

Episode 40: AAPI at Cornell, Part I
Released on May 14, 2021

[00:00:00.36] TORAL PATEL: The opinions expressed by the guests and contributors of this podcast are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Cornell University or its employees.

[00:00:11.92] Welcome to the Inclusive Excellence Podcast. May is Asian and Pacific American Heritage Month, a month that honors and celebrates Asian American and Pacific Islander identity-- also known as AAPI. While there are many events that recognize this special month, it is important to acknowledge that this time feels different. The wave of anti-Asian violence and racism that has negatively impacted the community is something that cannot be dismissed.

[00:00:41.85] Through this series called AAPI at Cornell, you will hear the stories of Cornell staff members in their authentic voice, celebrating their heritage, and the joys of being Asian and Pacific Islander, while also naming the very real concerns that they experience in this moment. My name is Toral Patel.

[00:01:00.03] ANTHONY SIS: My name is Anthony Sis.

[00:01:01.62] TORAL PATEL: And you are listening to AAPI at Cornell. Our series begins with part one of a two-part conversation with four amazing staff members-- Perdita Das-Humphrey, Jamie Hom, Aaron King, and Carolyn Chow.

[00:01:19.69] Hello, everyone. Thank you for joining us today. My name is Toral Patel, and I use she/her/hers pronouns. Today, I'm very excited to welcome an amazing group of Cornell colleagues who will be sharing their stories as we celebrate AAPI Heritage Month. Let's start with some introductions. Carolyn, do you want to share your name, pronouns, your role at Cornell, and some of your salient identities.

[00:01:40.69] CAROLYN CHOW: Sure. Hi, everybody. My name is Carolyn Chow. My pronouns are she, her, and hers. I am the staff recruiter at the College of Veterinary Medicine. I'm also the inclusion program lead. My salient identities are that I am Chinese American. I identify as lesbian, married to a woman. And I have an invisible disability.

[00:02:04.26] PERDITA DAS-HUMPHREY: Hi, everyone. My name is Perdita Das-Humphrey. I use she/her/hers pronouns. I am the house assistant dean of Hans Bethe House here on West Campus, overseeing a living learning community of sophomores. And I've been at Cornell about four and a half years now. And some of my salient identities are I am Bangladeshi American. I'm a first-generation immigrant. I just am a naturalized US citizen. I am heterosexual, cisgendered female, identify as a woman, and I'm married to a white American man.

[00:02:41.26] AARON KING: Hello. Hello. Aaron King. Pronouns he/him. I work on the West Campus House system, as well. House Assistant Dean for William Keeton House. And identities-- many, many identities. I identify as Asian American, Korean American, transracial adoptee. I think my growing up in the south, that's kind of an identity. First-

Episode 40: AAPI at Cornell, Part I
Released on May 14, 2021

gen college graduate in interracial marriage, and with multiracial children as well. So all of those come into play. And yes, cisgender man identified.

[00:03:16.41] TORAL PATEL: Perfect. Jamie.

[00:03:18.12] JAMIE HOM: Yeah, hi, my name's Jamie Hom. My pronouns are she, her, hers. My role at Cornell is I'm the assistant director in New Student Programs. So that is, our orientation and Tatkon Center falls under that. And my salient identities, I would say, is I'm Asian American, Chinese American, specifically, third generation, a woman, and cisgender.

[00:03:39.38] TORAL PATEL: Perfect. Thank you. Thank you all for being here. So my first question to all of you is just, as we celebrate AAPI Heritage Month, how has each of your heritages shaped the person that you are today?

[00:03:50.21] JAMIE HOM: Obviously, like my heritage, I identify as Chinese American, but I grew up really-- I would say it's interesting because I grew up in a very white, predominantly white, town. I was kind of the only Chinese, just Asian, Asian American representative in my school from K-12. Counting my brother and sister, there was like three of us. That's it.

[00:04:12.45] So I would say I was pretty isolated. I did have my family in Brooklyn that we would visit for holidays or over weekends. But I would say, my heritage, just really understanding my Asian American identity was pretty isolating. And I didn't really fully grasp it, I feel, until I had higher education. And then started taking race ethnicity classes and getting involved in our Asian American association, where I started to learn about that identity more, and the history of the AAPI community in the United States.

[00:04:49.11] PERDITA DAS-HUMPHREY: I can continue. My experience is, honestly, almost the complete opposite of it. So I grew up in Bangladesh for the first 20 years of my life. And I've been living in the US for 13 years. So at this point in my life, I've still lived in Bangladesh more than I've lived in the United States. So that has been really interesting.

[00:05:07.93] I do feel that I grew up-- as when you grow up in a different country-- you grow up pretty homogeneous. So the idea that I could be anything other than Bangladeshi wasn't something that-- I'm Bangladeshi, I live in Bangladesh. That's just who I am. So suddenly becoming an other, after moving here and then just realizing how much of the values that I grew up with are ingrained in me, so that was fairly interesting.

[00:05:33.78] And the other piece-- even growing up in Bangladesh, I feel like I kind of had an othering experience in a different way. So I grew up Hindu in a majority Muslim-dominated country. So that was a small group. There's a small percentage of us who are Hindu. In a way, I would always say that I had two sets of celebrations growing up.

So I celebrated with my Muslim friends. I fasted during Ramadan. And then they joined me for all of the Hindu celebrations.

[00:06:03.63] So religion played-- even though I'm not religious. I think it just played a big part of how I understood the world, and that just kind of did a 360 since I came here, because once I moved to the US, my race really shaped who I was, and not necessarily my religion. Of course, I miss the traditions and miss the food and all of that stuff. But I feel like there has never been a point in my life, whether growing up in Bangladesh or here, where I've not been part of some sort of a minoritized identity. And I've been thinking about that a while, especially in the last year or so.

[00:06:40.62] CAROLYN CHOW: Thanks so much for sharing all this, Perdita and Jamie. And Aaron, I can't wait to hear from you. But yeah, Jamie, when you were speaking, I felt like what I grew up with was sort of very similar. And what's interesting is, I think generationally-- so it's interesting because my parents came from China and then in Taiwan to the US actually through Cornell, which is amazing because I think, gosh, I was born American because of Cornell, which is just amazing to think about. Now I work there, which is amazing.

[00:07:13.39] But also just that they came in the early '60s, and they graduated from the business school with MBAs. And we ended up moving to central New Jersey in a predominately white town and county. And so I have to say, because it was like the early '70s that I was growing up in, the challenges that we encountered as the other, an other kind of family, was just really confusing, actually, because I think what ended up happening was my oldest brother really ran into issues just in kindergarten. I mean, my parents could immediately tell his behavior was very different when he went to school and would come home.

[00:07:53.61] And so my parents, I think, in order to protect us, they really tried to just encourage us to explore the space and just be American. And to the point that, I think, what ended up happening, unfortunately, is my middle brother and I do not speak Mandarin. We grew up very much, I think, just trying to navigate, like ignoring the Chinese aspect of our identities to survive in the town that we were in and in the educational system because, for my parents, the education was everything. And they were like, as long as you succeed academically, you'll be fine.

[00:08:33.30] But I think that that was just an interesting time in the early '70s and '80s, trying to grow up and make sense of it because it just really-- I never felt like-- obviously, I did not grow up white and I was in a predominantly white neighborhood. And it wasn't until I think I got to college and then to grad school that I was like, this is what diversity looks like. And my entire educational experience was so different.

[00:08:58.40] But as a grown-up, as an adult, there was just a lot of confusion. Like, can I celebrate anything from my background? And I just didn't even know. I just, literally, over the weekend, asked my mom about Qingming. I was like, do we celebrate this? Because I attended the event that we did a couple of weeks ago, talking about it. And

so it's just been an interesting process to try to figure out. No, actually it's not a part of my identity that I should ignore or say I'm American so that means the Chinese part of me is gone. So I think as an adult, I've really tried to learn more and become a little bit more aware and, I don't know, engage a little bit more in my actual Chinese identity.

[00:09:46.38] TORAL PATEL: Yeah. Aaron, how has your heritage shaped you?

[00:09:49.48] AARON KING: Oh, all right. How much time do we have? Yes, thank you. Thank you. Wow, all of that resonates so much. For me, let me give the context. I just watched Minari last night, and this little boy who grew up in Arkansas, I'm like, oh, my goodness, that is me, minus the Asian family around me because I was adopted.

[00:10:17.72] But these scenes of the tractor, the church, all of this, growing up that resonated. And in so thinking about what was mentioned, Carolyn, you mentioned about some of the-- and Jamie, too-- that growing up in mostly white area population, the assimilation was very strong. And yes, any children growing up you have to adapt to people around you, but this is different.

[00:10:48.24] This is you fit into everything for a different reason than just the pure norms. And that-- and now, I remember the first time. I always identified as Asian, but that was externally. Of course I'm Asian, because that's what people see. But it wasn't until even after college because even in my undergrad in Arkansas, I remember there about four other Asian men who we all got confused with each other. People would call us by other folks' names.

[00:11:25.29] And this happened over and over again. And it wasn't until grad school that I identified as Asian American, and so this was something that I, from the inside, was owning. And it wasn't until then that I remember walking in New York City, a moment where I was like, wow, I'm just an individual person. That was a powerful moment. I wasn't the Asian dude in the room. I wasn't the Asian who gets confused with everyone else.

[00:11:56.53] I mean, you might get confused in New York City, but you are an individual. And that was powerful. I don't know how to even describe that. But then also thinking about these spaces, like Cornell, these sort of spaces, then it starts to intersect a lot with class for me. And sometimes I feel class as strongly, if not more than race, because people use the term liminal space for adoptees. I feel like being in these elite spaces, I'm removed from my home and my roots in Arkansas and that working class.

[00:12:34.24] But that space looks nothing like me. And if I just go back there, unless I knew the people, I'm not connected to that in the same way that I used to feel like it. So again, I feel like I'm just swimming a lot.

[00:12:49.51] TORAL PATEL: Yeah. It's funny because everything that-- there are bits and pieces that each of you shared that resonate with me as well. So I moved to the states when I was about nine-- oldest of three siblings with my parents. And slightly

different from-- one of the things that kind of really impacted me was that none of us could speak English, including my parents. As the oldest child, as I learned, there was a lot of things that I had to teach my parents because they weren't in school, so they weren't integrated in the culture to be able to pick up on that kind of stuff.

[00:13:19.19] And so, same with Jamie and Carolyn and Aaron, I don't know if this is a trend or something, but I also moved from India to Vermont, where I was one of the only. My brother and my sister and myself. There was this the three of us as the only minorities in the entire school system. And so, again, a lot of things that you said resonated with me.

[00:13:37.30] And I distinctly remember this one thing that when I learned, one, is because of the time of the year when we moved here and because we couldn't speak English, I started a grade lower than I should have for my age. And so I graduated pretty much as the oldest person in my class because I was 19 and 1/2 when I graduated high school. So that has always-- for me, it's been that-- and so I finished college in three years because I had to catch up to everybody else.

[00:14:00.46] So that was one thing that stuck with me. But two, the other thing is I distinctly remember when I was in the second and third grade and when learning to write in cursive, I taught my mom how to sign her name because she couldn't sign her name. Every time she signed my report card, she would print, block print, her letters, her initials, and that's how she would sign our report cards. And so that's the one thing that, to this day, my mother's signature looks like what I taught her in third grade. My signature has evolved since then because of how much writing I've done, but my mom hasn't.

[00:14:35.39] And so to this day, she still has her signature exactly the same as what I taught her to do in the third grade. So I would come home and we would practice her letters, and that's how she is able to sign her name in cursive. And so I'm so excited to hear all of you talk about some of your family as you migrated to this country and what's happened. Can you talk a little bit about maybe some of the traditions that are important to you? Traditions that you celebrate, whether they're traditionally from your heritage or not? Just some personal traditions. Jamie, do you want to start this time?

[00:15:07.27] JAMIE HOM: Yeah, I can start off again here. Yeah, so I think the traditions that pop up in my mind always revolves around food. I think that's how growing up my parents really connected me to my Chinese American identity because, otherwise, I don't speak the language. My parents grew up bilingual in New York City, in Brooklyn. They have, I guess, the neighborhoods in Brooklyn on 8th Avenue that is the Chinese community down there. So they kind of grew up in that space.

[00:15:37.84] Then they moved upstate. So I kind of grew up upstate-- as I mentioned before, really isolated in my identity. And my parents didn't teach me the language. I guess that's that conversation we've been having about like assimilation, just to fit in. So I didn't speak the language. I did sort of learn Mandarin when I was in college, but

otherwise, I would say growing up, a lot of my traditions evolved around food-- how that was really integrated in different holidays.

[00:16:06.94] One tradition for me that always sticks on my mind is Christmas morning. For breakfast, we have dim sum, which that is our tradition. They were not religious. We kind of celebrate Christmas based on present-giving, which I think was very Americanized and a way of my parents allowing my siblings and I to have that American childhood, I guess. So yeah, but still really food-wise, had the dim sum breakfast, brunch during Christmas.

[00:16:35.05] Thanksgiving we celebrated that with you have all your traditional Thanksgiving food. But there was also the Chinese lo mein there too. So just sort of very food-wise, I guess really bonded my family together and need to understand and have a piece of, I guess, my Chinese heritage through food, whether it was visiting my grandparents in Brooklyn and having my grandma's homecooked food and food that she taught my mom how to cook. So yeah, so even, I guess, some other traditions, but food is like every other day, besides pizza and spaghetti night.

[00:17:10.87] So I had your Chinese cuisine dishes and those evenings. So yeah, very food-related. Now I'm hungry.

[00:17:19.20] [LAUGHTER]

[00:17:20.07] PERDITA DAS-HUMPHREY: I was going to say that is making me hungry. And I super resonated with that, Jamie, because everything in the Das-Humphrey household just revolves around food. A little background-- I have an older sister who lives in Chicago. She is 14 years older than me, and she came to the US when she was in college. So she's been in the US for a while.

[00:17:41.62] And it's actually through her that we all emigrated. And it took a while. So it just so happened, by the time I became an international student to go to college, is when my parents immigration came through. So they moved to Chicago the same year I moved to Connecticut for school. So it just happened at the same time.

[00:17:59.47] And the one thing, through the many ups and downs, that kind of kept us together was food. Now, being in Chicago, they have a lot more access to traditional Bengali ingredients than I do up here in upstate New York in the middle of nowhere sometimes. But that also means that pre-COVID, whenever I choose to visit Chicago, the TSA officer at O'Hare Airport always had a fun surprise because my suitcase would be packed with chili powder and homemade garam masala and cumin.

[00:18:31.51] And my pantry here still smells of that, so that for me is home. And some of the traditions, my husband and I are really good about celebrating, even if it's just the two of us, taking some moments to celebrate some of the traditional holidays, like FaceTiming my parents and my sister and her family. And some of them are Bengali New Year, which is our Bangladeshi new year, which is April 14. Every year, Durga

Episode 40: AAPI at Cornell, Part I
Released on May 14, 2021

Puja, which is this big Hindu festival that happens around October, September, depending on the lunar calendar.

[00:19:03.32] And as I said, growing up I still celebrate Eid. I still fast when I can. I guess, just something that is kind of a way that I understood my friends and their culture, having been one of the two Hindu students. I really assimilated into their traditions. I still carry that with me.

[00:19:22.37] And then some of our adopted traditions here are also Thanksgiving and Christmas, where in addition to the American cuisine, we always have making biryani or something that is from home. So Christmas dinner, there is a goose and then there is biryani, and it's fun. And I love it. But yeah, we try to-- during this pandemic, especially, I felt that my husband and I tried, even if it's just the two of us, to take a moment and cook and celebrate. And the easiest way to celebrate has been through food. So I think we resonated with that.

[00:19:55.12] CAROLYN CHOW: It's so interesting listening to all of you, and just to think back on the kind of confusion that I felt growing up. My parents, I think, also tried to do the whole bring in some Chinese traditions like Lunar New Year and moon cakes. But it was interesting because my dad would always bring home the moon cakes, and he would just say, this is something that we did in China. And then that was it.

[00:20:23.83] It wasn't like, oh, this was the meaning of the message that's in the cake, or like, wow, because we didn't have a lot of conversations about-- he was actually orphaned during the Japanese invasion of China. And so that greatly influenced, I think, some of his like-- I didn't find out so much about my dad until he passed away. So it's sort of like when he passed away, I was like, what do we do? How do we do this as a family?

[00:20:53.90] And because he was orphaned very young, he had this real intense attachment to family and family get-togethers. So because he was orphaned, we only had our maternal, my mom's, brothers and sisters and cousins that all eventually came to the States as well. And so I remember a lot of my dad just driving us to Maryland, to Rhode Island, to everywhere where my cousins and aunts and uncles were because he really, really, really wanted us to spend time with our families and to be with the family.

[00:21:29.57] But it was never really talked about in the context of, we are a Chinese family, and this is what this means. And so I just loved that conversation about Thanksgiving, which is actually my favorite holiday because of the food. But also, when I think about my uncle, before the pandemic, had everybody over to his house. And his wife is Jewish. I think most of my cousins, myself included, are married interracially.

[00:21:58.48] And so that's something that I think over the last couple of decades, there's this sort of mishmash of, some culturally relevant celebrations and then somewhere it's like, I have no idea. We have one of those plants that only blooms once a year and at night. And we have that plant, actually-- we have a bunch of cuttings from

it like from the original when my grandparents fled China with my mom and her family, and they saved this cutting. And now all of us in the family have cuttings from that plant.

[00:22:36.16] And it's so funny because I'm like, I totally try to get it to bloom, and I have no idea why. I just need to really kind of-- so it's important to me because I grew up with that. But as I learn more of about our family's history and about Chinese history specifically, it is becoming more meaningful because I think as I get older or as I grow more comfortable with my identities, the meaning is definitely something that we've been trying to really embed in our lives.

[00:23:08.78] My wife is super-- she's Caucasian. And she actually grew up right around Cornell, which is why we came back here. And it's interesting because every Christmas day, our thing is we make dumplings, all day long. And it wasn't anything that my family did normally or regularly. It's just something that we were like, no, this is our special Christmas tradition. This is what we're going to do. And now it's funny because her family in this area also just comes over to our house and we do this big giant dumpling baking project, and it's a great way to share it with her family as well.

[00:23:46.16] AARON KING: Yeah, I feel like we could do an entire session just on food. So let me chime in briefly on that. Yeah, hungry as well. I mean, a lot of what I grew up with in the South was-- I mean, thinking of traditions and stuff-- it was a Christmas, Easter service, those sort of presents, all of that cultural sort of piece. And I remember just thinking about the food piece. Whenever I was adopted, I think that my family had take me to a Korean place and like, oh, want you to try this not too long after I've been over here.

[00:24:24.41] And then maybe they did it at a future point and I just wasn't about it, that I couldn't eat the hot stuff like I used to could, things like that. So maybe my taste buds adjusted a bit. But I remember the next time that I had Korean food, I believe it was again in grad school when I was in New York City, and I didn't know-- no, it was actually in high school. And I visited there. And I didn't know what to do with it because I was used to just Chinese buffets. And here's all the food. It tastes-- it goes to the palate of Americanized palate.

[00:25:02.48] But here's all these little dishes, and where's all my food at? And then, I'm like, I need an abundance. That's my dietary restriction, is a small amount. I want a lot of food. But then later on, whenever I did go back and I met some folks in the city who-- and we went to a Korean spot in K-town-- and actually showed me, oh, this? That's Bonchon where you eat this stuff in the beginning, and then it can go along with your main meal and all of that.

[00:25:35.67] But I didn't even know. So just being introduced to something that would have been part of my culture and eating some of the kimchi is like, I don't know this, but it's familiar. And just enjoying that time together over this meal. And then, actually in California, having some friends-- I remember this distinctly. They came over. They brought their portable grills into our apartment. And we actually did a Korean barbecue

in the apartment. And that was such a moment because it was kind of like, hey, let's do some burgers on the grill outside that I'm used to, just a different version of this.

[00:26:17.00] It's just, hey, come over. Let's have some food. But that was amazing. We aren't going out to some Korean barbecue restaurant. So that was interesting on one side. But then I remember here at Cornell, went to eat in a dining hall, and on the menu it had Arkansas chocolate gravy and biscuits on the menu. And I actually remember having this growing up. And I don't know if y'all are familiar with this or if that just sounds really weird to you.

[00:26:43.61] And so I got the chef, and I was like, hey, I didn't know if this was like a regional thing or a state thing. I was like, that's cool, where did you get this recipe, et cetera. But he asked me, what did you think? But it was such a weird thing that I was me, as Asian American, here was representing for the taste of Arkansas, even though I grew up there. But it was just a weird kind of switch of roles. So a lot of those types of stories resonate for me.

[00:27:13.82] TORAL PATEL: Yeah. Yeah, for me, food is big, too. I just remember that growing up where I grew up-- like I said, I grew up in Vermont-- and to this day I say some of my best friends are still from there. But it is a predominantly white area where I grew up. And I distinctly remember telling my mom that I wasn't going to take Indian food to school because whether it was the smell or the look of it or whatever it was, I didn't want anybody to say anything about it.

[00:27:41.45] And it's so funny because I remember that, and then my kids-- they're 12 years old-- and so they're at that age where their friends' opinions matter quite a bit. My son could care less about anybody's opinion. And I'm so proud of that. I'm proud of myself as the mom. I'm proud of him as a kid. He brings Indian food to school every day. And as long as it's his favorite food, he does not care, to the point where he's just like, this is so yummy. And all the teachers have told me that they actually go to see what he brought for lunch.

[00:28:16.10] And then I remember in kindergarten, I had a parent come up to me and said, whatever your son brings to school for lunch is what my daughter wants to eat because your son raves about his food so much that my daughter, that's the only thing she wants. And I was like, I don't think she can handle the spiciness because it's spicy food. And she was like, I don't care. My daughter doesn't want to bring anything else that I would bring, that I'd pack for her. She wants what your son is eating because of how much your son raves about the food that he brings to school.

[00:28:45.77] So again, it's a proud moment for me that I am so glad that it's completely the opposite of how I reacted when I was in school compared to my son. But my daughter's still a little iffy about what she'll bring. But I think it's just because she's picky about her food. But my son, just as long as he loves it, he does not care for anybody's opinion. And I love it. I love every second of it.

[00:29:06.83] So let me just move on to our next question. And so what does it mean for you to have the celebratory month, in terms of just celebrating all of our heritages, all the different heritages that make up AAPI?

[00:29:17.63] PERDITA DAS-HUMPHREY: For me, I've spent most of my time in the United States defending that I am Asian, that it's to be part of this celebration. I think this is the first time in my 13 years in the United States that I'm part of something that's celebrating the AAPI Heritage. And I think for me, I was just realizing that.

[00:29:42.17] I've attended spaces like this, but I don't think I've ever felt celebrated for the way I'm feeling right now. When you see me, I think I appear as someone who is, let's say, traditionally from India. So when I first moved here from Bangladesh, a lot was like, oh, you're Indian. And I was very specific about correcting folks, even though it was uncomfortable because Bangladesh has such a rich history.

[00:30:09.38] My parents lived through the liberation war. It's so recent. We're a fairly new country. And to be called by our country's name was such a big deal. So I spent so much time telling people, I am Bangladeshi, not Indian. We're neighbors, and I have nothing against-- it's great, let's celebrate. But I would like for you to acknowledge that I'm Bangladeshi. And I think the reason why I had to because every time I would say, I am Bangladeshi, 9 times out of 10 someone would say, oh, it's the same thing.

[00:30:39.48] And then there was that big conversation about, no, it's not the same thing. And then it became like this-- another aspect of it was this idea of being Asian. For the longest time-- this has disappeared on most forms now. But for the longest time, on the demographic box on any form, there was the Asian check mark, and then there was the Indian subcontinent checkbox.

[00:31:03.38] And if I would check both, I would get that push back of, you can only choose one. And I'm like, but I'm both. I'm from that subcontinent area-- because Bangladesh would be spelled out in what Indian subcontinent meant-- and I'm Asian. If you pull up a map, it's in Asia. So that was such a big part of just me assimilating here into the US, is sometimes felt like I was giving folks mixed signals.

[00:31:28.43] But then I also don't think I'm responsible for that because I get to celebrate my heritage anyway I want. And I say that because in school, I was a big participant of club India, and I was in the South Asian council. And there wasn't a Bangladeshi club, so I tried to open a Bangladeshi club, and all of that stuff. I did everything. And all I kind of just wanted was this acknowledgment that we are not monolithic as a culture, and as an individual, I am just not one thing. I'm multiple things. And I can be celebrated for everything I'm bringing to the table.

[00:32:03.96] So I think just to have this recognition, which I honestly didn't get before coming to Cornell-- I'll be really honest. I stepped into Cornell, and there is an Asian & Asian American Center, and there are people who look like me. And then there are students who come to me and say, you don't know what it means for me to see

Episode 40: AAPI at Cornell, Part I
Released on May 14, 2021

someone in your role who looks like me. So having that moment here, and then kind of it all coming into this one space of, yes, we are not just about this month, and it feels great to-- I feel safe. I think that's the way I can put it.

[00:32:35.92] JAMIE HOM: I don't know how to add on to that. But I would say definitely, for me to hear about Asian American, Pacific Islander Heritage Month, it is definitely about celebration. I wish it was, as you mentioned, like it's not just like one month. I wish as a human being I'm Asian all the time and love to celebrate that every single 365 days of the year. That definitely, to have a month and to actually see it, and to have people putting events and creating spaces for us to have these dialogues, it's wonderful and empowering and beautiful.

[00:33:10.00] And for me, that word "celebration" is how I kind of see this month and to be able to share with others my identity and part of who I am. I would say it's specifically in different spaces because I feel like specifically AAPI Heritage Month, I did not know it even existed growing up until I got into higher education. And that is where my club organizations were putting on events. You saw it highlighted in the events school, like newsletters and whatnot, and then the same here in Cornell.

[00:33:44.71] So I'm kind of just seeing a pattern. It just seems to be in these higher education spaces, I would say now with social media being a huge thing-- I was recently scrolling on May 1, several days ago, on Instagram, and just seeing it really pop up and people sharing it in their story. Whether it was just influencers I follow or different AAPI champions. Just seeing them post stories, news articles, infographics just to celebrate AAPI.

[00:34:16.04] So I feel for me, growing up as a '90s early 2000s child, it wasn't really a thing until I got into higher education spaces. And then now, with social media, seeing it more prominently around. So that makes me, I guess, definitely proud of my Chinese American background.

[00:34:34.96] And just to kind of celebrate it despite all the hardships that we experience, personally for me, growing up and experiencing racism, and sifting through that racism, and that trauma that comes with it. But then at the same time just celebrating who I am as an individual, and my heritage of my grandparents coming here to the United States and raising my parents, and my parents raising my siblings. So yeah. Just beautiful.

[00:35:06.53] CAROLYN CHOW: I also-- I love the celebratory aspect of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month because what doesn't get taught or acknowledged in a lot of history classes-- or when we were growing up, or at least when I was growing up here in the '80s and '90s and in school, there was not really anything about Asian history at all. And especially Asian history in the US. So I think there's the celebratory aspect. And then there's also that sort of-- for myself.

Episode 40: AAPI at Cornell, Part I
Released on May 14, 2021

[00:35:37.07] And I think just really wanting to engage in that space of like why is this the way it is, or what came before me? When I think about my parents and all of the people that came before me that really fought for-- even, you can't say like, oh, it wasn't like, you know, my parents were activists. But they definitely, I think, they went along with, how do you have your kids survive in this culture, because we know they're going to have a better life for it.

[00:36:11.17] And at the same time, there's all these sacrifices. And then the trauma of the racism. I grew up super confused because both of my parents graduated from Cornell, which I knew was like, that's a big deal. Oh my gosh, it's Ivy League. And it was Cornell was very huge in our family and as the pinnacle of where you should go for college and education.

[00:36:34.42] Yet, because they had such thick accents, I watched people treat my parents as if they were dumb. As if they were stupid. Or people would get just really impatient with my parents. And it was interesting because that, growing up as a child, is very confusing, and I was a little embarrassed by it. And kind of like, oh no, I can't separate myself from this. And making sure that when I was hearing English, and speaking, that I became very aware of my diction and how I write.

[00:37:09.89] So with Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, I think some of that, for myself, in the past couple of years, it's really been about trying to learn about the history of-- every time I think, when something happens to me-- even moving here from Seattle, I moved here three years ago, it was like a completely different experience. And it's just interesting because every time I think, that really stunk that that person just said that to me at the local grocery store, and then I think back to the history, and I'm like, that was nothing compared to the systematic elimination of Asians being able to even come into the US. Or just no justice for Vincent Chin being killed because of the reaction to the Japanese car success in the '80s.

[00:38:01.14] So I think it's good both for celebration and also that reflection and reminder that as hard as I might think I have it in the moment, I really honor the people who, unfortunately, suffered so much before, and didn't have the opportunities that I've had. So I've been very fortunate to also be able to say, gosh, I have been given a lot of opportunities to shine in ways that I think, in previous generations, just wasn't exactly the case.

[00:38:29.58] And I do have to say, I know I'm not trying to be like, here at Cornell-- But yeah, Cornell, because I think Cornell has historically been so-- The whole reason my parents could even come to the US was through graduate school because Cornell opened its doors to international students in ways that just changed the entire trajectory of my entire family. So organizations like Cornell, and environments like Cornell that really say no, this is, difference in thought is really valued, is something that I have just really come to appreciate.

Episode 40: AAPI at Cornell, Part I
Released on May 14, 2021

[00:39:03.59] TORAL PATEL: Well, I want to thank all of you for sharing your amazing stories with me today, as part one of our session. And we will be continuing, for our listeners to know, that we will be continuing this discussion in part two that will be released next week.

[00:39:17.97] That's it for part one of our four-part special series. For the latest updates on diversity, equity, and inclusion at Cornell, as well as resources to honor and celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, be sure to visit diversity.cornell.edu. My name is Toral Patel.

[00:39:36.68] ANTHONY SIS: My name is Anthony Sis. Thank you for listening to AAPI at Cornell.