

WHY WE SHOULD CELEBRATE ASIAN AMERICAN MONTH

By Grace Song

Contradiction, contradiction, contradiction. Time after time, the Asian American growing up in the United States has had to endure, relentlessly and without cease, contradiction after contradiction. Living in the “melting pot” of America, as it has been traditionally referred to and cleverly coined, various ethnic groups have emerged and joined the American population.

Despite the diversity of people the United States has provided a haven and ultimately a home to, there exist still traditional and governing typical “American” physical characteristics. Those stereotypical, generalized, and somewhat prejudiced qualities may include blonde/brown hair, blue/hazel eyes sunk into the face to create depth and dimension, fold in the eyelids, and a prominent nose with an elevated nose bridge.

Being immersed in the popular American culture and only knowing that as the way of life, it has been extremely difficult for the Asian American adolescent to have a secure understanding and a complete and total acceptance on oneself. On one hand, the obvious Asian features have acted as a barrier to the Asian American from being completely accepted fully as an “American.” On the other hand, having been raised in America and its pop culture, the authentic and pure Asian experience, identity, and perhaps even the ability to speak the languages has been lost. The Asian American looks Asian but feels American. To the Asian community, s/he is an American. But to the Caucasian American, s/he is visibly Asian.

Asian American Awareness Month is vital not only in our own respective communities but further into the outer sphere of our nation as a whole. The American public needs to be educated about the various ethnic groups that co-exist in this “melting pot” so as to instill a mutual respect for each other.

However, most importantly, I firmly believe that the issue of why Asian American Awareness should be promoted is more for the Asian American than anyone or anything else. It will provide an opportunity for the divided Asian American to find her/ his true identity. The population of Asian Americans living in the United States is growing steadily and thus, it is an increasingly prevalent issue that needs to be addressed as promptly and as efficiently as possible.

To the average, clueless, and ignorant Caucasian American, Asian American may be viewed honestly and innocently, without malicious or evil intent, as “all the same.” Asian Americans may all look the same to some Americans and therefore are not respected and appreciated for the rich and beautiful tapestry of numerous nationalities and customs within the Asian American community. Thus, there is a dire need for the Asian American Awareness Month to be utilized and taken advantage of to educate and enlighten fellow unaware and unknowledgeable Americans of the differences and the uniqueness of the different Asian American nationalities.

In addition, there may be preconceived notions or wrong stereotypes of Asian Americans living in the United States that Americans may have. All these and so much more can and will be cleared up so long as Asian American Awareness Month is utilized to its full potential in promotion and education.

Perhaps the best and key factor in the importance of celebrating Asian American Awareness Month is for the sake of the Asian American youth currently living in the United States in a state of confusion. There is an identity crisis among the Asian American adolescents; they do not know for sure who they are - if in fact they are Asians or Americans. "Only her skin and her hair are Chinese. Inside - she is all American-made" (Amy Tan). Much of this is credited to the fact that their inner selves are composed of American values and beliefs. However, their outer selves cannot be ever more Asian. They become so caught up and involved in living their "American" lives and playing by the "American" societal rules that they become strangers to themselves and to their families. Their American pop culture has swallowed the Asian American youth in and when they are regurgitated, they are not able to comprehend their self-worth, self-identity, and thus, lack in self-confidence.

Celebrating Asian American Awareness Month will be a step in helping these lost youths find their way back to themselves. This month can be a stepping stone to their individual journeys to their roots and to their human cores. They will be one day closer to the summit of reaching the peak of destination that they are neither "American" nor "Asian" but that they are both and that they can be both - Asian American.