

## Asian Solidarity Collective Hosts Virtual Conference in Support of Proposition 16 and Affirmative Action

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### Body

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The Asian Solidarity Collective hosted a virtual panel discussion titled "Shaking the Foundation" on Friday, Sept. 25 that sought to educate the Asian Pacific Islander community of San Diego on the upcoming vote on Proposition 16 and affirmative action. The San Diego grassroots organization educates Asian Americans on social justice and promotes solidarity with marginalized communities.

Prop 16 refers to a California ballot initiative that asks voters if they are in favor of amending the state constitution to repeal Proposition 209. The 1996 proposition prevents the state government from considering factors such as race, sex, and national origin in public education, employment, and contracting. Proponents of the repeal say that it would allow for state institutions, such as the University of California, to adopt affirmative action, or measures that would encourage greater representation of disadvantaged minority groups.

The event began with a land acknowledgement, stating that San Diego County is located on indigenous Kumeyaay land. It was followed by a moment of silence.

The event was moderated by Grace Shinae Jun, a co-founder and principal member of the Asian Solidarity Collective. The panelists included Associate Professor Affiliate Dr. OiYan Poon of the University of Illinois at Chicago's department of educational policy studies, local San Diego activist and organizer Jean-Huy Tran, Education Equity Director Victoria "Nikki" Dominguez of the Los Angeles branch of Asian Americans Advancing Justice, former Vice President of Program Strategy at the Los Angeles branch of Asian Americans Advancing Justice Reshma Shamasunder, and UC San Diego Associate Professor of History Simeon Man.

Man provided historical context to affirmative action in his opening remarks and argued that the United States is structurally built around an ongoing system of white supremacy.

"The United States is built on white supremacy. That is the foundation on which the struggle for affirmative action is being waged," Man said. "By white supremacy, I do not mean only certain people believing and acting on the belief that they are superior because of their white identity... But I also mean white supremacy as a structure that has conferred tangible rewards to people for no other reason than because of their claim to that white identity."

Man went on to talk about how Asian-American opposition to race conscious policy is centered around the model minority myth, a stereotypical narrative that sees Asians as innately talented and as successful, boot-strapping immigrants.

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"[The model minority myth] was born in the midst of black freedom movements of the 1960's as a way to delegitimize black struggles and to prevent coalitions from being formed," Man said. "The portrayal of Asian Americans as bootstrapping overachievers has gone hand in hand with the subjugation of black and brown folks in this country. These tired tropes are distracting and they are effective; the fact that we are having this panel at all speaks to that effectiveness."

The panel then answered a series of questions regarding Prop 16 such as how they have meaningful conversations about the measure and its potential economic ramifications. The discussion also focused on the panelists' views on how the proposal is a meaningful step towards uplifting the black community.

Shamasunder touched upon the impact of structural racism on Asian-Americans, citing increases in hate crimes amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and calling for solidarity with other communities of color.

"More recently, in the wake of [COVID-19], Asian-Americans are a direct target of anti-Asian violence, both [state violence] as well as individual one on one violence," Shamasunder said. "It is the result of a shared system that is creating systemic violence against various communities, including ours. Standing together with black advocates, with brown advocates, is critical if we want to confront this in a holistic way."

The event concluded with a speech by San Diego City Council Member Monica Montgomery Steppe. She commented on the personal impact of Prop 209 on her family and called attention to the challenges that Prop 16 supporters face going forward.

"Speaking from the Black perspective, we have built up a country that never has granted us reparations for [the work of African Americans]," Steppe said. "We are up against a mentality, what we have learned through this white supremacist system, and through nuts and bolts messaging. I think that we can do it, but we just have to know what we are up against."

The Asian Solidarity Collective is currently working on a ballot measure campaign called TAKE ACTION that aims to engage with the San Diego Asian American community through panels and webinars ahead of the November election. The group will also be hosting an event on Wednesday, Oct. 14 to discuss their stances on other propositions.

Seventh College Assistant Director of Residence Life Joanne Song Engler will be hosting a UCSD workshop on Thursday, Oct. 8 titled "Facts not Fiction: Prop 16 and Anti-Racist Policies," to further discuss the implications of Prop 16 and affirmative action. Students who are interested in attending are encouraged to reach out to Engler at [email protected].

Prop 16 is on the ballot for the presidential election on Tuesday, Nov. 3, 2020 and requires a simple majority to pass. To learn more about Prop 16, please consult the Official Voter Information Guide on the California Secretary of State's website.

Photo provided by Carmela Prudencio of the Asian Solidarity Collective

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