

Letter to the Editor: Dear Asian people at Cal Poly- vote yes to affirmative action

The Poly Post: California State Polytechnic University - Pomona

October 20, 2020 Tuesday

University Wire

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Section: OPINION; Pg. 1

Length: 728 words

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Body

Lydia Dasari is a business administration junior. The views expressed in this letter do not necessarily reflect those of Mustang News.

Proposition 16 affects all Californians, not just Asian Californians. I address this to us, Asian people at Cal Poly, because our cultures have been specifically weaponized to preserve unjust power dynamics. We are told that our livelihoods and our social standings are under attack when, in actuality, many of us can attribute our success to affirmative action.

It is not my intention to generalize or stereotype Asian folks, but rather to discourage us from being complicit in systemic racism. Prop. 16 is bigger than us.

Dear Asian people at Cal Poly,

For the love of equity, please vote yes on affirmative action.

When I say "Dear Asian people," I'm speaking to us all. East Asian people, South Asian people, Southeast Asian people - all of us who grew up in beautifully complex, traditionally high-achieving, anti-Black cultures.

Prop. 16 is on the ballot and if passed, will allow affirmative action once again in California. It does not create a quota system, nor will it take away your younger sibling's shot at a prestigious university or a future career opportunity for yourself.

How do I know? Well, 41 states allow for affirmative action, including Pennsylvania. The state's overall diversity breakdown is ... homogenous, to say the least. About 80 percent of the population is white, around 4 percent is Asian, and 7 percent is Hispanic. However, at Penn State, Pennsylvania's largest public university, about 65 percent of the student body is white, 6 percent is Asian and 6 percent is Hispanic.

Dear Asian people, even under affirmative action, we are still accounted for in academia and underrepresented minorities are still, well, underrepresented- but to a lesser degree.

Similarly, in Illinois, thanks to affirmative action the state has created a scholarship program for minorities (including Black people) studying for a teaching credential. Why? This Johns Hopkins study tells us that if a Black child has just one Black teacher between kindergarten and third grade, they are significantly more likely to graduate high

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school and go to college. In response, Illinois formed a scholarship that could specifically and systemically provide a solution to Black students' drop-out rates. This race-based initiative has statistically encouraged student retention and would not be possible in a state that did not allow affirmative action.

Prop. 16 does not divide us. It is not a threat on equal rights. It does, however, start to mitigate the disadvantages of severely underrepresented minorities.

We live in an anti-Black and anti-immigrant (specifically anti-Latinx) environment. Amidst the power struggles, I see my Asian peers stand up when they see injustice, attend BLM protests, critique aspects of Greek Life, and organize for social justice. Asian students contribute immensely to Cal Poly's fight for diversity, for student rights and against systemic racism. I acknowledge that many of us were not raised to do so.

Asian cultures typically are based on class and hierarchy and are often defined by status. In caring for and outwardly supporting those outside our race, we inherently go against our shame-steeped backgrounds that often teach us to be headstrong, high-achieving and selfish. When we participate in social justice, we are stereotype-ending disruptors of expectation.

I am proud to be South Asian and proud to stand in solidarity with those less privileged than I. I am proud of every single Asian person on this campus who has unlearned bigotry enough to support Black Lives, lobby for immigrants who are different from us and champion progress.

To those of us who are still unlearning, please take this opportunity to detach from the privileged narrative we are fed. Expand your frame of reference and acknowledge that equality does not always result in equity; the system we live under needs to be reformed. Out of all the opportunities to critically evaluate our place in society, this November may be the most important, and this ballot measure is a great way to start.

Dear Asian people at Cal Poly, please vote to perpetuate the value of solidarity. Vote to undo years of systemic racism and privileged academia. Vote to restore affirmative action to California. Vote Yes on Proposition 16.

Load-Date: October 20, 2020

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