

KOREAN AMERICAN
CIVIC EMPOWERMENT
FOR COMMUNITY INC.
New York, New Jersey,
Texas

GRASSROOTS

Korean American Civic Empowerment - Grassroots Internship Journal

2024 KACE GRASSROOTS
INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

ISSUE No.3

Our Stories

First-hand reflections on the
Korean-American experience
from our Interns.

Interviews

Stories of the Korean-American
experience.

Field Research

A presentation of findings based
on independent research
conducted by the Interns.

Opinions

The thoughts and concerns from
our Interns regarding current
events and politics.



The 2024 KACE Grassroots Internship in front of the United States Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.
[July 17, 2024]; (Photo by Gyuho Choi, KCMB-TV).





The 2024 KACE Grassroots Internship at the Thomas Jefferson Memorial, overlooking the Washington Monument, in Washington, D.C. [July 16, 2024]; (Photo by Gyuho Choi, KCMB-TV).

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About the KACE Grassroots Internship Program: Since its launch in 2004, over 300 high school students throughout New Jersey and New York have joined our annual high school internship program. Our 2024 program is open to high school students of all backgrounds that are interested in contributing to our community’s civic empowerment in New York, New Jersey, and Texas. Through this program, Interns learn the importance of registering new voters, issues facing the Korean American community today, and the process of organizing and mobilizing the Korean American community. Under supervision, Interns research and lead public campaigns to raise awareness of various important issues. Interns also have the opportunity to meet with elected officials and engage with members of the local, state, and federal legislature. Our program is specifically devoted to developing all the inherent skills of our interns as they go out and experience firsthand what it takes to help and support the community. Students with demonstrated interest in public policy, politics, and history are encouraged to apply. To learn more, such as the application process, please visit our website: <https://kace.org/internship/>

About This Journal: Our high school interns completed several research and writing assignments throughout the KACE Grassroots Internship Program. This journal contains some of those submissions, and serves as a time capsule of their thoughts and experiences. It is my hope that future Interns and members of the Korean American community will benefit from these different perspectives from all walks of life and circumstances from their formative years in the grand diaspora of our shared heritage, culture, and history. - Richard In, Esq.

OUR STORIES

Empowering Change: My Journey with KACE and the Korean-American Community

By Joy Piao

My world view has always been centralized around the idea that things will get better. Regardless of how good or horrible life has been, things are bound to improve. But, it should come as naturally that this idealistic attitude is correlated to dedicated effort. Based on the evident results of past equality efforts such as the civil rights movement, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Rights Movement, Women's Rights Movement, etc., it is clear that these ideologies have paved their way for a better society. The Korean American Civic Empowerment Organization, KACE, is a prime example of how people should work together towards creating a more sustainable and inclusive community. Particularly, throughout my time at KACE, I was able to broaden my own understanding of my culture as well as my knowledge on how to help the Korean-American community thrive.

When I applied to KACE's internship program, I was not quite sure of what to expect. I had a vague idea of how this program would aid our community; however, experiencing the process in person reached far beyond my expectations. Through this internship, my knowledge and awareness of the struggles the Asian American community faced had drastically increased and opened a variety of new opportunities for me. During our session, we would join zoom meetings where highly respected individuals like Mr. Park, Esq. and Professor Yuh would share lectures regarding the history and stories of minority groups like Korean Americans. However, the

main session is what really exceeded my expectations. During this time, we attended in-person office meetings and participated in a multitude of events and activities. These included, but not limited to, organizing presentations, voter registration drives, debates, trial re-enactment rehearsals regarding the tragedy of Vincent Chin, and meetings with legislative offices in Washington D.C.

From these experiences, I became acutely aware of the discrimination against my people and made me realize how far the Asian American community had progressed. It is undeniable that discrimination against Asian Americans has unfortunately been a significant part of American history, as witnessed through restrictions like the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), Japanese American Internment (1942), Asian Exclusion from Citizenship (19th to early 20th century), and much more. However, despite these adversities, Asian Americans have made significant contributions to American society, culture, and economy. These contributions, along with outcry and protests against past systematic injustice, have greatly facilitated societal change for the better. Nonetheless, challenges related to stereotyping, representation, and systemic biases continue to affect Asian American communities today. It is evident that KACE works admirably towards addressing these concerns and minimizing them through their many initiatives such as the KACE Grassroots Internship Program. This internship not only gave me so many opportunities and experiences, but it gave me hope, a hope that strives for the complete, universal acceptance of Korean Americans in American society.



Street clean up project at the Barton Avenue Open Streets and areas surrounding the Murray Hill Long Island Rail Road Station [August 9, 2024]; (Photo by Richard In, Esq., KACE).

What's so different about me?

By Claire Yoon

Growing up as a Korean American in the United States was a unique and challenging experience. Even though I lived in America all my life, I still have many differences from other kids who grew up here too. While it was emotionally challenging to deal with the discriminative experiences I had as a child, they also helped me develop the resilience I need to deal with discrimination I might face in the future. Not only that, they also contributed to my character and how I view my culture today.

When I was younger, around second or third grade, many of my non-Asian classmates were confused or disgusted by different parts of my culture. I distinctly remember two girls in my grade who came up to me during lunch and asked me what I was eating. I wasn't friends with these girls and it seemed like they always had something negative to say to me. Regardless, I respectfully replied that it was miyukguk, or Korean seaweed soup. They then responded by saying, "Ew, it looks like slime," made a face, and walked away giggling. This comment really hurt me, and as a child, I was confused as to why they were teasing my culture. Following this incident, I asked my mother to pack me more American foods that "didn't smell." She was upset, but understood why. I thought to myself, "We are all just people. What's so different about me?"

This is one of the many experiences I've had as an Asian American in the U.S. I've been made fun of many times and have felt ashamed of my culture and who I am. However, one thing I've come to realize as I've grown older is that I should be proud of my culture. The discrimination I faced when I was little were mainly due to a lack of awareness or information in society.

In 11th grade, I started a Korean club where I taught students in my school about Korean culture, history, language, music, and food to combat the lack of knowledge regarding my culture. About a dozen students joined my group and were eager to learn about Korea. On the last day of the Korean club, I brought in some Korean foods for them to try. It was honestly a shock to me that all the students really enjoyed the food. When they were hesitant about trying a new dish, they didn't look disgusted but were curious to learn what it was called and what it was made of.

This experience gave me a new perspective, and I realized that people nowadays are more respectful and curious about learning what Korean culture is. However, the experiences I had as a child are still ingrained in my mind. When I show parts of my culture or eat Korean foods in public, I sometimes still feel ashamed. My past experiences have made me more conscious of my culture, and my mind sometimes makes me want to suppress it in front of other people. But society has changed now and has become more accepting of new things, especially cultures, and I realize that I'm not so different from my friends.

I am now extremely grateful that I have two different identities: Korean and American. I know that not everyone has a culture they can connect with or grow up with. The different traditions, foods, and people I grew up around shaped my character and who I am today. Now that I am able to embrace Korean culture, it has given me a deeper appreciation for diversity and helped me accept that I cannot change my history; it will always be a part of me. I don't need to change who I am. Others simply need to change their views because, to be frank, I'm not that different from them.



Town Halls in New York (top) [July 26, 2024], and in New Jersey (bottom) [August 14, 2024]; (Photos by Gyuhoo Choi, KCMB-TV).

OUR STORIES



The 2024 KACE Grassroots Internship at the Financial District with the Federal Hall National Memorial in the distance (top), and inside the Federal Hall National Memorial [July 11, 2024]; (Photo by Richard In, Esq., KACE).

My Name Is... By Sean Lim

On the first day of freshman year, Mr. Thomas hesitated, squinting at the list of names. “J...Jay...ee...hoo?” he stammered, struggling with the unfamiliar sound of my Korean name. Upon hearing this, my face burned with embarrassment, and I quickly stopped him. “It’s just Sean,” I interrupted quickly, silently urging him to move on. As I sat back down, I felt my classmates’ eyes on me, and the sting of being different settled in. In that moment, I felt a sharp disconnect, not just from my peers, but from a part of myself as well.

During my childhood, I moved frequently from one town to another. Regardless of which neighborhood I called home, it always had a predominantly Korean-American population that gave me a sense of familiarity. I was surrounded by people who looked like me, watched the same things as me, played the same games as me, and were raised with the same ideas, beliefs, and culture.

However, there were moments when I felt out of place. “Americans” celebrated holidays such as Thanksgiving with dishes like turkey and mac and cheese, while my family typically ate “떡국” (Tteokguk) and other Korean dishes during our celebration. Though I enjoyed these dishes, I often found myself begging my parents to eat something “normal,” subconsciously thinking that if I ate American food, I would finally be just like the other kids.

Even during lunchtime, I would often long for the typical sandwiches, Lunchables, and snacks that my American classmates brought. Even as a child, I knew that the small things such as eating different foods would cause me to stand out. This traditional difference made me feel like I lived in two different worlds.

At home, the sense of disconnection continued. While my parents immersed me in my culture and heritage through food, traditions, and language, I found myself losing touch with my roots. As I learned English throughout my early school years, I started to forget how to speak Korean. Even simple video calls and text messages with my grandparents became challenging and awkward, often leaving me tongue-tied and embarrassed. I am Korean American, but with each passing year, the “American” part overshadows the “Korean.”

While I may never feel like I fully belong to either the American or Korean identity, I am learning to create my own self. However, this realization did not come overnight. It took years of self-reflection and struggle to understand that my heritage and culture are an essential part of who I am. Through reconnecting with my roots, whether through cultural events, KACE, or simply being with my family, I have begun to bridge the gap within myself.

I am proud to embrace both sides of my heritage, as each part contributes to who I am. This blend of cultures is my strength, my identity; it is what makes me myself. I am not just Sean; I am Sean Jaeho Lim.

Heritage and Discrimination By Jayden Park

My experience as a person with Korean heritage living in America is one of those “atypical” stories. For almost my entire life, I have been surrounded by Asians and Koreans. I have always felt like I fit in, and have rarely felt ostracized for my Korean ethnicity. Even when I am around peers of other races, I do not feel out of place, unless someone goes out of their way to point it out. I was blissfully unaware of the idea of being in an ethnic minority because I went to schools with a majority Asian student body. I attended nursery at a large Korean church, pre-K at a private Korean school, and elementary school in an Asian dominated neighborhood.

Living in New York City has been a very positive experience overall because the city is more accepting of ethnic minorities, like Koreans. It creates an environment where people feel accepted, so they flock here. Although Korean Americans are one of the many minorities, I believe we should appreciate the fact that living in New York City gives us access to large Korean American communities across Queens and Manhattan and a chance to bond with other Koreans. This is uncommon in most parts of the United States. Personally speaking, although I have never been the target of racial prejudice based on my Korean ethnicity outside of New York, I can account countless stories of other Asian Americans who were killed based on race. When traveling up further into the Northeast, I can tell you that I saw the most racism by far during a trip with my church youth group.

The Northeast was the first place where I heard the slur “chink” being used outside of my school, and directed at a family. That moment changed my mindset from expecting the best out of others, to expecting a negative outcome. Because of this mindset change, I never really felt the incentive to leave the city anytime soon, instead of facing discrimination and being separated from the Korean American community. I would rather stay cooped up in a place where I feel welcome, then be judged because of the birthplace of my parents.

However, just because I have not experienced discrimination against me, this does not mean that discrimination does not exist in this city. The fear of being attacked or being shunned for my race is always looming in the back of my head when meeting a different racial group, whether it be in school or somewhere else. When traveling outside of New York, I can feel the switch from blending in with the community to standing out in public. For example, in the state of Connecticut there are few Asians there, most being of Chinese descent. I have visited multiple towns in Connecticut. I have yet to be discriminated against, but I feel as if I am missing something everyone else has. When I visit states like these, the children I pass by when walking stare at me as if I was some mythical beast. Of course, this is only because they have seen two or three Asians in their entire life.

I want to express that my story on my experiences as an Asian American is not to suggest that people from a geographical area, such as the Northeast, are racist. I assume all people act the same way regardless of race. Although all the points I have stated I believe are true now, they have not always been the truth.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic toward the beginning of 2021, I remember walking on the sidewalk with my grandmother returning from school witnessing a Chinese couple pass by a white person. This person went out of their way to go on the road to avoid this couple, when 10 seconds ago they passed a different person of non-Asian descent. This same thought comes up time and time again, and came to me, when I was thinking about the question, “How has my life been affected by my Korean heritage?”

My experience as a person of Korean heritage has been more or less positive, with small negatives over the years. My heritage is not something I use as a reason to blame people of other races for issues, and I never will. In the words of Shirley Chisholm, “racism is so universal in this country, so widespread, and deep-seated, that it is invisible because it is so normal.”



The 2024 KACE Grassroots Internship’s annual group photo at Foley Square, Federal Plaza of the Manhattan Civic Center [July 11, 2024]; (Photo by Richard In, Esq., KACE).

OUR STORIES

A Fulfilled Journey By Yuxi Tai

Immigrating to the U.S. as a young child was extremely disorienting. My mom first moved to the U.S. for her education, and then brought the rest of us after a year. My Dad initially refused to come, but compromised after thinking about our future.

When my family first moved to Los Angeles, it was quite uncomfortable for me to adjust to the new environment. It exposed me to people I had little to no cultural connection with. In contrast to my home country with its unified culture, the U.S. offered a diverse array of cultures to explore.

My mom signed me up for a recreation center, where I got to socialize with other kids my age. I still remember my surprise upon finding out what air hockey and foosball were. Despite their novelty, or even perhaps because of it, I enthusiastically went to the rec center every day after school.

Another time, I went into my first U.S. supermarket with my mom. There were so many things that I did not recognize. For example, I was utterly confused by cereal. Processed food filled with sugar in a cardboard box that you eat for breakfast? How bizarre! However, the other Korean-American friends that I made from my Korean-American dual-language class helped me adjust. Because Korean-Americans in the past had congregated together to advocate for a dual-language class to be made within public schools, I never felt isolated or ostracized because of my race.

While it has been over a decade and my memories of California are faint, the impact of these classes remains to this day. I especially remember how fulfilled and cheery these classes made me feel. If I had to describe this feeling, I would envision it as yellow and pink circles floating in ethereal bliss. I am truly thankful for the Korean-American community for making Korean immigrants comfortable in America.

After living for a year in Los Angeles, my family decided to move to Flushing, New York, a community rich with people of my heritage. Upon entering elementary school, I was delighted to find out that there was a

Korean-American dual-language class, similar to the one in Los Angeles. Through this class, I formed lasting friendships with fellow Korean-Americans, bonding over our shared heritage.

During my first year of middle school, my family decided to move deep into Long Island. It was then, I realized how fortunate I had been in Los Angeles and Flushing. There, Asians constituted a small minority in the population. Out of 31 students in one class, I was the only Asian. Being in that type of environment for two years has made me realize how much of an impact others can have on us, and how much of that we take for granted in our everyday lives. However, because of the strong foundation I built in my early years, I was capable of remaining comfortable and upholding my Korean heritage in this foreign environment. For example, while everyone in my class had classic American lunches, I brought in myeolchi bokkeum (stir-fried anchovies) and fried dry octopus. Because the others were unfamiliar with my culture, they did not respond positively towards my food. Still, I brought back Korean food for lunch everyday because of its astounding flavor. Embracing my Korean culture in a predominantly white environment was certainly not an easy feat, but the satisfaction of enjoying delicious food made the challenge worthwhile.

After entering middle school, I wanted to take action to change this fact. What could I do that would bring more awareness to Korean culture? As I thought more about this, I started to think of starting a Korean club. However, when I was going through the logistics of making this club, my family decided to move back to Flushing.

I moved back to Flushing for high school, which I had missed incredibly. I am constantly grateful for the Korean-American community and the invaluable opportunities they have provided me. Although moving to the U.S. was not the smoothest experience, my fellow Korean-Americans helped me and my family adjust to the American experience. These experiences have played a vital role in shaping my identity and connecting me with my Korean heritage.



Voter registration drives in New York at the H-Mart in Murray Hill Plaza in Queens, NY (top) [July 19, 2024], and in New Jersey at the Super H-Mart in Ridgefield, NJ (bottom) [August 17, 2024]; (Photo by Richard In, Esq., KACE).

My Haven By Rachel You

It goes without saying that a home should be a place of comfort, rest, and coziness. There are two sides to the interpretation of the definition of “home,” whether that be physical or symbolic. My room is a place of comfort, and so is the cozy nook in the soundproof practice rooms at my school. Perhaps it is also important to have a place to visit when feeling down, another option that allows peace of mind, “solace.” My third home, though, is a place that I do not visit as often, but one that holds a special place in my heart.

As a child, I spent a lot of time moving around from one grandparents' apartment to another, with my mother and brother by my side. As a small child, there was a sense that I did not know what “home” truly meant. My father was often away in America, finding a place where our family could nestle, a place where we could call home. My grandparents cared for my brother and I, making home cooked meals daily, often taking us to playgrounds, and buying us drinks from convenience stores. It would be a lie if I said the memories of my time in Korea linger in my mind, as they seem to get lost in the present. Although I do not remember traveling from home to home, I remember the small details of my grandmother's garden on her balcony and the area at the door where my grandparents

greeted me and waved goodbye when I left or entered the house.

A lot of the memories that I made in Korea are nostalgic, and perhaps built me to become the person I am today. They often visit me at random times of the day, and I cannot help but reminisce. As I visit my local H-Mart, I am reminded of the soft drinks my grandfather used to buy me. Such memories comfort me; they lull me to sleep and visit me in my dreams.

The memories I hold are frozen in time, they do not move forward as time goes on, and that is what makes them so comforting. I can safely assume that they will be there when I need them and that they will be encased within me, with no one having the ability to steal them from me. When I am having a hard day, with nowhere to turn to, I visit my third home. Perhaps that is why having a third home is so important; a place to go when there is no other choice- a haven.

People often believe that a home should be a place with four walls and a roof, an enclosed space that has a given space. However, my memories hold a place that is not physical and still allows me to feel what a home should feel like. Although my home in Korea does not have a specific location and I have multiple places that align with the standard definition of “home,” I still visit my memories to bring me comfort, peace, and calm.



Voter registration drive in New York at the Barton Avenue Open Streets, in Murray Hill (Queens, NY) near the Murray Hill Long Island Rail Road Station [August 2, 2024]; (Photo by Richard In, Esq., KACE).

INTERVIEWS



New Jersey high school interns at our Palisades Park office (top and middle), and at the Comfort Women Memorial at the Palisades Park Library (bottom) [August 5, 2024]; (Photo by Richard In, Esq., KACE).

Interview by Yeun Seo

This is an interview of a high school student (name redacted for privacy) about their experience immigrating to America.

Q: How was the immigration process?

A: When I was thirteen, my family moved from Seoul to the United States of America. It was quite the voyage. I recall the entire procedure as being both nerve-racking and exciting. My parents' decision to move for greater chances was the beginning of it all. An enormous amount of documentation was involved. We required birth certificates, passports, and a lot of other paperwork. The hardest thing was definitely getting the visa. We needed to demonstrate that we could sustain ourselves and that we had a valid purpose for moving. My parents were required to compile employment letters and bank statements. They were anxious about all the paperwork and interviews, as I recall.

Q: What was the hardest part of immigration?

A: The hard effort started as soon as we received the visas. We had to pack everything, say goodbye to friends and family, and decide what to do with our Seoul home. Everything

happened in a blink of an eye and we were up and gone from our home of 13 years just like that. It was a mixture of regret about leaving our home behind and eagerness for the new journey. The experience of arriving in the United States of America was completely unusual. I arrived in the bustling city of Leonia with dreams as big as the skyscrapers that greeted me across the Hudson. There were tons of fresh experiences to adjust to. In order to register us, locate a place to live, and enroll me in school, my parents had to deal with the local authorities.

Q: How was integration into society?

A: It was unsettling to start at a new school. I felt very alone and disconnected from the new society as I was different from everyone around me. But with the help of my family and new friends, things began to get better.

Q: Would you do it again if you could?

A: Looking back, the immigration process was quite difficult and full of ups and downs. Though it required a great deal of endurance and patience, in the end, it gave us a ton of new opportunities. It was a difficult yet worthwhile trip.

Interview by Alyssa Kim

This is an interview of a Korean immigrant woman (name redacted for privacy) about her experience immigrating to America with her husband.

Q: When you came to America, did you know that you would end up moving here permanently?

A: When we came to America, we were not planning on staying here permanently. We came here for my husband's research and studies.

Q: What did you expect from America, and did it live up to your standards?

A: We came to America hoping to be able to research more, since the American research center had more space to do so. I did not have any expectations, and did not expect or fear anything, for we were only going to stay temporarily. Thankfully, since my uncle was already living in America, he assisted us with how we could get to America nicely.

Q: What are some culture shocks that you faced when you moved to America?

A: Some culture shocks that I noticed were when we went to the grocery store, the same item prices were all different, depending on the store and our location. In Korea, everything is the same, or similarly priced. Also, no one seems to care what kind of job you have in America. Korea is quite a society where you live to meet others' expectations. In America, you live up to your own standards, and no one says much about you. Korea has a very toxic work- life balance. You are always working late, even on weekends. And if you are a student, you stay in school very late, just to study more. In America, you can have an excellent work- life balance, for you can go home and still have time for family, friends, etc. Korea is also a fast-paced country, and once, when we were robbed, it was difficult to get the police to act quickly.

Q: Were you ever discriminated against throughout your time in America?

A: No, neither me nor my husband have faced discrimination throughout our stay in America. If anything, I feel like I have been mocked for my Korean accent from time to time. Since we originally moved to Missouri, a rather suburban state, our neighbors (majority white) were unsure and hesitant to talk to us.

Q: If you had the chance to go back in time to before moving to the US, would you come again, or would you have stayed in Korea?

A: If I could go back in time, I would definitely come to America again, if not earlier. I believe that America has great opportunities.

Q: What are some differences between Korean and American culture/ traditions that you like/ dislike?

A: I noticed that in Korean culture, you respect your elders a lot, hence the different ways you should know when addressing older individuals. Also, when it comes to traditions, we have ancestral rites every year or so, and usually our individual families come together to all pay our respects to the deceased family member(s). It's quite stressful, but I'd like for my kids to learn about these traditions through my actions, since it is quite a sacred part of our family. I don't really know much about American culture, but one thing that I noticed is that they are rather centered around family, and it's a rather peaceful atmosphere. However, I dislike the fear of not being able to send my kids to school without worry. Of course, this threat is all around the world, but I can't help but feel uneasy while my kids are at school, due to the common guns, drugs, and kidnapping threats. One other thing that I noticed is the amount of racism in America. Since we, as Koreans, are the minority, I do feel worried every once in a while for my kids. But I can see that the world is changing quite fast, and I hope that racism doesn't remain such a big issue. Also, as someone who's worked as a waitress, I'm not the biggest fan of tipping culture, since I believe we should be able to rely on our paychecks, rather than tips.



Community safety booklet press conference with Councilwoman Sandra Ung (NYC District 20) at our Murray Hill Office with our New York high school interns [August 8, 2024]; (Photo by Richard In, Esq., KACE).

INTERVIEWS

Interview by Hana Jang

This is an interview of a Korean immigrant man (name redacted for privacy) about his experience immigrating to America.

Q: Why did you immigrate to the United States from South Korea?

A: I was attending college in South Korea at the time, but it was hard economically. Once I completed my military service, I immigrated to America to attend university here.

Q: What were the different kinds of challenges that you faced when you first immigrated to America?

A: There were big differences in culture such as the language and customs (gender customs, food, etc.). Learning English was difficult, especially in a new country where everyone was a stranger. I would always listen to talk radio stations and watch popular American television shows to improve my English. While listening, I tried to understand what they were saying. I would spend 12 to 13 hours, and sometimes even the whole day, listening to these talk radio stations. Because I was Asian and could barely speak English, I was looked down upon by my peers. When I went to college, I studied very hard and slept only 1 to 2 hours each night. However, despite my hard work, I was discriminated against in ways that were not obvious. This negatively impacted the opportunities I had available.

Q: Could you share a moment from your early days in America when you faced racism?

A: When I immigrated to the United States, racism was very bad. When I arrived, I worked in a predominantly Black neighborhood where tensions were particularly high between the Black and Asian communities. I was a victim to two armed robberies while I was working as a college student.

Q: What are some key differences that you observe between the culture in South Korea and the United States?

A: Korea is a place where image is especially emphasized to an extreme extent. This is not good. It is common to be overly concerned about how others perceive you. People are too fixated on relationships and self-image, but in America there is the overarching idea of independence that is highlighted instead. In America, there's this principle of living as your own character with your own personality and style.

Q: Why do you think it is important to pass on Korean heritage to the next generation, such as your children? What are some key aspects of your Korean heritage you wish they carry on?

A: The custom of maintaining a strong family connection and being respectful to everyone. Trying your hardest to maintain good relationships and connections with those who you know and respect. And obviously, the Korean language. Language has the power to tie us all together, and is important in having a tight-knit family. You are able to understand each other due to this special common ground. And honestly speaking, there's nothing like family in America. Family is key.

Q: Do you think that there are more opportunities available in America compared to South Korea? How do you perceive the impact of these opportunities on personal and professional growth?

A: I do agree with that. For example, if you graduate from a Korean university and immigrate to America, people wouldn't really acknowledge it. But America, for the sake of comparison to history, is like the world's Roman Empire. A college degree from a university in America opens up far more diverse opportunities around the world. Although I may be polishing it a bit too much, you have the resources available to be successful virtually anywhere with an American education.

Q: How do you believe we should address and combat anti-Asian racism effectively? What approaches should be avoided to prevent potential negative consequences?

A: I believe my generation is doing our part to support the next generation who are rising to combat racism. I don't think that violent demonstrations and protests are the solution. Instead, we must build up our credibility and our foundation as citizens in America so that the youth can receive better education and have the opportunities needed to emerge in the mainstream in diverse ways. So, not just settling to go to medical or law school if you do well in school. There are not as many people who are willing to take the risk and diverge from the typical aspirations observed in Asian-Americans. I want the next generation to not just go to medical school, but instead branch out into different areas of expertise so that we as Korean-Americans can appear mainstream. Additionally, on the same point, we need more Korean American politicians.



Video conference call with Congressman Andy Kim (NJ 3rd District) and our high school interns in New Jersey and New York [July, 15, 2024].

Interview by Doeyoon Seo

This is an interview of a Korean immigrant man (name redacted for privacy) about their experience immigrating to America.

Q: What was it like when you first came to America for college?

A: It was tough. The American and Korean college systems were very different. In Korea, people in the same majors are organized together and are able to socialize and do meetings. I thought it was also like this in America, but here the system was different and you just went around on your own to your classes. I was expecting to get closer to other Korean students in the college, but I didn't really know anyone and it took some time to make friends. I wasn't really good at English either. There were some classes I didn't understand, but I was able to study well because I already took my major, accounting, in Korea.

Q: What was the biggest challenge you faced in America as a Korean American?

A: There wasn't really anything. It seems like the biggest challenge when you're facing it at that moment, but once time passes it isn't as big of a deal as you might have thought. The culture of America was different from Korea, so, in terms of language and interests, I couldn't really become very close to other Americans. I mostly spent time with other Korean and Asian Americans here, and I think it made adjusting to America much easier.

Q: If you could incorporate a part of Korean culture to America, what would it be?

A: A big part of Korean culture is that we are like one team. It could have both a positive and negative impact on others. I don't think most Americans think of themselves as one team, especially since America is filled with very different cultures.

Q: What is an act of racism you faced that you still remember?

A: Many years ago your mom received a UPS delivery that required a signature from a worker. The worker who signed the package wrote a racist slang targeted towards Chinese people. I filed a complaint against UPS but they just said the worker heard the last name wrong. I also encountered other acts like people telling me, "go back to your country." But

when discussing racism it is important to realize that it can happen to anyone. There are racist Koreans and Asian Americans too. There are always some people who are hateful and try to discriminate against others in any place. In America, the discrimination is commonly centered around race, but in Korea, it is usually more about gender and social status. If you encounter discrimination, you shouldn't become stressed about it, but you also shouldn't just let it pass. You have to learn to pick certain fights because some could actually hurt you more than the perpetrator.

Q: After knowing your experience in America, if you could choose, would you immigrate to America again?

A: It depends. If I want to be surrounded by friends and family, I'd stay in Korea. But if I want to have more career opportunities, I would come to America again. The competition for jobs in Korea is very fierce, so there is also great competition in companies. Most people are forced to retire early. Education is quite similar for both Korea and America. The only difference is that in Korea, you would have a harder time finding a job after graduating since there are more people than companies. In America, you have more opportunities even if you don't go to the best college. It's also easier to switch jobs in America, especially if you don't have the best start. Korea has a set range of age for completing things in life, so if you are delayed in something, like schooling, it's very hard to recover.

Q: Is there any difference in the way people treat Korean Americans and Asian Americans today compared to when you first came to America? (30 year gap)

A: The way people treated Korean Americans specifically didn't really change. The only difference is that Korean culture, such as Korean food, is spreading more amongst Americans. However, the way people treat Asian Americans in general became worse. There wasn't as much Asian hate in places like subways before. It started happening more frequently after COVID-19. I assume it has died down a little after the pandemic since I stopped seeing a lot of news on anti-Asian hate crimes.



Annual trial reenactment performance by our high school interns, held this year at our Murray Hill office. Special thanks to AABANY and JuryGroup for the script and materials. [August 8, 2024]; (Photo by Richard In, Esq., KACE).

FIELD RESEARCH



The 2024 KACE Grassroots Internship in front of the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C. [July 16, 2024]; (Photo by Gyuho Choi, KCMB-TV).



The 2024 KACE Grassroots Internship in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. [July 16, 2024]; (Photo by Gyuho Choi, KCMB-TV).

Our Trip to Washington D.C.: My Experience

By Hana Jang

The grand capital of American politics, Washington D.C., hosted the KACE grassroots internship cohort this year for an enriching three-day trip, with interns traveling from New York, New Jersey, and Texas. For many of us, including myself, it was our first visit to the nation's capital. Alongside my partner, I debuted as an amateur interviewer, adding a unique dimension to my experience. We explored landmarks such as the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum and had the honor of meeting the aides of prominent legislators like Rep. Bill Pascrell Jr. and Rep. Grace Meng. This incredible opportunity opened my eyes to the nuances of the legislative process, showcasing how every decision is meticulously crafted through collaboration

and nuanced understanding. Despite the coincidental sweltering heat that plagued Washington D.C. that week, our experience was thoroughly enjoyable and enlightening.

Our journey began at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, where I was captivated by the displays showcasing incredible feats of engineering and science. I recall being struck by the vast expanse of exhibits that collectively conveyed a powerful message about humanity's ingenuity in exploring the skies and beyond. Among the intriguing displays, I was amazed by the open area where large model aircraft hung from the ceiling. This space offered a striking view of iconic planes that had charted the history of aerospace as advanced by humankind.

This sentiment was reinforced by other concentrated exhibits. Highlights included the Apollo 11 command module, Neil Armstrong's Apollo 11 spacesuit, and extensive data collection on other planets in the solar system, all vividly illustrating technological advancements that have propelled humanity to the skies and beyond.

The trip also provided my first taste of journalism. Equipped with a mini handheld microphone, my partner and I interviewed fellow interns, gathering their thoughts and opinions on the museum visit, which was the start of many more interviews throughout the trip. Though the responsibility proved slightly challenging to grow accustomed to, I have no doubt that my experience was enhanced by this

opportunity to hear from other KACE interns about their perspectives. Just like how we transitioned from one new experience in the capital to the next, the takeaways of my peers regarding these opportunities that they spoke about in our conversations were diverse yet interconnected by an overarching sentiment of fulfillment. I found the privilege of facilitating these in-depth moments of expression rewarding and personally enriching because it provided insight about the different ways in which the trip was impactful for everyone.

Along with broadening my own perspective, conducting interviews helped me sharpen skills such as communication and critical thinking. My partner and I
(continued on next page)

FIELD RESEARCH



The 2024 KACE Grassroots Internship in front of the White House in Washington, D.C. [July 17, 2024]; (Photo by Gyuho Choi, KCMB-TV).



The 2024 KACE Grassroots Internship in front of the United States Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. [July 17, 2024]; (Photo by Gyuho Choi, KCMB-TV).

each received a packet of suggested questions prior to the trip. Though I stuck to the pre-made questions earlier on while interviewing, I was soon encouraged to put my own twist on the questions and deviate from them. In other words, I had to adapt accordingly. Despite finding this task challenging, it became easier to empathize with my interviewee and foster deeper conversations with more fitting questions based on the occasion. This experience was very fulfilling on a personal level, and one that contributed to the memorability of the trip.

Another highlight of the trip was touring the U.S. Capitol building. The iconic white-domed structure, symbolizing the American government, offered an insightful glimpse into the legislative process. We learned that in the U.S. Capitol, the Senate and the House of Representatives meet to debate legislation

that affects the nation in their respective wings. We visited several rooms with beautiful neoclassical architecture and meaningful items, including the National Statuary Hall Collection. This hall features statues donated by states to honor important figures in their history. The freedom of choice each state has in this special display of unity and diversity left an impression on me. The hall displayed the powerful intersection of these concepts, with figures like Robert M. La Follette from Wisconsin and Daisy Lee Gatson Bates from Arkansas. The statues' collective home in the U.S. Capitol building exemplifies our nation's motto: *e pluribus unum*. I had been unaware of the significance of this phrase before the trip, having only observed it etched onto plaques scattered around the city. At the start of our tour, we watched a short film that discussed the importance of this very

motto. By the end of this film, I learned the phrase's translation: out of many, one. By the end of the tour, I came to truly understand the meaning of *e pluribus unum*. Our nation's motto embodies the concept of the United States as a union of citizens, state, and federal governments forming a single entity.

Our trip extended beyond sightseeing. We were granted the golden opportunity to connect with the staff of key senators and representatives. The experience was truly one of a kind, and I remain grateful for the chance to meet the highly accomplished individuals who work hard to serve their constituents. During the meetings, we were given the opportunity to pose questions to the staff, leading to interesting conversations. I was struck by how deeply committed and knowledgeable the staff were about the issues they championed. It was inspiring to sit in on these

conversations and witness their dedication to the behind-the-scenes of Congress. Likewise, it was motivating to be a part of a group so diverse in terms of geography and background that came together for our shared interest in civic engagement. We were offered valuable time to connect with one another and create fun shared memories. Meeting face-to-face with fellow interns from New Jersey and Texas that we usually only communicate through Zoom added an allure to the trip and made it all the more memorable.

Ultimately, the 2024 KACE Grassroots Washington D.C. trip was a successful culmination of the KACE internship's mission to advance our inherent skills such as leadership, communication, and analytical thinking through firsthand experience. I hope future cohorts of this program treasure this experience as much as I did.

FIELD RESEARCH



Meeting with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's office (U.S. Senate - NY) [July 17, 2024]; (Photo by Gyuho Choi, KCMB-TV).



Meeting with Senator Mazie Hirono's office (U.S. Senate - HI) [July 17, 2024]; (Photo by Gyuho Choi, KCMB-TV).



Meeting with Rep. Bill Pascrell Jr.'s office (NJ 9th District) [July 17, 2024]; (Photo by Gyuho Choi, KCMB-TV).



Meeting with Rep. Grace Meng's office (NY 6th District) [July 17, 2024]; (Photo by Gyuho Choi, KCMB-TV).



Meeting with Rep. Marilyn Strickland's office (WA 10th District) [July 17, 2024]; (Photo by Gyuho Choi, KCMB-TV).



Group photo at the Rayburn House Office Building [July 17, 2024]; (Photo by Gyuho Choi, KCMB-TV).

FIELD RESEARCH



The 2024 KACE Grassroots Internship on the Capitol Tour, tickets provided by Rep. Tom Suozzi's office [July 17, 2024]; (Photo by Gyuho Choi, KCMB-TV).

The Capitol

By Louise Choi and Sean Lim

Sitting on top of Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. lies the United States Capitol. The Capitol is the seat of the U.S. Congress and a symbol of American democracy. It is also known for its neoclassical architecture and the famous dome. This historic building has seen and been part of many historical events that are pivotal for both American history and shaping world history. Thus, it has attracted many visitors from around the country and world to visit the place where much of history has begun.

House Wing and Senate Wing

As common knowledge, the Capitol is where Congress meets and the President delivers the State of the Union. It has two wings: the House Wing and the Senate Wing. The House Wing has two notable features: the National Statuary Hall, used for ceremonies and filled with statues from various states, and the Hall of Columns, known for its 28 marble columns ("Architect"). During the Capitol tour, I noticed the statues that represent a certain state were usually famous and prominent historical figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. but also some statues took after historical figures who were lesser known. I was even able to find out who some of the New Jersey statute representatives were. The House Wing also has The Cox Corridors with murals curated by Allyn Cox. During the tour, we never explicitly stopped at the Cox Corridors. We did see the 1620 mural of the Mayflower Compact. This mural resonated with me strongly as I remembered being in awe of the immense detail the mural had which must have been difficult given the mural's grand scale. Most importantly, the House Chamber is known in the House Wing where representatives meet and sit in the semicircle and features a gallery of 23 marble relief portraits for visitors to admire ("Architect"). The Senate Wing has the Brumidi Corridors (decorated with Raphael's Loggia-inspired murals by Constantino Brumidi that blend American patriotism with classical imagery)

and the Senate Chamber ("Articles"). A place the tour also never stopped by was the Senate Chamber. Similar to the House Chamber, the Senate Chamber was moved to a new location in 1859 to accompany Congress's growing size, with the Old Senate Chamber being used as a museum exhibit ("Architect"). Both wings are significant for their historical and architectural value, as well as their ongoing use in legislative processes.

Capitol's Dome

One of the highlights of the Capitol Tour was the Capitol Dome. Standing outside the building, the dome looked so regal and grand that it made me especially appreciate the architecture. The dome's history is filled with struggles and obstacles during its construction period. To give a little historical context, the Capitol's dome was originally designed by Thomas U. Walter. The dome was constructed between 1856 to 1866, becoming then the most famous man-made landmark in America at a total cost of \$1,047,291 (AOC). But before its completion, it had an initial dome in 1824 following Charles Bulfinch's design. Charles Bulfinch was a Boston architect that brought the Capitol to completion after 30 years of sporadic construction. The Capitol's first dome was replaced by Walter's improved design in the 1850s as the former dome was considered too small for the newly enlarged Capitol Building and a fire hazard. Walter's new dome design, which would be made out of cast iron, received authorization from Congress quickly. Though conflicts arose and construction time either slowed or halted at times, the dome was completed in January 1866. This was later followed by the Statue of Freedom at the top of the dome, completed before December 2, 1963 ("Architect").

Given the dome's history, it is no surprise the dome is often seen as a symbol of the Union and a republican government, especially since the Capitol's dome continued its construction during the Civil War. Freedom was personified into a monumental statue fittingly

named Freedom. President Lincoln further cemented the Capitol's dome's symbolism with the Union as he had famously told a friend, "If people see the Capitol going on, it is a sign that we intend the Union shall go on" (Lindsay). Hence, it has become the symbol of resilience and freedom that was especially needed during the difficult times of the Civil War and beyond throughout American history. The statue has reminded Congress and the American people that no matter what happens with the Union, American perseverance will overcome its difficulties.

National Statuary Hall

National Statuary Hall is also known as the Old Hall of the House. This grand space, built in the shape of a Greek amphitheater, is both a museum and a ceremonial location that tourists visit daily. The hall is decorated with plaster surfaces, sandstone gallery walls and pilasters, and a floor consisting of black and white marble tiles, supported structurally by columns of Breccia marble. One step into this magnificent site takes your breath away. Observing the domed ceiling, fireplaces, and oculus, most stand in awe wondering how a human made this ("National Statuary Hall | Architect").

Historically, the hall was built and used for the House of Representatives until 1857, when the House moved to its current chamber. In 1864, Congress allowed states to donate two statues, with each one honoring an important figure in their history ("National Statuary Hall Collection"). These statues give a glimpse into the rich and diverse heritage of the states throughout the history of the United States. Whether you're a history nerd, an architecture enthusiast, or simply a curious tourist, this hall promises a memorable experience.

U.S. Capitol Rotunda

The U.S. Capitol Rotunda, located beneath the Capitol's dome, is the symbolic "heart of the Capitol" ("U.S. Senate: U.S. Capitol Building"). The Rotunda was first thought of in 1793 by Dr. William Thornton, but due to the lack of money, supplies, and other delays, construction did not start until 1818. It was eventually built under the supervision of Charles Bulfinch and was completed by 1824.

Imagine stepping into a room that feels like stepping back in time. Designed in the neoclassical style, the Rotunda is circular and measures 96 feet in diameter and 180 feet in height. The Rotunda has curved sandstone walls divided by columns with carvings of olive branches, symbolizing peace and unity. The floor and stunning sandstone rings around a white marble slab adds to the room's immense aura.

However, the Rotunda is more than a room, it is a journey through history. The Rotunda's interior has grand paintings and relief sculptures that depict moments in American history. High above, the Frieze of American History wraps around the upper walls, depicting significant events from Christopher Columbus's discovery of America to the beginning of aviation ("Capitol Rotunda"). And then there's the Apotheosis of Washington, a breathtaking mural painted by Constantino Brumidi in 1865, showing George Washington ascending to the heavens, with "symbols of American democracy and technological progress" ("U.S. Senate"). Though Brumidi's death left the frieze incomplete, other artists carried on his legacy.

The space also houses several statues from the National Statuary Hall Collection, adding to its role as a repository of national memory and honor. While the Rotunda serves no legislative function, it is used in many important ceremonies, including funerals for presidents and important persons, and celebrations. The Rotunda is a place where the past and present meet, a place where you can hear the echoes of history and hope that the nation will continue its journey onwards.

While these locations within the U.S. Capitol are popular tourist destinations for those visiting Washington D.C., they are also historical sites that depict moments in American history. From the House Wing to the Capitol Crypt, each special location gives a glimpse into our nation's past, reminding us of the accomplishments as well as the conflicts that have shaped the United States. The Capitol serves as a powerful symbol of resilience and progress, showing the sophisticated journey of American democracy.

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OPINIONS

Characteristic

By Nathan Song

First impressions make up practically all human experiences and interactions. When a person meets somebody new, their interactions with that person will shape their future interactions based on how they perceived that person beforehand. These first impressions will determine how people see institutions, companies, races, and other groups of people. From reading this passage, you may have already created your concept of me and what kind of person I may be, and I shaped my concept of you, the reader, as the type of person who would read a journal article. This simple and everlasting cycle of human interaction may seem unfair to most, as many may disagree with the fact that one person can form a prototype and bias on an entire group of people based on one person. However, this is simply how society and human interactions work and will continue to function throughout the history of man.

When it comes to first impressions, as an Asian in America, people have widely judged me and piled me in with the common misconceptions of Asians. For example, many have labeled me as smart, a straight-A student, and an academic machine without even getting to know me, but that's just not who I am, at least, not all of me. I can count on my hands the number of times that I have been asked whether I was from China or Japan; I am a Korean American from Texas. Though these experiences and questions, in my book, have never been labeled as racist, the people who asked me these questions were practically all innocent children, my friends, or genuinely curious strangers who had no fear in asking whatever question, idea, or thought that popped up in their minds. It now dawns on me that I never truly understood the term "racist." Perhaps it was a good thing that I never had to face racial conflict, or perhaps a bad thing to have never faced adversity. However, as I grew into my tween and eventually teenage years, the concept of racism and ethnicity truly formed into a definite concept. Taking into account my sixteen years of experience as a Korean American, I can confidently say that I really do not know how I feel about my experience as an Asian American in America.

Though I have never faced blatant racism, exclusion, or bullying for my race, I still feel as if I have shared the same pressures and conflicts of the Asian American community. The COVID-19 pandemic was a dark time for Asians in America, a time when Asian hate crimes spiked at an all-time high and were only perpetuated by statements from officials, politicians, and other statistics. As a result, 54% of Asian Americans stated that they felt their mental health worsened in response to the increased reports of Asian hate, discrimination, and violence. Hearing about the incessant news articles and stories about Asian hate crimes through social media truly opened my eyes and made apparent to me that there was a need for action, for this was once again a time when people had to come together to establish one community that shows and sends a message, "we will tolerate this no longer."

The idea of a "model minority" has risen to prominence as of recent. What this idea suggests is that because of unrealistic

expectations of one group of people that one may perceive to be succeeding, the struggles and shared conflicts of the community are ignored.

Although I have just recently learned about the "model minority" myth, I can see connections to my real-life experiences that apply to this term. Many of my friends throughout my life have judged me to be living an easy life, never having to study or struggle academically, simply because I was an Asian. While this example may not be the best example of the model minority myth, it details how stereotyping infiltrated the very innocent roots of society to the point where it had become normalized. I have learned many lessons as I have developed and matured. New pieces of information and segments of knowledge have been added to my arsenal. With that, I learned the unfortunate truth of the struggles and widely unpopular oppression against the Asian American Community. Alongside numerous establishments and institutions, and with widespread messages, the movement to stop Asian hate made clear to me that everyone had the ability to make a change. Even if it was a minor step towards stopping Asian hate, it was the thought and effort that truly propelled the movement.

From the peak of Asian hate crimes, I have made it my mission to fight for inclusivity and acceptance of wide Asian American populations within America. Within my own town/community, I have taken action to establish clubs dedicated to spreading the rich Asian cultures throughout my school, hoping to inspire the younger and the next generation. That's why, for better or for worse, I would describe my experience as a Korean American as easy. Perhaps I should thank the fact that I was born into a generation of acceptance and peace, an era of moving forwards and past discrimination: the future.

Hate and casual bullying have become so widespread and normalized that, more often than not, we do not notice it right under our noses. A simple thing such as a joking remark may as well have been intended to spread hate but eventually just brushed aside as a joke. When people think about their insecurities, they think of them as flaws or imperfections in themselves. But for me, I see insecurities as a characteristic, a characteristic that drives you and pushes you to work harder.

If you are unhealthy, you strive to become healthy. If you are short, you may strive to become tall. If you struggle, you will strive to succeed and live a comfortable life. So I give you this one piece of advice. For as long as you proceed to think independently, you must hold this mindset to work harder and turn these insecurities and flaws into characteristics that will move you in the right direction: forward.

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How to be a Real Korean

By Louise Choi

"What kind of Asian are you?"

This is a question I get asked frequently by people, most of whom asking out of harmless curiosity. It's funny to me that my ethnicity needs to be clarified because I always thought I was obviously Korean. I thought that my eyes or the lurches my mom makes before school would be signs that I am, in fact, Korean. Yet, these signs fall flat in people's eyes as they still scratch their heads and wonder what kind of Asian I am. Some thought I was Chinese because of my tan skin; others thought I was Japanese because my eyes looked so big and round. I have heard many assumptions from others about my ethnicity, but very few would say I look Korean. Every time I get the response "Oh I thought you were—!", everything I thought about myself as being Korean falters.

But the question I always wanted to ask to those who question my ethnicity is what defines me as being Korean. My experience is not going to be the same as a Korean living in Korea or an American living in America. So what do I need to do, look like, or act like, to make it obvious to everyone that I am Korean?

Do I need to change my appearance?

As I mentioned before, what I liked most about my features were my eyes. I like that they were unique and different from other Koreans who were born with monolids. But that's exactly why people think I am not Korean—so much so that I have been mistaken for completely different races simply from my eyes alone. At some point, I started not to like my eyes as much as I used to. I began to point out flaws about them, like how one eye folds weirder than the other which makes it look smaller than the other. With my new insecurity, I started to envy those with monolids. My envy is not for a cosmetic reason, but more from a validation standpoint; I figured if I was born with monolids I would not have to doubt my Korean ethnicity as often.

Do I need to change my friends?

I believed for a long time that it was perfectly fine to not have a friend group of one race. But others still question why I do not associate myself with other Koreans as much. They whisper amongst themselves, accusing me of being too "whitewashed" to find commonality with other Koreans, or that I place myself on a higher standard than them.

Do I need to change my extracurriculars?

Maybe I need to go back to playing the piano or be on the swim team again. While I am at it, I should probably stop trying to go on a liberal arts path and instead focus my time prepping for law or medical school.

A fresh mindset about myself.

Changing myself to fit these standards could make me "more" Korean on the outside. I would look Korean, but would I be happy with that? Of course not. Accommodating to a standard that dangerously follows Asian stereotypes isn't going to guarantee anything for me besides satisfying others' discomfort of seeing a Korean not fit into the mold. It also is not going to guarantee that people would perceive me as more Korean automatically. So then, how can I?

The short answer is, I cannot. There is nothing I can do to get people to think differently of me or see me "correctly" the first time around. I tried that in the past. Taking Korean school, going to church, and meeting Korean friends, I tried to embody and display my ethnicity as clearly as possible. However, recently, I have been taking this as an opportunity to stand out against my friends and new people. I have come to realize that I do not need to fit into a mold to become the ideal Korean because there is no such thing, especially as a Korean living in America. The question "what kind of Asian are you?" has altered my thinking about how to showcase my identity to others. I may not look Korean or act Korean enough in the eyes of others, but that allows me to develop a fresh mindset about myself to show others that I am an individual with a unique personality that people may not have seen before. I hope being a Korean living in America will not make up my whole identity, but instead enhance it.



The 2024 KACE Grassroots Internship inside the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. [July 18, 2024]; (Photo by Gyuho Choi, KCMB-TV).

OPINIONS

American Korean, or Korean American?

By Olivia Kim

I never thought that my experience living in America was anything unique. I was born in the US from two immigrant parents. Both of them had immigrated to the US when they were very young, and they identify more as American than Korean. For my mom especially, the only thing that identifies her as Korean is her name, looks, and family. For the longest time, I had those same feelings. Like many other assimilated Asian kids, I did not feel like I belonged to the title of being “Korean.” I was more American Korean than Korean American.

An important person that made me truly feel like I was Korean was my grandmother. I grew up with a Korean grandmother on my dad’s side who taught me Korean. We would sit together and read Korean children’s stories and she would ask me to write about my day in Korean. When she would walk home with me from my elementary school, she would talk to me in Korean. However, I whined enough about these efforts that she stopped teaching me and resolved to just speaking in Korean with me instead. I never got to be truly fluent in Korean, and I am definitely far from it today.

I grew up in a mostly Asian neighborhood, and I knew plenty of Korean people. When choosing which high school to attend, I chose one with a large Asian percentage (around 70%). I was lucky enough to have never felt like a minority at my school. Despite my school being in a white neighborhood with mostly white teachers, there were at least 20 people in each of my classes who looked like me. I never felt alone or left out. The closest I got to that feeling was during trips to states like Wyoming or Nebraska that had a less dominant Asian population. However, despite being in a school with a large Asian population, I always felt like we were more Americanized than anything

else. I did not feel like I was Korean there.

I joined a program called ASAP around the same time my grandmother turned 80. She is fragile enough to keep my whole family on their toes whenever she gets sick or hurt. When I was a kid, I saw my grandmother as a constant in my life. Her turning 80 made me realize that she was not. She’s not invincible, and she’s definitely not immortal. Knowing that she might leave us soon scared me. And along with that, it scared me to think that the most definite link I had to Korea would be gone with her.

I joined ASAP to learn about advocacy and policy making. It was not like my high school, where most of the conversations were about school or classwork or upcoming tests. At ASAP, I feel like I belong even if I do not exactly share the same experiences with another person. The complex feelings of being an “ethnic minority” are hard to explain, but they are explored here. I can almost always relate to an experience of being an AAPI with another ASAPer. That connection is able to thrive at ASAP, and it really allowed me to think about my identity in a different way.

I wanted to start to learn more about the history behind being a Korean American and I wanted to learn more about Korea. The food, the language, the culture. It was something that seemed so foreign to me, but the possibility that my only link to it could one day be gone scared me. It still hurts to think that without her I would just become a full American and forget to be Korean. It pains me to think that someday I will not be an American Korean anymore, and I’ll just be an American. And so, that encouraged me to start picking up Korean again. It encouraged me to start happily eating and learning how to make the food. And, while I may not be completely there yet, my newfound journey to getting there has been rewarding. It has made me realize that I not only do not want to be just American, but I also do not just want to be an American Korean. I want to be Korean American.



Annual summer street chalk art mural at the Barton Avenue Open Streets in Murray Hill (top) [June 28, 2024], and Safety Training seminar with Nonviolent Peaceforce (bottom) [August 12, 2024]; (Photo by Richard In, Esq., KACE).

The Importance of Korean-American Political Engagement

By Allen Lee

As someone who has recently begun interning at Korean American Civic Empowerment, I am discovering firsthand the importance of political engagement. I now strongly believe Korean Americans should be more active in American politics. Their participation is more than mere representation; it ensures that Korean Americans have a substantial influence over policies that impact their lives.

I believe Korean Americans possess a rich cultural heritage and a strong sense of community that significantly enriches political discourse in America. When Korean Americans engage in the political process, whether through voting, advocacy, or running for public office, they ensure that their perspectives and needs are acknowledged.

Consider the contributions of Asian American leaders like Congressman Andy Kim and Congresswoman Grace Meng. Rep. Andy Kim, a former national security official, has been a vocal advocate for veterans, small businesses, and healthcare reform, championing causes that directly affect his constituents, many of whom are Asian American. Rep. Grace Meng has been instrumental in securing funding for minority communities, fighting against hate crimes, and ensuring language access for immigrants.

Political engagement also instills a sense of empowerment and belonging among Korean Americans. It dismantles barriers of marginalization, allowing individuals to actively, or even remotely, shape the policies that affect their everyday lives. This empowerment can also be crucial for younger Korean American generations, who can draw inspiration from seeing their community leaders effect change nationally. It can instill in them the confidence to pursue civic leadership and contribute meaningfully to the country’s future. Furthermore, increased political participation by Korean Americans can strengthen diplomatic ties between the United States and South Korea.

A politically active Korean American community can serve as a bridge, bringing better mutual understanding and collaboration between the two nations. The call for greater Korean American involvement is necessary, as in politics it is for a more inclusive, dynamic, and representative democracy and for the Korean American community to rise and claim their rightful place in the American narrative, ensuring their voices resonate in the halls of power and their contributions are recognized and valued. This involvement is not just advantageous but essential for the flourishing of both the Korean American community and the nation as a whole.



Group photo at the St. George Terminal of the Staten Island Ferry, overlooking the NYC Manhattan skyline [July 11, 2024]; (Photo by Richard In, Esq., KACE).

Additional Youth / Young Adult Leadership Development Opportunities



Grassroots Internship Coordinator Program

Typically consisting of former grassroots interns (not a requirement), our Grassroots Internship Coordinators assist with the education, training, and management of high school interns/volunteers. The position is open to undergraduate students or recent college graduates. Candidates for the program are selected after an application and interview process. This program equips our coordinators with skills and experience to confidently lead the next generation of proud and responsible Korean Americans.



College / Legal Internship

KACE offers internship opportunities for college students, young adults, and current law students. This internship program is very different from the Grassroots Internship Program meant for high school students. College student and young adult interns assist with a variety of our work, while legal interns assist us with legal research and help facilitate our legal clinics.



KACE Collegiate Leadership Conference (CLC)

Designed for college-aged young adults interested in contributing toward the Korean American community, this program goes over the responsibilities of being a Korean American in the modern day. Topics covered include networking, grassroots activism, voting rights and voting advocacy, and taking the lead in action. We hope that through this program, participants will leave empowered with a greater understanding and appreciation of the strength they possess and a sense of purpose of their place within the Korean American community at large. Last year's CLC was held on May 25, 2023 at the Met Church in Manhattan, NY.



College Student-lead Initiatives

We have been working with college-aged young adults to understand and utilize their vast networks and resources to deliver change and impact to improve their communities. On April 7th, 2023, KACE co-hosted an event with NYU students to address low voter registration rates and low voter turnout rates among college-aged young adults while providing further community engagement opportunities.



Mentorship / Guidance

KACE provides mentorship opportunities and guidance to help high school students, college students, and young adults to excel in academics and career paths. One advice we share with all eager and motivated young persons is to not let your young age or lack of experience deter you from reaching out for guidance and mentorship. Experience is something that is earned over time, and time is the advantage that all young people possess. It goes without saying, of course, that you still need to put in the work. It's okay not to get it exactly right the first time. But with each attempt, you learn and build upon what you've already learned. Sooner or later, you'll find that those lessons add up to earning the experience needed to excel on your career path and passions.

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