

WHEN WE RISE

By CANDACE FARMER

No matter your political party or who you voted for in the past two elections, it's abundantly clear that our country has never been more divided and drenched with pain. Our leadership was unreliable and daily breaking news events became numbing.

We didn't just question those in power -- for some, it was family members, friends, co-workers or even next-door neighbors. Flags and slogans could now carry a hidden meaning. Distrust and blind allegiance were encouraged and reinforced in ways we've never seen before. Politicians were no longer afraid to show the dirty tricks hidden up their sleeves -- all during a pandemic.

Generations of people across the country who had never cast a single vote before showed out in numbers for the 2020 presidential election, putting an end to the Trump era. And while the damage from his presidency is far from over, millions of Americans broke voting records in the U.S. seeking change.

Along with change, came protests. Unlawful killings of Black Americans sparked months of protests in cities throughout the U.S. during the summer of 2020. George Perry Floyd Jr., whose neck and back were knelt on by a Minneapolis police officer for 9 minutes, 29 seconds while he was suffocating to death. Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old African Ameri-

can medical worker who was shot six times in her own home by Louisville police who entered on a no-knock warrant. Ahmaud Arbery, who was fatally shot while jogging in Glynn County, Georgia. They are recent victim faces in the Black Lives Matter movement and a representation of unjust history.

San Jose State graphic design major, Jasmine Dator, 21, was one of the many SJSU students who participated in protests throughout last summer.

"It is emotionally draining but I am invested because I wanted to be and had to be," said Dator.

For Dator, allyship came naturally. She is an active member of the campus community, first designing flyers for KSJS, the university's year-round radio station. From there, she transitioned her way into the MOSAIC Cross-Cultural Center.

"I was inspired by art I saw on flyers in the student union, by my friend [and now co-worker] Erica during my junior year," said Dator.

Dator is the first social media coordinator for MOSAIC, a diverse "safe haven" for students on campus whose mission is to provide a safe and welcoming environment for students of all backgrounds.

Along with attending virtual open mics during the pandemic, Dator has used her graphic design skills to promote information and events on social media through MOSAIC supporting POC, LGBTQIA and DACA students.

A sense of obligation was the overarching theme for individuals, communities and surprisingly



businesses during a wave of Black Lives Matter protests. Allyship was a big topic of discussion, emphasizing that those who weren't members of the Black community speak out and show support. For many people, it was an eye-opener that allyship was just as, if not more significant, in the fight for equality.

Companies such as Target, Etsy and Nike, are a few of the thousands of corporations and small businesses who stood in solidarity with the Black community through messages and advertisements, as well as donations to Black organizations during a wave of police brutality.

With allyship came voting. The momentum from the Black Lives Matter movement caused a shift in voting turnout.

“GOVERNMENT ISN'T SOMETHING YOU CAN OPT-OUT OF”

According to Pew Research, Americans cast 158.4 million votes in the 2020 election, which is more than six in 10 people of voting age and two-thirds of the eligible voting population.

Voting was encouraged across all outlets, especially on social media platforms urging younger voters and older adults who never voted before to become registered and participate in the upcoming elections.

SJSU political science alumna Rawabi Hamid, 24, stressed the importance of voting. For the 2020 election, Hamid opted to vote by mail.

“Government isn't something you can opt-out of,” said Hamid. “I'm pretty privileged, but I want to speak for those who can't.”

Hamid recalled one of her former professors explaining to her class that the only way to see real change was through voting, especially in local and state elections. Voting is not only important on an individual level, but also for the greater good -- a point that was made through advertisements during the past election.

Strong voter turnout was seen in the race for U.S. Senate in Georgia when Sen. Jon Ossoff and Sen.

Raphael Warnock won in a close race over Republicans David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler, who were both up for re-election. This win caused a 50/50 split between Democrats and Republicans in the Senate leaving Vice President Kamala Harris as the tie-breaker, thus giving power to Democrats.

Georgia surpassed its voting record history, accounting for four million votes in the 2020 election, according to Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger. Georgia turning to a blue state can be accredited to the larger turnout of Black voters in Atlanta.

However, even with progress, Hamid knows that the government is no perfect system.

“The process, in general, is destructive,” said Hamid. “You don't know the effects of policies until it's in play, and usually it will be beneficial for one group but it can completely devastate another.”

This is a problem for the U.S., where there are both racial and socioeconomic disparities that are engraved in the construction of government from the highest to lowest levels. Hamid believes in an ideal world, the playing field would be 100 percent equal, but with America's dark history it's more than likely impossible.

Many political activists from the Civil Rights Era showed support and encouraged a continued fight for equality during the summer protests.

SJSU senior psychology major Réla Duncan attended two protests, one on Juneteenth at the Port of Oakland where political activist Angela Davis attended as a guest speaker. Following this, protestors marched through downtown Oakland to the city's police department.

She attended this protest with Dator, a close friend.

As an African American woman, Duncan went through a series of emotions. While she was in shock and in disbelief of the continued mistreatment of Black Americans, she wasn't surprised.

“During the BLM protests, I remember feeling overwhelmed,” said Duncan. “There was definitely this sadness I felt and anger stirring up inside of me.”

Duncan and her family talked openly about the ongoing injustices towards their community. Despite her sadness and anger, Duncan appreciated the allyship from protestors of other ethnic backgrounds that showed solidarity.

“I was fed up but happy to see hundreds of



Jasmine Dator poses for a self-portrait

other people fed up too,” said Duncan.

Like many in the millennial and Gen Z generation, Dator stayed up-to-date with occurring events with the help of social media.

But there were downsides.

With screen time being a requirement for her education and work, she had to learn how to find a balance between staying informed while setting boundaries for herself and her mental health.

“Making things to look forward to throughout the day like going for a walk or watering my plants to recenter myself is important,” said Dator.

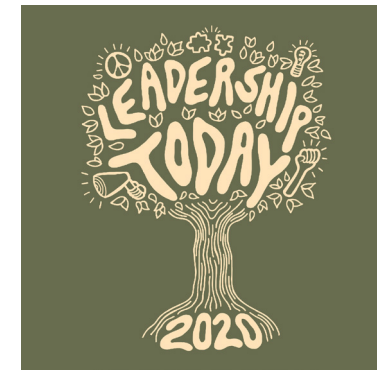
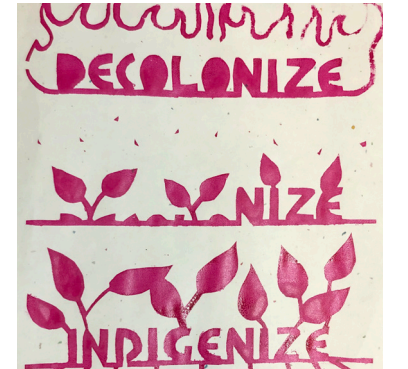
These small boundaries became big things amidst a time of turmoil. Dator also found solace within the extended campus community.

“MOSAIC really helped me process what was going on,” said Dator.

And as a Filipina woman, increased hate crimes against Asians following COVID-19 has been another source of anxiety for her amidst the pandemic.

The FBI warned at the start of the coronavirus outbreak in the U.S. to expect a surge in hate crimes against people of Asian descent. This was following former President Trump's tweet, on his now banned account, referring to COVID-19 as the “Chinese Virus” on March 16, 2020.

Since then, there has been a rise in attacks against Asian Americans across the country, including



Inclusive flyers designed by Jasmine Dator for SJSU MOSAIC

the mass shooting at two spas in Atlanta, Georgia, killing eight people, six of whom were women of Asian descent.

“My heart dropped,” said Dator. “I found myself being paranoid in public.”

While the process is ongoing, Dator is learning how to navigate this stress and violence towards the Asian community through historical reading, hobbies and attending online safe spaces that empower her and others in the Asian community.

Hopefully, one day, we can live in a world where people no longer have to process this kind of trauma.

The unjust treatment of people of color and Black Americans is perplexing, jaw-dropping, evil and unfortunately rooted in American history. However, with the rise of social justice movements during the pandemic, more people are willing to speak out against these issues than ever before.

There is still so much work to be done in the fight for equality. But, 2020 showed us the importance of putting your foot down -- and that there is strength in numbers. ■

*Photos courtesy of Jasmine Dator
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