

BEYOND

the broken dream

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CALAFIA 2025

FELLOWS

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SASHA VELAZQUEZ

KAELYN TAN

CHERISH LODICO

NOOR

KARISMA LEE

SENIOR FELLOWS

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Calafia is yli's statewide youth policy journal that amplifies the narratives of young people on topics and issue areas important to them and their communities.

Calafia's past issues have focused on youth criminal justice reform, educational equity, and addressing stigmas within communities of color.

Contact María Schindler at mschindler@yli.org for a print copy.

Calafia Fellows are selected every year from each yli office to create and edit the issue's theme and the stories presented.

They are also mentored by experienced reporters, travel to statewide and national media conferences, and learn the steps to producing a printed publication.

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CALAFIA YOUTH POLICY JOURNAL ISSUE 9 PUBLISHED BY
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EDITOR'S NOTE:

From the eyes of young people a more complete and truer vision of the state of the world can be achieved; from their mouths an instrumental and meaningful word can be spoken. That voice testifies to the grief of broken circumstances and systems and it tells of a way through it, sometimes gritty and sometimes gracious but always bolstered in altruism, flowing forth from a well of neighborly care that all of us need. In *Beyond the Broken Dream*, Calafia fellows hold their own honest stories up to the light through personal narrative, and bring entire communities' stories to the forefront with astute observation and research.

The six 2024-2025 Calafia fellows have pointed with granularity toward the issues of systemic disappointment that are besetting our shared society. They have covered the spectrum of broken dreams from the psychological toll of poverty, to the struggle of obtaining government assistance, to the anguish of forced immigration and life in the United States, to green capitalism and transportation, to racial justice and colonial collusion within the Palestinian genocide. Hopes for prosperity are routinely torn up and indicate a need for reimagined societal realities: Alejandro, Sasha, Kaelyn, Cherish, Noor, and Karisma have invested time, effort, and hope in slicing to the heart of these mass nonfulfillments.

As facilitators and senior fellows, Maria, Iris, and I have found it to be an incredible privilege to walk alongside the fellows as they weave stories and strong convictions into a golden thread that is profoundly worthy of being followed by the society it reflects.

Our hope is that the publication might speak with clarity to the arenas that have lost moral footing, advocate with earnesty and humility for those who receive the damage, and play a role in the healing of our neighbors. We invite you to join us in our pursuit!



Maggie De la Peza

MAGGIE DE LA PEZA

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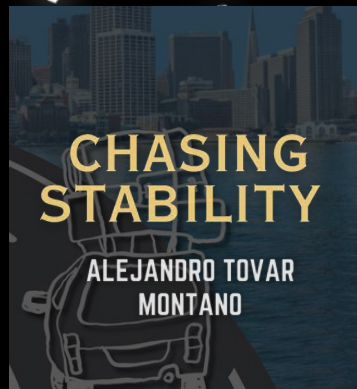
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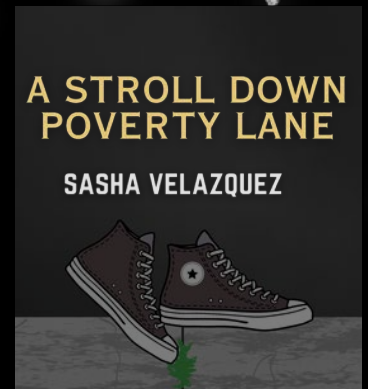
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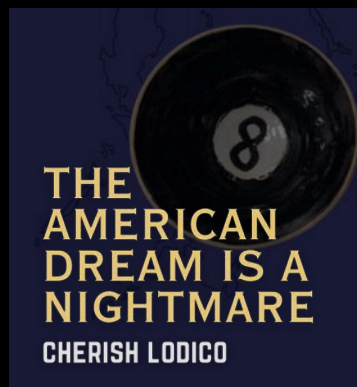
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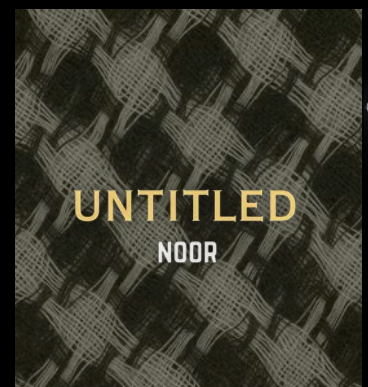
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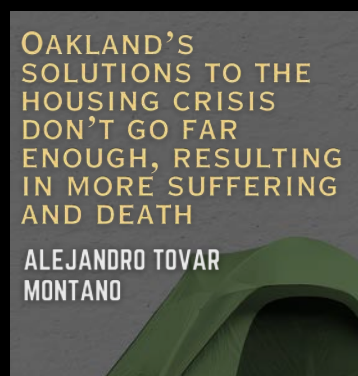


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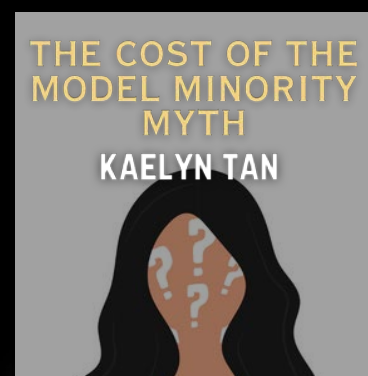
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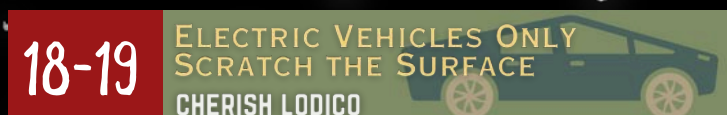
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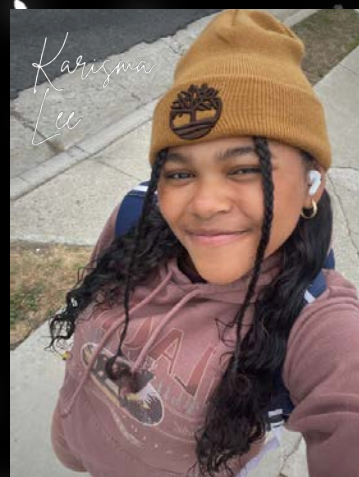
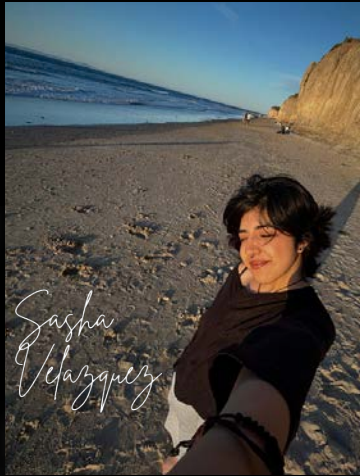
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MEET THE TEAM

FELLOWS



SENIOR FELLOWS



2ND YR. SENIOR FELLOWS

3RD YR. SENIOR FELLOWS



CAMINOS

A POEM BY ADAMARI COTA

La tierra, el suelo, el concreto firme

sobre el cual todos dan sus pasos

All echo with the same heartbeat

from the desert life to city streets

That dim my eyes in the nights

They are now tearing and breaking
For new beginnings

The sands of
coachella embraced
the soles Of my black converse,
which carried dreams
through sunny days and quiet nights

The sun. the warmth in my skin,
the place I once knew,
were all left behind...

For Berkeley's cold breeze and mist

From dust to fog, from sand to sea,
From a place I used to embrace,
to a new chapter,

My Converse led me to a city of wonders,
where life feels like a scene

We walked together with my Converse
In the city of wonder
Leaving behind my old pair I step into this
new Converse,

we talk together to a new **camino**

NEW BEGINNINGS

A LETTER BY CLARISSA WING

Dear Freshman Clarissa,

I know this new chapter of your life seems to be filled with ambivalent emotions: anxiety, uncertainty, and self-doubt, counterbalancing gratitude, pride, and hopefulness. I wish I could say you will not encounter the former emotions to protect you from the hurt. But, these experiences will build your resilience and teach you formative lessons.

You're going to love your university and the opportunities that seem to seep through it—the gleaming hope of what is to come. You'll experience a new sense of freedom and independence, feel inspired by a bustling city and campus, join clubs that cultivate community and connection, make new friends whom you get to share exciting ventures with, and create memories you know you'll remember for a lifetime. It'll feel like you are just at the beginning of writing your story.

Despite this, you'll be challenged with seeds of self-doubt that cause you to question your abilities. Classes are more difficult than you anticipated and it'll feel like your intelligence is being put to the test. You will struggle in some of your courses and they'll be hard to balance. Though I know you want to do it all on your own, you're going to learn to reach out for academic help.

It's okay to feel vulnerable. Self-compassion is what you discover you'll need. You'll find that you're not alone in this journey of the new challenges you face. Your classmates will share their similar experiences of academic struggle, newness to college life, and the overwhelming feeling of imposter syndrome. You'll feel the love and encouragement from your family who are proud of how far you've come and will be there to cheer you on, especially during the more stressful times. They are, after all, the people who you did this for.

You'll recognize how far you've come and the devotion it took to get to where you are now. Don't let those fears obstruct your belief in yourself and your dream of achieving higher education. Embrace the tears, frustration, obstacles, learning lessons, and successes that are part of the process. These feelings will continue to come up even after your first year and that's okay. It's not always going to be a straight path. During these times it's important to allow yourself to feel those emotions and give yourself grace because you are doing the best you can. It's not going to be easy but know that you can reach out for help.

I say all this not to scare you from the negative experiences, but rather to convey that despite the challenges you will face, you will emerge resilient. Know that I am proud of you, at every stage of this journey. Your future self is applauding you with the unfaltering understanding that you are trying your best. Be kind to yourself and remember that you are not alone in this process. Believe in yourself as much as others believe in you.

With love,
Your future self



CHASING STABILITY: THE STRUGGLE FOR A HOME IN OAKLAND

BY ALEJANDRO TOVAR-MONTANO

Man, I've always felt displaced. I feel like I'm a displaced rose. It's always been hard making friends and moving around a lot was hard. Every school I went to I was alone. I got to see kids be really close to where they were sleeping over at each other's houses, making plans on weekends, sharing lunches, just enjoying each other's company. See, but those types of friendships were friendships where they were friends for years, but I never got to experience that because I moved a lot. People felt abandoned and so they moved on. Only reason I know they felt abandoned is because I've always been abandoned so I know how it would feel. It feels lonely and feels like no one cares about you because if they did they wouldn't be leaving you right?

I've always just wanted to be a part of something, but I never felt like I truly belonged anywhere. I was always an outcast. Growing up this is the kind of connection and brotherhood I wanted with kids my age.

I could say I've lived in about every part of Oakland, from the east to the west to the deep of Oakland, from the 20s, to the 30s, to the 80s, to the 90s. It was hard getting approved for a house or an apartment. The first thing owners look at is your background and my mom's background was okay but then they look at who else lives in the house and automatically reject us because some family members have a record from doing things when they were younger. Another thing they look for is credit and neither of my parents ever had good credit. My mom had my sister at 18 and me at 19 and then she would have 7 more later on. She is now 33 but she was never educated on credit nor did she think it would impact her. But it does and though now she's getting her credit together it is hard.

Me and my mom. No matter the pain she consumed, her smile always managed to shine as bright as the moon.

There were nights we had to sleep in our cars. There were years we would have to squeeze together with family. I imagined it like we were traveling the world though we were just traveling the city of Oakland. We would get turned away a lot and I hated to see the look on my mom's face when she wouldn't get approved. She would stress and would cry to my father about what we would do and where we would go. It was always like that. It was a pattern, we would get a house stay a year or two, get pushed out and then it would start again. And by being pushed out I mean either the landlord would raise rent or the property would get sold and the new owners would raise the rent.

A few years back, Homies Empowerment, community members, my family and I gave back to our unhoused community - we went to an unhoused encampment and this is how it looked. A lot of these people were here because rent kept rising so much that their normal 9-5s weren't enough to sustain housing.

On some occasions we moved because it just wasn't safe. We have been robbed and our house has been shot at or caught in the crossfire. Of course for our safety we would leave. We'd move in with family an hour away but it was a back and forth because of tragic family deaths or issues with our family we were living with there.

Moving around would embarrass me a lot because the friends I did have at the time would ask to come over and sometimes they couldn't because of my housing situation. I didn't know how to tell them that they couldn't come over because my house at the time was my car. I would have to make up things like "my family has the flu" or "my parents are working on our house fixing it up." It affected my friendships with many and it still affects me to this day because I still don't really have those friends or people to go to when I'm feeling stressed out. I don't have no one to confide in. I've always just had me, myself and I.

Moving back and forth our car looked just like this. We didn't have money to pay for moving companies so we took our necessities and squished them all together. Our lives were packed in the back of our car and this is how it was for us everywhere.

Being lonely wasn't all that bad. It gave me time to focus on myself and have some self-acceptance. I've always based myself on what other people say and think. I was a follower trying to be popular, denying myself of my true identity and being alone gave me a chance to find myself. Something that I did make sure was that my grades were always between As and Bs, that I finished my projects and other school work. My mind is set: I will get a full ride scholarship and pull myself and my family out of poverty and we will not have to worry about landlords raising rent. We will have the financial freedom to live and be happy. People say "Money can't buy happiness" but if money is the key for my mom not to worry and cry and fight with my dad, that would make me happy. It will make my siblings happy because my mom wouldn't have to work so hard and my dad wouldn't have to work so hard and could actually make time for me and my siblings. Whoever said money can't buy happiness must've never gone through my struggles.

My dream is to be a lawyer, graduate and hopefully build an apartment complex where my community of Oakland can live comfortably. I will provide stable and affordable housing so future generations won't have to feel that displacement I've felt throughout my childhood - so their parents won't have to stress and work extra jobs and can actually focus on raising their kid or kids. It's a longshot because people like me don't really make it but I'm willing to try for my community and for my younger siblings and future kids. All I know is that I'm ready to fight back against the higher power that's targeting our families. I'm ready to stop this generational curse that's affecting me and that will affect our future family if we as a community don't stop it. Yes I'm just a youth and yes many of my readers are youth but remember we are our family's hope to end this war that society is waging on us. We have more privilege than our ancestors had. They fought for our place here in the US and I'm not going to let their sacrifices go unnoticed.

A STROLL DOWN POVERTY LANE: HOW POVERTY FOLLOWS THE LIVES OF THOSE WHO ENDURE IT

BY SASHA VELAZQUEZ

Fresno is a city where financial struggle is as common as the pavement we walk on. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 20.6% of Fresno County residents live in poverty, more than 1.5 times the rate for California and the United States. I was one of them. I was born to a single mother in the lower class. I grew up the eldest of a poor, hungry family.

As I grew older, my family's financial situation mobilized. When I was 14, my mother met her partner who received fairly high wages at his job. With his help, we ascended to the middle class, got a car, and moved into the suburbs of Clovis, Fresno's more "prestigious" sister city. I had achieved what so many Fresnoans crave; escape from the economic injustice that plagues the Central Valley. I was technically out of the gutter. We were not rich, but we were comfortable. Yet, I felt a lingering anxiousness. The memories of dinnerless nights, unpaid electricity bills, and frequent eviction notices shrouded my mind, leaving a deep sense of unease. How could I, as someone no longer grappling with economic injustice, still feel the mental toll of someone who is?

People often view poverty as merely an economic standing, the material state of being poor. In reality, poverty has much grander implications. When I think back to my life before we became financially stable, I remember an anxious little girl who was keenly creative and an excellent student. But at the time, I only saw myself as poor. When you live in poverty, it trumps all other aspects of your identity, minimizing them until it feels as though you are nothing else. Your skills, interests, goals, and aspirations are unimportant when you don't know whether your next meal is guaranteed. Before anything else, before you are a person, you are poor.

Poverty is trauma. And like any other trauma, it is not easily forgotten. The constant stress of financial instability I came to know in my developing years eroded my sense of security and hope. Though I was a child, bearing witness to my mother's chronic stress as she tried to balance a full-time job and childcare for four kids branded its painful mark on my mind as well as hers. I was left feeling insecure about my financial situation, and I was and remain hyper-aware of my financial habits at all times. I have and continue to compare my situation to those around me, which is an exhausting

habit, as the middle-class neighbors I moved next to share almost nothing in common with my family. They go on 3-week vacations in the summer, and I still worry about budgeting for toiletries. When I began to understand the broader social implications of economic injustice, I realized that this unease was not just personal; it was systemic. Those who have experienced economic injustice often find it challenging to envision a future untainted by the past, a self whose worth isn't tied to a bank account. Along with alienation, I have grown familiar with a feeling of survivor's guilt. The simple fact that I made it out of poverty purely by chance continues to leave me uncomfortable, like a ghost that follows me through the social classes. I have felt undeserving of my newfound status, but this is no fault of my own.

The presence of such a deep-rooted, recurring feeling only proves that the ultimate goal of social perception and public policy is to make the impoverished feel hopeless and unworthy. The cycle of poverty persists, not because the poor are lazy or undetermined, but because the poor are accustomed to hard work with no payoff. Thus, they feel that no effort will ever be sufficient. This trampling of the spirit for years, decades, and even generations, produces a complete and utter hopelessness of change in the future. The very essence of meritocracy – the idea that your economic and social status reflects your abilities and worth – causes the visceral emotional vulnerability that keeps lower-class families in their predetermined destination and limits social mobility.

By addressing these feelings, I and other individuals who find themselves in better financial situations than their origins can shed light on the lasting emotional and mental effects of poverty. There is no tidy, instantaneous way to eliminate the traces of poverty, but there is power in finding that it does not define its victims. The impoverished, the poor, and the downtrodden are deserving of the same comfort and security enjoyed by the masses. My humanity is not spelled out by the money in my wallet, and neither is yours.

POVERTY LN



PROTECTING OUR BOXES

BY KARISMA LEE

The hard truth is this:
Life is like a box of treats
Each piece delicious

Each piece they can take
If they take and take, what's left?
The crumbs of deceit

CAUTION

Growing up, I didn't fully understand our economic situation as a family. Once I got older, I realized how much our family relied on economic relief from

government programs to get by. Through systems like Section 8, Medi-Cal, and food stamps, my father could keep our family housed, fed, and took care of me while working one, sometimes two jobs. My mother had always been unemployed and mostly helped by filling out paperwork for these government programs. I don't think we realized how much of a help that was until she was gone. My mother was mentally ill, and her resistance to her medication for bipolar disorder led her to abuse other prescriptions, as well as other substances like alcohol. After a while, she found herself lost and eventually left us alone.

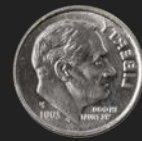
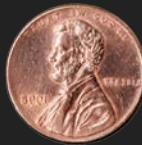
Due to all the problems she was causing us emotionally, mentally, and even medically, her absence from our lives was more of an aid than a problem. That is, until it was time to reapply for Section 8 and all of the financial programs we relied on. My mother was the main name under many of these programs and, given that she wasn't around, we couldn't get her signature or move forward with the application process. It took months for us to get her name off of most of the programs and for my dad to get full custody of me. But even after figuring a lot of it out, the amount of help we received economically was cut down substantially. At one point, they completely cut us off from a lot of financial programs for the sole reason of my mother being out of the picture. But it wasn't me and my father's fault that she had left the family.

We needed aid
We needed assistance
Instead, it felt like a raid
As the government stole our stash from a distance

Looking back at our experience with these programs leaves me with a sense of bitterness. While we were fighting for what we'd already earned, the organizers of these systems were putting roadblock after roadblock in our way. The financial programs that many Americans need to survive are supposed to prioritize us, the American citizens that give them as a government the power to govern. But there were so many steps and bureaucratic barriers stopping us from getting the help we needed, and most of those

They were our necessities for survival. This red tape was an unnecessary maze of excessive documentation and struggle to receive the help that we were entitled to and desperately needed.





The American system is embedded with racism and inequality, beginning with our country's history of slavery and white supremacy. When finally freed, we lived in rural poverty, having to fight tooth and nail in a system that was built to give people with generational privilege a leg up economically. They owe us the help that we paid for with generations of stolen labor, and I will never be okay with systemic racism taking away the undeniable rights and resources we as a people deserve.

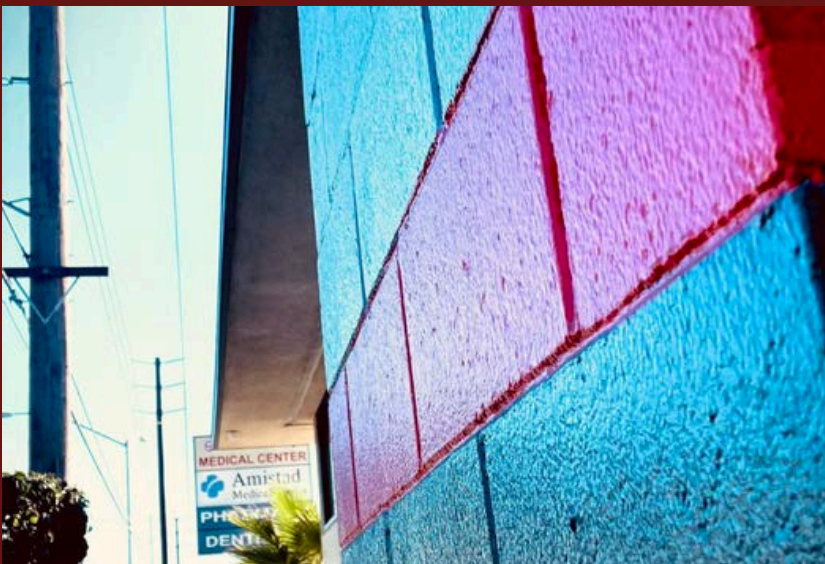


Please hear our names
Don't ignore our cries
Please see our pains
Don't let us fall behind

We're all alone
Only crumbs are left
We plead for help
But were left with theft



Looking back it felt like a robbery, and although that part of my life is over, I'm not over the injustice that took place. Thieves are criminals, so to ignore the blatant criminality of my U.S. government is not something I'll do. I'll never let them steal another piece of me, and I hope that others struggling to hold on to what is theirs will fight to keep their stash too.



We'll rip through the wrappers
Those blockades you set
Then take what we deserve
Collect our owed debt

We'll fight to keep our boxes full
We know one thing is clear
After making our lives crumble
You won't make our voices
disappear



First-Generation, Second Chances

BY KAELYN TAN

When I look in the mirror, I see a daughter of Asian-American immigrants and a first-generation student. This is the ongoing story of my life, shaped by my family's journey in a foreign land and my own relentless pathway to college.

My family moved to the United States in 2012. Although I have lived here for most of my life, I am still filled with bright memories of walking down streets decorated with fire lanterns and indulging in shāo kǎo, which are Chinese barbecue kabobs.

I miss living in China and I could imagine that it was difficult for my parents to make the decision to move to the United States and say goodbye to all of their family and friends they have known their whole lives, not knowing if there would be a chance to meet again.

I cling to my mother's hand in the bustling airport near Kaiping. My nine-year-old brother is too old to hold hands, but I'm only three. My mother's hand is sweaty and I wonder if everything is okay as she turns to me.

"Life will be better in the States, Měimei," she says.

My family of four moved from a spacious three-bedroom apartment in China into a scruffy, old room when we first settled down. I was unaware of my family's relationship with money as a young child, but I noticed many hints. My parents had very demanding jobs that required them to work six days a week, in twelve hour shifts with few breaks in between in exchange for fifteen dollar hourly wages. My parents would complain about having to work every morning, but they had no choice but to stay in their jobs. I did not understand why my parents did not pack their bags and leave their jobs back then. The harsh reality for many immigrants like my parents is that they have limited career opportunities and are bound to their jobs until they retire.

People who came before my parents promised that America would welcome us with open arms and prosperity. But the country that my parents had envisioned instead broke all the promises that they were given and shattered their hopes and dreams of achieving a better life.

My parents' decision to build a new life in the United States has influenced how I am designing the blueprint of my future. Throughout my childhood, I saw how my parents were unsatisfied with their jobs and did not have the opportunity to pursue the life that they envisioned. While my parents never pressured me to do anything, I still felt the weight of responsibility to make my parents proud and prove that their sacrifices were worth it. My parents had always regretted not attending college.

"I should have tried harder to study so I would have lived with more purpose," said my mom.

I have always held my mom's words close to me. I recognized higher education as a way for me to grant freedom to myself and my family. Eventually, I became obsessed with the idea of getting accepted into an elite college. In my freshman year of high school, I would study until 2 a.m. and cram my schedule with as many activities as humanly possible. It felt like every cell in my body's purpose was to work.

Despite the hours I put into studying and my extracurriculars, I felt like I would never catch up to my peers in the marathon of high school. I always blamed myself for getting lower marks and achieving less than my peers, but it was not a fair comparison now that I am looking back on my journey. I live in the heart of Silicon Valley, where there is a concentration of wealth. Many of my peers have access to tutoring, college consulting services, and more extracurricular opportunities. Meanwhile, I have to juggle my responsibilities at home with my classes and activities with minimal support.

All these experiences reveal who I see in the mirror—a daughter of immigrants who carries the weight of their unfulfilled dreams and a determined first-generation student hoping to become the living proof of their American Dream.

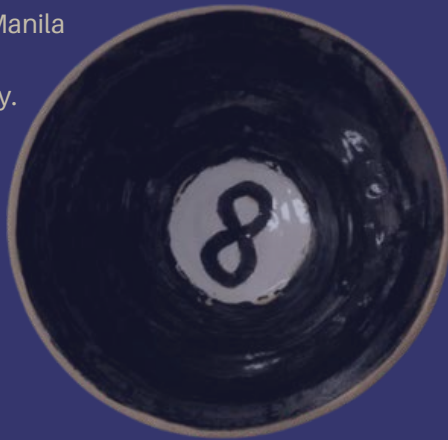


THE AMERICAN DREAM IS A NIGHTMARE

BY CHERISH LODICO

Growing up, the idea of the “American dream” was always embedded in my mind. From TV Shows on Nickelodeon that taught me how to speak English, to my family reminding me of my destiny to eventually leave the Philippines, I was tasked from a young age to lift my family out of poverty.

Although my single mom managed to afford school tuition through constantly working overtime shifts as a call center agent, my class status in the Philippines was easily defined from where I lived. The so-called squatter areas of Novaliches, Quezon City, were immediately distinguishable from the affluent neighborhoods of capitalist foreigners in Bonifacio Global City and the parts of Manila that surrounded the United States Embassy. It was our dream to become one of those families that did not wake up to the sound of chickens clucking at 5:00 AM, or to tricycles passing by our house.



The most painful part about forced migration is being away from family. At just 15 years old, I hopped on a plane without my mom. How do I even write about being miles apart from the person who supported me my entire life, or begin to fathom her not even attending my high school graduation? I can't. You always think that stories of families growing up over skype or facetime are simply lifetime episodes. They're not.

Yet, despite immigrating for a better life, my family's dream was never, and probably will never become a reality. Like the smog I vividly remember inhaling in Quezon City defined my class status as a Filipino, the fog I endure in Daly City – the home of diasporic Filipinos – symbolizes mine and the stories of thousands forced to leave their country because of the economic crisis.

While being in America may be “better” economically than your home country by the slightest (or not at all), it is also met by exploitation – the price you pay for escaping poverty. Having “equal opportunities” and a “better life” comes with capitalizing off of your own talents and skills at just 16 years old. It comes with constant homesickness, and being consumed by the nostalgia of hearing crickets while you go to sleep, or a-cock-a-doodle-doo when you wake up.

As a local amateur ceramics artist, I try to find spaces where my pieces can be shared by the community. Whether through making a mushroom votive candle holder for my friend just because, or creating a not-so-practical holiday present, my goal when I first took ceramics as a class was to establish sharing as a way of living – a Native American practice that ties back to the idea of material goods not being the basis of wealth, but rather a tangible object that provides us with the rich opportunity of doing good for the community. Instead, I am forced to sell these pieces online in an attempt to make income as a substitute for the job I cannot find but desperately need in order to help my guardians pay for the constantly increasing rent in the Bay Area.

Struggling to find a means of income is the exact reason that pushed me out of my country – and it will continue to shape my future as I think about applying for college, or a post-graduate job that pays enough to sustain myself and family. Getting a better education where I can get a better paying job, which can then be sent as remittances to my family in my home country. This is the better life I aspired to have.

The education I will attain may lead me to be in a debt I will be paying until I retire, but this is the migrant mindset – migrate, work, get paid, send remittances, sleep, repeat. Will I be exhausted and burnt out by the time I'm in my 30s? Probably, because the American dream... is actually a nightmare.

Untitled

BY NOOR

MARCH 3, 2023

I committed to an elite institution's offer. In doing so, I believed their propagandist promise of lifting my family and me out of poverty. This came at a time when I was attempting to stave off financial ruin working my third job as an after school recreation leader. I had no other choice — my father sustained a work injury that precipitated his retirement in May 2022 and my mother was laid off a month later. I, the 16-year-old eldest (queer) child of immigrant parents, had to be the breadwinner in my family. I was responsible not only for my 4 AP courses, 2 college classes, and applications to 10 colleges as a senior in high school, but for paying my family's bills and staying on top of communication for government benefits. I saw my college acceptance and decision as our ticket out. Instead, it is co-optation at its finest.



AUGUST & SEPTEMBER, 2023

I was reveling in the first few weeks of college, gleefully making use of excessive, stolen resources. From stable housing, to a picturesque campus, and several delicious dining halls, their propagandist promise seemed to come true. As the weeks wearily wore on, though, I began feeling the culture shock and extreme homesickness that nobody prepares first-generation low-income students for. My attempt to feel "right at home" was a vain one. I was no longer surrounded by my actual community, one forged around racial and economic lines. My analysis stopped there, until...

OCTOBER 7, 2023

Operation Al-Aqsa Flood. In response to an act of fierce resistance, the zionist entity wages a heightened, televised genocide that has now martyred 400,000 Palestinian people and counting in the most brutal ways. I starkly realized the elite institution that I once fantasized is monetarily invested in the waterfalls of bloodshed of my people and the exhaustive leveling of my homeland. In this way, the zionist propaganda machine has failed.



OCTOBER 7, 2023 TO NOW

Over the following year, my subversion of escalating state surveillance and repression has accentuated a feature hidden in plain sight: that universities are a valuable tentacle of empire. What keeps these empires (elite colleges) afloat are subjects (students) that are co-opted by being infused with privilege typically reserved for the bourgeoisie. The tentacle hires underpaid housekeeping and dining hall staff whose sole purpose is to clean up after perfectly (in)competent adults. The tentacle secures housing for its co-opted subjects on land violently stolen by razing indigenous Mexican communities to the ground. The propaganda was so reinforced that only a phenomenon as vicious as a genocide was able to penetrate it and wholly unmask the truth.

The truth? Elite institutions prey on marginalized "model minorities" and subsequently isolate them from their community to champion a DEI platform. This way, the elite institution can draconically revoke their material privilege at any moment while infusing them with neoliberalist ideals that overlook criticism of this imperial force forcibly displacing communities.

I am one of the marginalized "model

minorities." I'm an empire's subject. I unduly benefit from its inherently-unbridled material privilege. Simultaneously, I refuse to concede my political beliefs, one of which being community care. Co-tending to the financial needs of my family in a meritocratic system that promotes individualism is only one way in which I resist the system and build up my insurgency.

And yet, being a student is being complicit

in this tentacle of empire. Not accepting the elite institution's offer, however, would be impossible given my family's poverty. I remain hesitant on if there is a way to de-co-opt students at privileged universities in order to build up an insurgency. What I am trying to do about it, though, is recognize and manipulate this economic privilege.

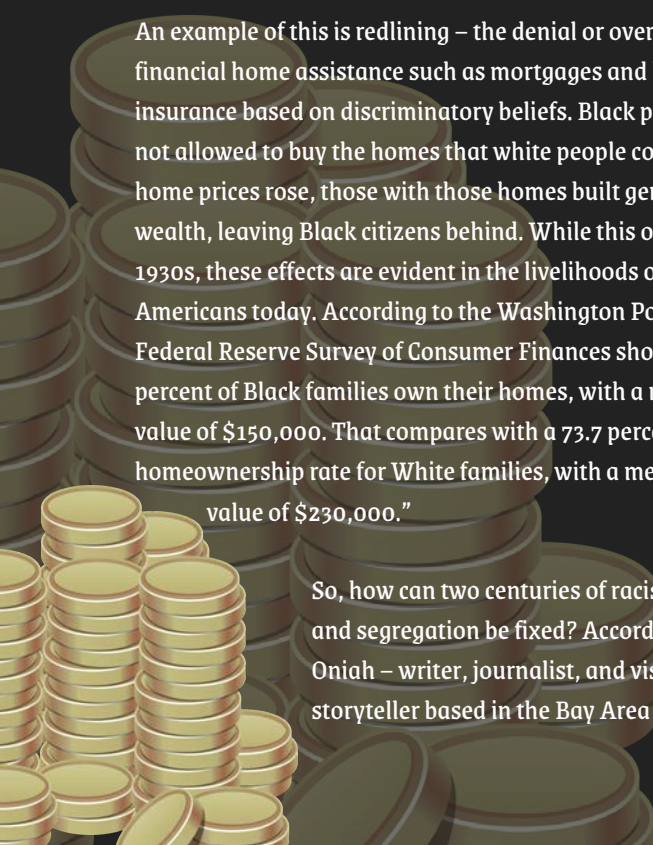


BEYOND REPAIR: THE ROCKY ROAD TO REPAYMENT

BY KARISMA LEE

In attempted compliance with President Donald J Trump's executive order to ban diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in federal workplaces, the Defense Intelligence Agency paused the observance of Black History Month, as well as other observances such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Pride Month, and Holocaust Remembrance Day on the federal level. This is a blatant attempt at erasing history in America – and we must fight to continue not just to recognize it but to address it.

As a young Black woman, seeing these initiatives is frightening – recognizing my history and its impact on my race today is vital. According to census.gov, “Black individuals made up 20.1% of the population in poverty in 2022 but only 13.5% of the total population.” America's history of slavery and segregation is what landed us on the poor soil we're in today. According to the State of California Department of Justice, “Over the 200-plus years of slavery, enslavers extracted an estimated \$14 trillion of free labor from enslaved people.” After abolition, ex-slaves had to build their lives from scratch in a world filled with segregation and racism that wanted nothing to do with them if it didn't help them profit.




An example of this is redlining – the denial or overcharging for financial home assistance such as mortgages and home insurance based on discriminatory beliefs. Black people were not allowed to buy the homes that white people could, so as home prices rose, those with those homes built generational wealth, leaving Black citizens behind. While this occurred in the 1930s, these effects are evident in the livelihoods of Black Americans today. According to the Washington Post, “The 2019 Federal Reserve Survey of Consumer Finances shows that 45 percent of Black families own their homes, with a median home value of \$150,000. That compares with a 73.7 percent homeownership rate for White families, with a median home value of \$230,000.”

So, how can two centuries of racism, injustice, and segregation be fixed? According to Chinwe Oniah – writer, journalist, and visual storyteller based in the Bay Area – it can't. “If

the country were to pay back every single cent owed to descendants of enslaved people, that would effectively mean giving the country over to Black folks. There's not a reality that we can imagine where that is possible,” said Oniah. There is also the psychological effect slavery has had on the community. Oniah continued, “It's not just the loss in wages. There is a cultural, there is a physical, there is a psychological effect that has happened as a result of slavery and that has been perpetuated for generations to where we are today.”

What we as a community can do is look for ways to make things better for those who were wronged through reparations. Reparations are making amends for wrongdoings by compensating those impacted through money or other forms of aid. Luckily for us in California, steps have been being taken to get to that better tomorrow. On September 30th, 2020, Assembly Bill 3121 (AB 3121) was enacted, establishing the Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans. This task force was to “study and develop reparation proposals for African Americans, with a special consideration for African Americans who are descendants of Persons Enslaved in the United States.” The state of California has made strides in the issue of reparations for the African-American community, and we as a society must continue to try and compensate to the greatest of our ability to make up for a fraction of the pain the U.S. has caused.



Some believe that we don't deserve it. Youth Leadership Institute Program Coordinator Salem Boulware says, “The main argument against it is that those people aren't alive so there's no need for reparations. But those effects are very much still felt in just about any system in America: in the criminal justice system, in housing, schooling, and obviously the economy. With every other aspect, you can draw a direct line to the enslavement of Africans and their descendants.” The African American community deserves reparations for our troubling history in America, and it's the belief that we don't that makes it hard to create change.

Oakland's solutions to the housing crisis don't go far enough, resulting in more suffering and death

BY ALEJANDRO TOVAR-MONTANO

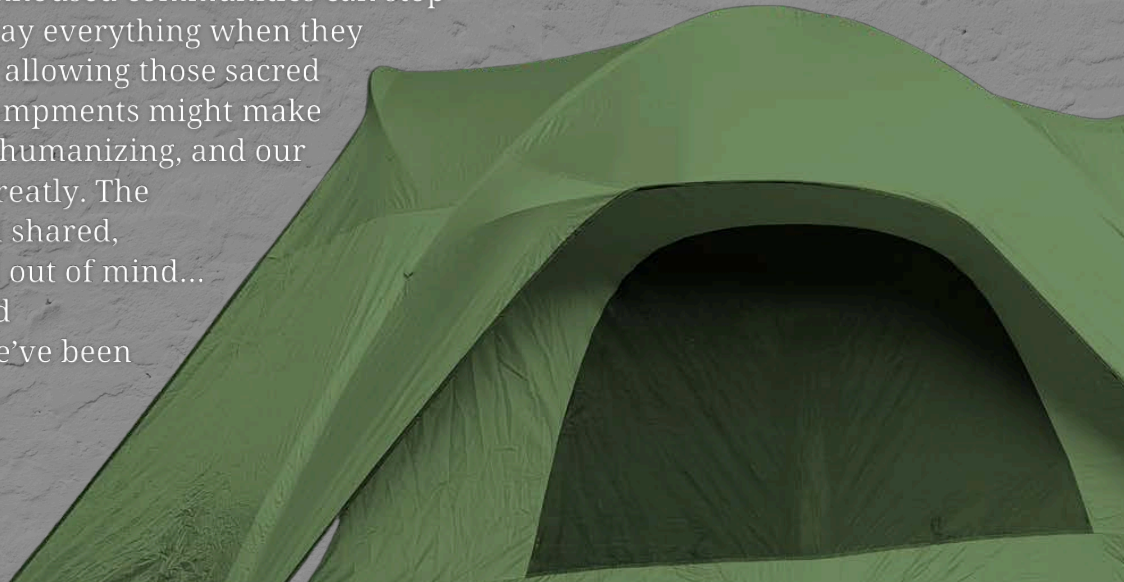


Are you just gonna sit there and watch our people suffer and die?

There is a housing crisis in Oakland, California, that is contributing to our unhoused population being on the streets. According to the City of Oakland, homelessness has doubled in the last ten years. In 2022, Oakland counted 5,055 unhoused, and in 2024, 5,490 unhoused were counted, which reflects a 9 percent increase in unhoused communities in just two years. Oakland has 1,200 emergency shelters and beds, 280 safe RV parking spaces, and about 600 permanent housing units for the unhoused. While this can help some of our unhoused residents, we don't have the resources to cover even half of what's needed.

Oakland has been trying to deal with the problem of homelessness but is only finding temporary solutions. One of the ways Oakland has been trying to "help" is by clearing encampments and offering shelters for our unhoused. However, emergency shelters and beds only temporarily shelter the unhoused. After only a couple nights, they're back on the streets. Often, people decline shelters because they may not feel safe and can't take their belongings with them. Clearing encampments is causing residents to lose essential and sentimental belongings. Natalie Orenstein from Oaklandside interviewed a woman who lost her belongings due to an encampment clearing: "Blumberg said she lost both financially and sentimentally valuable belongings in that closure, including a boat and her grandmother's jewelry."

An article by [Yale Law](#) states, "By using personal-property law to examine the context of items, instead of looking to their location, courts would honor the constitutional commitment to protecting individuals from government interferences with the objects he or she holds dear." Using the personal property law to examine items of our unhoused communities can stop the city from just throwing away everything when they clear encampments, therefore allowing those sacred items to be kept. Clearing encampments might make the city look better, but it is dehumanizing, and our unhoused continue to suffer greatly. The woman Orenstein interviewed shared, "They want us out of sight and out of mind... It would be nice if they worked collaboratively with us, like we've been asking for years."



Over the years, rent has increased all over the Bay Area, making it harder for families to keep stable housing. The housing shortage the Bay Area is currently facing is also a huge problem and is another reason why our unhoused relatives are being pushed out into the streets. According to the City of San Francisco, “The City’s housing shortage drives out families, forces workers into long commutes, puts seniors at risk, and is a significant contributor to the top challenges we need to tackle, including homelessness, climate change, and our economic recovery.” Housing shortages not only affect the unhoused but also those families barely surviving.

In October 2024, Governor Gavin Newsom allocated \$28 million to address homelessness in Oakland. The money will be used to build permanent housing and provide rent and moving costs assistance, case management services, and more. But what gets done with the money we receive for our unhoused? In 2020, a UC Berkeley student mapped Oakland and discovered over 4,000 vacant lots. We can reuse these spaces and get our people off the streets and into warm homes. It is also important that these homes are deeply affordable, near job centers, and close to transportation. Some may need rent assistance. The local government should and needs to prioritize elders who can’t work. The City could work with non-profit organizations like Homies Empowerment, Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice, and others to offer services like food distribution, clothing distribution, medical services, education programs, and other necessities to survive and struggle less.

Our unhoused are speaking out about what they need but aren’t being heard. According to KQED, “About 100 homeless advocates and residents rallied in front of Oakland City Hall Tuesday, imploring the city to improve living conditions in homeless encampments instead of trying to tear them down and evict people living there.”

We need to take a step back and help push up the voices of the unhoused and make their voices heard. Every day, countless lives are taken from us too soon because of homelessness. As long as a community sticks together and amplifies and ignites these voices, we can make a huge difference in our society.

It will take much more than the City of Oakland to help change the housing crisis. It will take people from all over the Bay Area to come together and help one another resolve this issue.

So, are you just gonna sit there and watch your people suffer and die?



Electric Vehicles Only Scratch the Surface:

DEBUNKING GREEN CAPITALISM AND REAWAKENING CALIFORNIA'S MASS TRANSIT SYSTEM

BY CHERISH LODICO



Elon Musk has done it again! He has found another way to make sustainability repulsive with the Tesla cybertruck. Despite concerns with the vehicle, it somehow appeals to consumers through the vehicle's stainless-steel exoskeleton and durability enabling it to drive anywhere. However, that's not just because of its high end technology, but because of our conventional thinking of it significantly mitigating climate change.

Society's shift in the use of individual electric vehicles like Tesla shows us that people have got the memo – climate change is real, and it is happening now. Electric vehicles are seen as zero-emission vehicles that can contribute to lowering our greenhouse gasses. If you have the money to afford a starting lease for a Tesla, like the cybertruck whose lease starts at \$899, then congratulations! The people thank you for using your money to take up individual actions and live sustainably, but switching to electric vehicles as a solution is unfortunately, exclusive to the wealthy.

In the Bay Area, about 8.85% of the population were identified to be of poverty status in 2023 by a census reported. With the ongoing housing crisis that makes rent more expensive, and also simultaneously causing the population loss in California, purchasing an electric vehicle is not on the top of the common peoples' priority list. The money that they make from the \$16-\$18 minimum wage in the Bay Area is better spent on rent, food, and other resources increasing in prices. As expensive as they are, its supposed zero-emissions are also questionable. Lithium and Cobalt are both essential to the production of Electric Vehicles. Despite its use in EVs, producing a less amount of CO2 emissions compared to the fossil fuel industry, its environmental impacts cannot be ignored. Larger EVs require larger batteries made with Lithium, and a majority of these metals from their batteries are known to be damaging even in the small quantities that they are disposed of. According to the leading environmental news website Earth.org, "Since a large majority of them are disposed of in landfills, leaks of environmental contaminants are quite frequent. Often, these leaks lead to underground fires, which release even more pollutants into the atmosphere."

Furthermore, big corporations who profit off "sustainable" ways are, to sugarcoat it, not great people. Tesla, who states that they are "[designing] sustainable systems that are massively scalable—resulting in the greatest environmental benefit possible," is the same company run by a CEO who supported the

election of Donald Trump into presidency. Since being elected, he has signed an executive order entitled “putting America first in International Environmental Agreements” which included the country’s withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord that aimed “to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels,” which is the complete opposite of a great environmental benefit.

Now don’t get me wrong – renewable energy is undeniably beneficial in both mitigating and adapting to climate change; but green capitalism, or the idea that capitalism and profit can go hand-in-hand with environmental action and justice, creates false climate solutions. Because we are greenwashed to think that switching to EVs will be the solution, we neglect the true solution to the climate crisis that accommodates the people regardless of class status, which is public transportation.

Students from Daly City expressed concerns about SamTrans, the public transportation agency that runs in the San Mateo County. In an interview with Jerard Del Mar, a senior at Westmoor High School who is also a public transit user, he expressed his experiences taking the bus when going to school, the local library, or hanging out with friends after class. “Buses run late all the time. It is just a little inconvenient, especially when, for example, I miss the bus when I’m trying to go to work and then I take the next bus but then that bus comes five minutes late.” As a high schooler as well, Del Mar notices the cleanliness of the buses, commenting that “I remember last week, I took the bus and it smelled like farts, and then one of my friends pointed that there was poop on one of the seats.”

Our public transportation system is asleep. As such, it leaves our buses – that are meant to serve the low-income, BIPOC, migrant, disabled, youth and students, and elderly communities – overly crowded, dirty, and unsafe.

This brings us to society’s greatest mind boggling question today – how exactly do we reawaken California’s mass transit system? The answer to that question lies within collective action.

In an interview with Montze, a former program coordinator at the Youth Leadership Institute – a California state-wide organization aimed to empower youth voices, they mentioned the work that they had done in the Transportation Equity Allied Movement Coalition or TEAMc. Originally founded to work hand-in-hand with SamTrans in regards to their price hikes, the coalition had worked to attend public SamTrans meetings to prevent its budget cuts that severely affected the youth in San Mateo County. Since then, the coalition had formed innovative ways to learn about the issues public transit users had. In multiple grants that the coalition had at the time, their proposal for a particular grant was to “investigate what’s going on in San Mateo County in regards to public transportation.” What ultimately came from this is Montze’s question of “what is our goal? Is it to move people or is it to move cars?”

We don’t have to reinvent the wheel, but we do have to continuously yet steadily peddle the gas. Instead of following the footsteps of the wealthy, we can instead, learn from the actions that TEAMc took to live a collective and sustainable life, especially for the people in the frontlines of the climate justice movement.



CORRUPT COLLUSION: A HISTORY OF HASHEMITE-ZIONIST COOPERATION

BY NOOR

“Man of peace.” “Instrumental in securing the Gaza ceasefire.” Is this how one describes a dictator intent on forcibly displacing and ethnically cleansing Gazzawis in order to seize control, stripping them of their right to return?

These words of endearment were how the ever-so-beloved King Abdullah II characterized his meeting with President Donald Trump at the White House in mid-February 2025. We should not be surprised.

This performance is the latest episode in the long, cynical history of Hashemite-Zionist collusion — a pact that stands in stark contrast to the region’s widespread anti-Zionist sentiment. This covert alliance has long thrived off of the subjugation of Palestinians — an ideology central to Zionism.

The following history proves collaboration is a defining feature of Jordan’s political strategy and thus should serve as a call to action for Jordanians.

Since its inception, Jordan has strategically positioned itself as a regional peacekeeper. Yet, this century-old façade is underscored with collusion that sets the stage for the occupation and genocide of Palestine. Jordan’s vicious, endless betrayal persists to the modern day — when Palestinians need unwavering solidarity the most, as the illusion of a ceasefire is upended.

The cooperation dates back to 1922, when Jordan’s first King, Abdullah I, offered to Chaim Weizmann, a major player in the World Zionist Organization state recognition of a “national home for the Jewish people.” This recognition was contingent on the Zionist regime’s acceptance of Abdullah as kind of Palestine. While this scheme was not realized, it set a critical precedent —

Jordan’s precarious balancing act between

upholding its identity as a mediator and colluding with

Zionists to advance its own colonial ambitions.

This balancing act is on full display at a secret meeting in 1947 between King Abdullah and Golda Meir, acting head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, on a plan for his annexation of the Arab portion of Palestine. By the end of the meeting, he was prepared to sign a formal, written statement denoting a favorable Zionist response to his annexation of the West Bank and a Hashemite non-aggression pact towards Zionist forces. Publicly, though upon passing of the UN partition plan twelve days later, he deployed his military to shield the Palestinians from the Zionists.

This front continued to be fortified through King Hussein's messy disengagement from the West Bank in 1988. In his "Address to the Nation" announcing the severing of ties, he touted the Kingdom's role as mediator: "Jordan will continue its support for the steadfastness of the Palestinian people." What he did next, nonetheless, contradicted his earlier sentiment completely. Citizenship was soon thereafter restricted for those residing in the West Bank. Not only was this group reclassified as Palestinian, but also reduced to political pawns who were only able to obtain Jordanian passports valid for two years.

Palestinians decoded the Jordanian government's agenda as early as the invasion of King Abdullah's army. Palestinians waged their own guerrilla warfare the next day, refusing entrance of other Arab armies because their supposed "protection" cloaked territorial aspirations. Because Palestinian resistance thwarted Abdullah's goals, Transjordan denounced and squashed their guerilla army warfare. Abdullah fundamentally disregarded the political agency of the Palestinian people because he chased after what would be most politically profitable.

Again at the onset of 1988 Palestinians decrypted the Hashemite's deceit and remained steadfast to the intensifying fire of the First Intifada. The purpose of this resistance movement was to reject attempts by any outside power to subsume and govern them, Hashemite and Zionist included. That attempt, though, was brought into the Hashemite fold for their political gain: to re-emphasize their crucial duty as upholder of regional stability. This Hashemite manipulation of a mass uprising led to the 1993 Oslo Accords, widely-despised for normalizing the existence of the Zionist state.

They need to see the Kingdom for what it truly is: an imperial power that merely pursues what is politically profitable for them at any cost, including their own lives. They are the next sacrificial lambs. Their government is also interested in annihilating their Palestinian identity, nationalizing them to exclusively Jordanians.

They **are** Palestinian. There is no 'us' and 'them.' They must reject our government's imperialistic need to divide and conquer them by creating the illusion of taking the 'inferior' Palestinians under their wing. In fact, the Palestinians in Jordan are under theirs. Palestinian resistance is more than a mere message to Jordanians about the colonial motivations of our government — it should serve as a guide for Jordanian revolution.

Jordanians owe it to their on-the-ground Palestinian family members and to themselves.

The Cost of the Mo

WHY AAPI NEED

BY KAE

“What did you get?” my friend asked after our math teacher handed back our midterms. My heart pounded like a set of out-of-sync drums. Hesitantly, I flipped my test to the front page, revealing a bold “B-” scrawled in red ink at the top. “I thought you were supposed to be good at math,” my friend remarked, baffled—as if I had just defied gravity.

Comments like these may seem harmless, but they are subtle discriminatory remarks known as microaggressions. There is a stereotype that Asians are naturally high achievers, labeled as hardworking, intelligent, and successful. These assumptions that are imposed by society fuel the model minority myth, and it places many Asian individuals into a pressure cooker to conform to unrealistic expectations in their personal lives and the workplace. The rollback of DEI initiatives at companies is setting back the progress that we have made in busting the model minority myth, among other issues within AAPI communities.

One of the most persistent and misleading stereotypes is that all Asian Americans are wealthy, a notion popularized by media representations like *Crazy Rich Asians*. No, we do not all have private jets or own mansions in Singapore. In reality, AAPI communities have the greatest internal wealth gap compared to any other ethnic group in the country. The U.S. Department of Labor reveals that the overall AAPI poverty rate is 13.2 percent, but some AAPI groups have poverty at twice that rate.

To dismantle the harmful misconceptions about AAPI communities, we need to examine how AAPI workers are treated in the workplace. About one in five Asian adults (22%) claimed that they have experienced at least one of three forms of workplace discrimination because of their racial or ethnic identity, according to a study by the Pew Research Center. Moreover, 15% of individuals reported to have been turned down for a job, and 5% said they had been fired due to their race.

Now more than ever before, we need to start rolling up our sleeves to speak out against toxic workplace practices that target marginalized groups like AAPI. This is where diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs come into the picture. DEI is an umbrella term for structures or frameworks that support a company’s mission to foster a workplace environment that values diversity, equity, and inclusivity. Unfortunately, prominent companies such as Amazon, Target, and Meta have publicly announced that they are rolling back DEI programs under the new administration. The action of cutting DEI programs in the workplace sends a message to AAPI workers that their companies do not value their contributions. Due to the model minority myth, AAPI workers are already assumed to be exceptional and free of problems in the workplace. Cutting down on DEI programs will only exacerbate the underlying issues that many AAPI workers face and strengthen the bamboo ceiling.

*Stereotypes
do not
define who
I am*



del Minority Myth

COMMUNITIES

DEI

LYN TAN



The impromptu strike-down of DEI programs is threatening not only workers but also future generations. AAPI youth begin to experience the weight of becoming a model minority and adhering to ridiculous expectations at a young age and during their most formative years.

I asked Veda, a high school student who identifies as AAPI, how she felt growing up in an Asian household, and she shared, “There are so many expectations and a higher standard compared to others. You have to be academically successful, really smart, and get all A’s, so it’s a lot of pressure.”

When I asked Laasya, another AAPI high school student, she said, “I definitely play into the model minority myth a lot, but I also see how others in my community who don’t fit the stereotype can be put down.”

The experience of being constantly compared to your peers growing up can be damaging to one’s well-being and pave a path for insecurity and anxiety for the future. While maintaining DEI programs will not mend the intricate scars of the noxious expectations put on AAPI youth, it is a powerful stride toward setting a warm tone in the workplace for groups like AAPI. Protecting the DEI initiatives at companies will also safeguard the professional trajectories that AAPI youth set out in the future.

Although the current political climate will make preserving the initiatives at companies challenging, we need to continue demanding attention and advocating for the communities that are vulnerable right now. As individuals, we can join movements and organizations to combine forces—such as Make Us Visible, a non-profit organization that empowers communities to champion changes in K-12 curricula to represent the hidden narratives of Asian Americans.

Co-directors of the Make Us Visible (MUV) New York chapter, Helen S. Singson and Christine Huang shared how MUV New York engages mainly in grassroots activism through a variety of initiatives like distributing a coloring book featuring Asian American futures and communities to target audiences across the nation.

According to Helen, “Christine and I make every effort to be in our children’s classrooms as much as possible. Since they’re still in elementary school, we can partner with teachers to ensure they have the right resources.”

All in all, it is important to remind ourselves that we need to stick together throughout these difficult times that are testing our patience and endurance. As Laasya shared, “I hope we recognize the importance of solidarity as people of color in America. It’s easy to be divided into groups or to see others as better or worse, but understanding solidarity is key to dismantling systemic structures.”

VOICES OF THE FIRST

THIS YEAR, THIRD YEAR FELLOWS CLARISSA WING AND ADAMARI COTA HAVE EMBARKED ON A SPECIAL PROJECT IN A BRAND NEW MEDIUM: FILMMAKING

WORKING WITH EMMY AWARD WINNING FILMMAKER, SEBASTIÁN DÍAZ AS THEIR MENTOR, THEY ARE WORKING ON A DOCUMENTARY ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE OF

**FIRST GENERATION
COLLEGE STUDENTS AT
UC BERKELEY.**

by CLARISSA WING &
ADAMARI COTA



BEYOND *the broken dream*

WELCOME TO “BEYOND THE BROKEN DREAM,” A CALIFORNIA-FOCUSED PODCAST ABOUT THE BETRAYAL OF DESIRES FOR ECONOMIC SECURITY AND THE HOPE THAT REMAINS DESPITE IT...



What is yli?

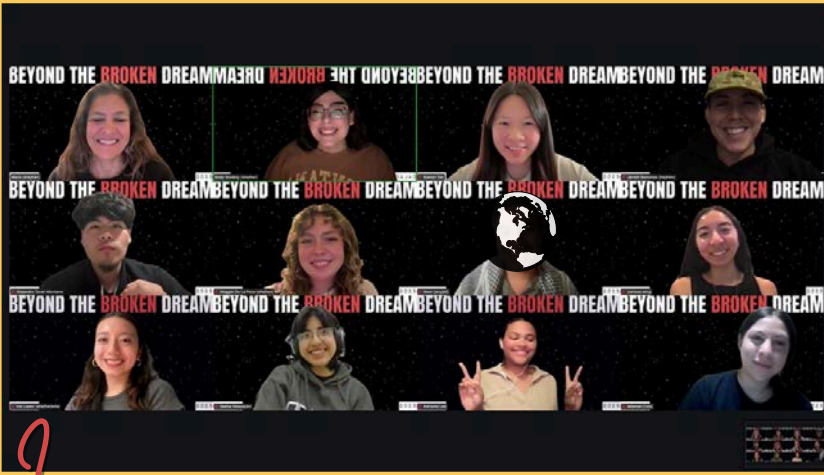
Youth Leadership Institute brings young people together and equips them to lead positive social change within their communities. We achieve this by **listening to their ideas**, **sharpening their skills and talents**, and **providing them with effective training tools and resources** to make their voices heard.

Where are our programs based?

- 📍 (6) Marin
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- 📍 (8) Merced
- 📍 (5) Madera
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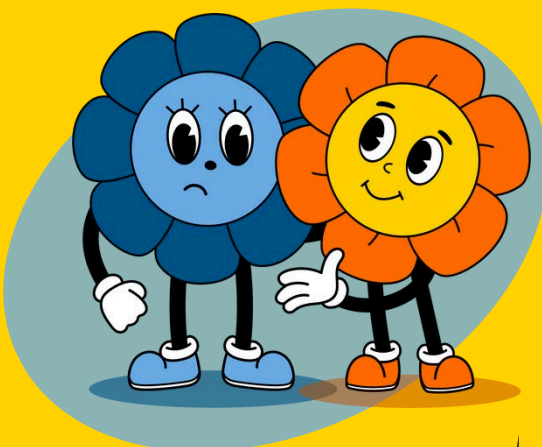


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You are never a bother

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To speak to a caring, trained counselor, call or text any of these numbers:

Call or text 988, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to reach the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

Call Teen Line at 1-800-852-8336 (6 PM-10 PM PT) or text TEEN to 839863 (6 PM-9 PM PT).