

We Are Part of History in the Making

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This specific assignment is to get us thinking about how we are part of history in the making. I know my own definition of history acknowledges that as I can talk about the everyday changes that occur as part of my historical experience. History has been told many times from a bias perspective only because people have only known one side of the story or because people have been trained or educated to only know one perspective of history. But history encompasses a wide range of political, social, economical occurrences happening on the local and global level concurrently.

To set the tone for my life, the events that occurred in my parents' lifetime are what eventually brought them to the United States to eventually have two American born Chinese kids, my younger brother and me. The fall of Saigon, Vietnam to the communist party in 1975 caused both of my ethnically Chinese parents to become refugees fleeing from their homeland to migrate to the United States in 1980. Upon arrival, they would not know that the 1980s would be one of the peaks of conservatism. President Ronald Reagan would push for policies that would favor large corporations and then cut from federal spending in programs (school lunches, student loans, public transportation) that benefited minorities and their children or those "not as privileged." I was born on March 20, 1983 in Newark, New Jersey and I was not directly affected by these events but the situation sets the tone for how other elected officials would prioritize education and the needs of those who weren't a part of "corporate America."

When I was about six years old and just finishing up kindergarten, there was an event occurring on the other side of the globe pertaining to students and the much needed support for democracy all over the world. The Tiananmen Square incident of 1989 created worldwide condemnation of the Chinese government for their unruly suppression of its people especially students and laborers. This would eventually affect the United States and myself because it would lead the policy in which graduate students from the Asian countries could stay in the states to study longer and eventually create a larger Asian and Asian American population in the United States.

During Reagan's administration, and "drug and hip hop war" was occurring and it allowed for a program called "Just Say No" to be implemented in elementary and junior high schools. I was one of those students who was enrolled in the program and even receive certification by graduating from the program. Down the line, after 1988, the economy would pick up again and 'yuppies' would push to advance technology and make it within reach by regular families including mine when we decided to purchase a computer for my schoolwork purposes and even having cable for our television (I practically grew up on MTV since music videos were very popular at the time).

During the time when a lot of the historical events were occurring, I did not recognize them or acknowledge them due to the fact that I was still pretty young and I was not familiar with relating to the things I saw in the media. All I knew was it was as if Asians

were a new phenomenon since everything before the 1960s and '70s was based on "black and white" dynamics. One such event was the 1992 Los Angeles uprising. By that time I had been living in the San Gabriel Valley, California, for about six years. 1992 meant that I was nine years old, a 3rd grader who was oblivious to the impact of this event on all races and not just a tension between black and white since they constantly played the same clip of the Rodney King beating and dramatized the racial tension. I understand now that the resonance of the event still remains and there is a constant fear that since an occurrence can take place again.

The aftermath of the November 1996 Proposition 209 (California Civil Rights Initiative) still resounds in today's debates and forums. Prior to Proposition 209, women, especially those from color communities had additional aid from public sectors and from higher educational institutions because there was an emphasis on equal opportunity and enriching the education of all students by combining representation of all different communities on each campus. But post-proposition 209 the burden was shifted back to colored communities to compete in the same social structure for limited spaces in higher educational institutions or even job placements. I can say that I am affected as both an Asian American and a female gendered person. The reason for this is that I am part of the generation who is impacted by the debate on whether affirmative action benefits or hurts the API population. Asians would no longer be considered a minority anymore as many people are under the impression that all Asians do as well or better than the Caucasian population in many higher educational institutes. This just also meant that I was deprived of many scholarship opportunities that were given to other communities of color because of the model minority myth.

In addition to events, another historical change I lived through was the change in my environment. The city of San Gabriel was not heavily populated with Asians until the latter part of the 1990s. My family and I had just known that there were a few established Asian supermarkets and restaurants around the area. But once there was an outpour of migrants from Taiwan and mainland China due to economical and social reasons such as expanding industries and prioritizing the education of youth, the San Gabriel Valley boomed into the new "Ethnoburb" or sometimes designated specific ethnic community names "Little Taipei" and "the new Chinatown." Now my family is not a minority in the city but we find it hard to really relate to the newcomers so we tend to have "migration gaps."

After I had chosen to become an Asian American Studies major and take all of these events and occurrences and relate it to my own life, I learned that knowing these intersections truly is both a blessing and a burden on myself. The reason why I found it to be a blessing is because I feel like I have found some sort of placement in history. My parents' experience was not an isolated event and knowing that there were many other people who had gone through the same things really helps bring a community closer together. It also makes it easier to document what had happened through another perspective. It is also a burden to know all of these relationships because it is truly a repressive history experience by a long line of ancestors, generations, and then just people of color in general. It is a "terrible" lesson to know because there is a constant

repercussion of migrants' means to just adjust or survive in a new country and how that may or may not conflict with those already established in this nation. Because there is so much work to be done in terms of educating communities, building social movements to echo the effects of the civil rights movements of the 60s and 70s and continue the momentum towards equity among all race, gender, and sexuality, I have decided to commit myself to community service in the API community. I wouldn't have even thought of committing myself to doing nonprofit and doing work in community based organizations if it weren't for my education in a higher educational institution that has an Asian American Studies center. I have both found a niche to apply my Asian American Studies major to both my identity and the career I would like to seek to preserve my parents' experiences and others like theirs. Setting the tone for other generations of Asian Americans to follow, it is just important to build grassroots movements in the community that involve the youth and empower the API community to create awareness and preserve what we still have of our history, roots, and culture.