to show our anger. Recently, I have become an ambassador of APIAVote (Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote) at my school. Although I can vote and encourage my family to vote, the work that APIAvote does is helpful in motivating other students and members of our community to register, learn, and vote - in different languages if needed! One of the best parts of being a part of this process is the feeling when someone successfully fills out a voter registration form in front of you. Many students perceive themselves as not informed enough to vote or think of politics as something that does not affect their lives. To combat this notion, we need to make it clear that since Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing racial groups in the United States, we have a huge potential to strengthen American democracy.

Activism is a daunting activity, but it can only be successful in shaping our future if citizens come together to stand up for what we want. Even though it may seem as if Asian Americans are hardly represented in the political realm, we have actually had a very strong civic presence in the past. In 1968, the Third World Liberation Front on the West Coast was made up of different racial groups, including the Asian American Political Alliance at SFSU to call for campus reform. Black-Asian coalitions have been present in every part of the United States, and are a great example of how community organizing together can lead to a strong front against the racial prejudice that both of our groups face on a daily basis. Unbeknownst to many, both racial groups have stood together historically and continue to do so in the present. It is never too late for us to take a part in civic engagement and stop being complacent, especially at a crucial time like right now. Asian Americans are facing hatred and misplaced blame for the pandemic, while Black Americans are struggling with police brutality.

Thanks to my exposure to Asian American advocacy in college, I have been able to develop a sense of civic engagement, and I have also seen more and more Asian American

activism across the nation! Watching Andrew Yang's presidential campaign was an eye-opening moment for me, as I realized that in the future, perhaps an Asian American could be President of the United States. Although we have not yet reached that point, we can still push those in our community to become involved in civic engagement and to go out to vote. With each year, we can push for more representation in all levels of our government.

Many of us struggle to identify with the "Asian" or the "American" side of ourselves, but recognizing both parts of our identities is the first step to exploring how we can impact of Asian-Americans everywhere. Even though the UVA activities fair this year was a little different from usual, I can proudly say that I helped to recruit advocates for the next generation and will continue to encourage those in our community to become civically engaged!