



Asian Americans in the Fight for Equal Education Rights

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Thought Pioneer Prize for AAACE's Essay Contest on "The American Dream: Equal Education Rights"

The Asian-American community, long praised as the “model minority”, now faces unjust bias in the admissions processes of K-12 schools as well as in higher education. Yet, when we begin to raise our voice, we are immediately condemned and shot down. Does the praise of “model minority” disguise the subconscious connotation of “silent minority”? But more importantly, will we yield to the subservience that is expected of us? Or will we take our place at the table and fight for the values and opportunities that had drawn us to the American dream in the first place?

The American society, and especially various admissions committees, have become fixated on this ideal of “fairness” -- offering every candidate, employee, and applicant a fair chance to pursue political, economic, and educational opportunities in the public sphere, workplace, or school. In our quest for fairness, however, we have inadvertently blurred the line between fairness and equality -- and in the process, we have abandoned the foundational ethics of our country.

The Declaration of Independence, upon which our American dreams are constructed, describes in eloquent simplicity the values of the American society: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...” Equality is defined here as the equal right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; moreover, the Tenth Amendment to the Bill of Rights states, “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people.” It is up to us, then, to uphold the right to equal educational opportunities. It is no longer the time to sit back and watch as our government continues to make decisions that further perpetuate the inequality among minorities in politics, workplaces, or academia. Rather, it now becomes necessary to take our future into our own hands, not only for the sake of our generation but also for generations to come.

Diversity is of course essential in creating a strong and close-knit community at each institution. As such, schools and universities are not uninformed in their search for a student body of diverse ethnic, religious, and financial backgrounds. However, admissions committees and lawmakers are misguided in the steps that they have taken and plan to take in order to pursue this goal. Affirmative action -- according to the *Merriam Webster* dictionary, is “the practice of improving the educational...opportunities of members of groups that have not been treated fairly in the past because of their race, sex, etc.” Despite its seeming appeal, we must realize that the gains of one cannot be made at the costs of another. The opportunities that are opened up for other under-represented minorities cannot take away from Asian Americans, discrediting the hard work that my peers and I put into our academics and extracurriculars to get accepted into the schools of our choice. Not for the namesake and pride, as we are stereotyped to be motivated



by, but rather for the opportunities to positively impact the world through the passion that we bring to the projects that we undertake.

Rather than equalizing the admissions process, we must instead focus on equalizing the opportunities that students have access to in preparation for the application through funding and supporting underprivileged students and providing them with the resources that they need in order to succeed -- in school. This includes: qualified teachers and updated textbooks; beyond the classroom, this can mean a safe, encouraging, and resourced home environment. With all applicants on an equal playing field rather than being judged by a biased referee, not only will the college admissions process equalize, literacy rates will rise nationwide and the income gap will decrease. In essence, admissions committees and lawmakers do not realize that unequal educational opportunities are the effects of a much more radical issue -- economic and social inequality. Instead of continuing to take steps to try to reverse the damage that has been done, why not create legislation to solve the root of the problem -- the disproportionate rate of those who cannot afford the expensive SAT prep classes, or those whose schools only offer a limited number of honors and AP courses?

The Asian-American community is at the forefront of this issue. It is time to step out of our comfort zone in the background and step undauntedly into the shoes of trailblazers. Our role now is to make our stories heard and break through the stereotypes that are placed on us. We must push back the fears of saying something wrong or causing controversy, and realize that only with controversy can change be fostered. And most importantly, we need to take proactive steps -- through rallying, conversing, and informing -- to pass local and national legislation to improve and expand the opportunities that are offered. And only when we, the Asian-American community, have equal rights to not only education but also to the American dream, will we as a society become one step closer to the equality that we strive for eternally.

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