

An interview with Rose Dominguez from NAFCON SoCal about the 2020 Census and our API community!

E: Would you be able to elaborate on what NAFCON advocates for?

R: Absolutely! NAFCON is a National Alliance of Filipino Organizations institutions and individuals who respond to the concerns of the Filipinos here in the US and in the Philippines and we do that by creating an action-oriented platform that brings people together through our four pillars of unity which are: cultural heritage, education, health and wellness and advocacy. We were founded in 2003 shortly after 9/11 in San Jose, California. During that time Filipinos wanted to respond to the discrimination and scapegoating of immigrants, so Filipino groups and church leaders thought it was important that they convene and discuss how they could address that. As a result of organizing themselves in their community, they elevated their discussion to a national level and launched an action-oriented network which we now know as the National Alliance for Filipino Concerns. Since then, NAFCON has continued to tackle immigration related issues like deportation and labor-trafficking. We've also elevated the concerns of the Filipino workers related to workplace discrimination, unsafe working conditions and wage theft. In fact, NAFCON was able to win a million dollars in unpaid wages in campaigns for caregivers, hotel workers, and others. Some of the things that we also do, we also conduct conferences and leadership trainings in order to engage and empower and unite youth and professionals all across the country. We educate them on the Philippine history, culture, and current issues that Filipinos in the US and Philippines. For example, next Tuesday and Wednesday, NAFCON is actually hosting a two-part community resource webinar to educate the community on the basis of COVID-19 disease -- what are the preventative care steps to be aware of 2 To hear from health workers who are on the front lines. To provide an analysis on the response of the government and its impact on vulnerable communities that people are really talking about like workers, migrants and students. The second part will focus on travel and response in the Philippines by the government and the people as well to share on what we can do as a community to promote health education, advocate for healthcare access, and to increase solidarity in the Philippines. We're also known for responding timely to major disasters in the Philippines by gathering support for effective communities in light of the recent typhoons and the eruption of Mt. Taal due to global climate change. Because of our consistent support for disaster survivors, it led NAFCON to advocate for environmental justice and economic prosperity in the Philippines.

E: In general, our team has realized that, in terms of numbers, the API community seems to have a smaller active civic engagement compared what might be the biggest reason for that? How would we be able to encourage more active civic engagement in our communities?

R: I think this is a really great question. I think that the first thing that we need to acknowledge is that the API community has a long and violent history in their home countries related to the impact of colonialism and imperialism. And many folks in the API community have endured trauma through poverty and war as a result. And so, during the third and fourth waves of

immigration of the U.S. during the late 1800s up to 1965 and onward and moving forward, we started to see Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Cambodians start to arrive. During that time, API people had to learn how to acclimate and survive in a country that was at its roots racist and white supremacist. APIs survived the Chinese exclusionary act, the Japanese endured concentration camps during WWII, and the Delano Manongs also endured violence and racism forcing them to organize during the United Farmworkers Movement. I believe that there are API folks that are actively involved in civic engagement and other forms of activism as a result of those experiences. Take for example, Grace Lee And Larry Itliong. even today in 2020, we have grassroots API community organizations fighting for housing justice and immigration rights. And even this year we saw our first API candidate, Andrew Yang, who is Taiwanese, dare run for President. As a result, if we do see less engagement it may be due to a number of factors, East Asians may not be involved because they feel that there are certain issues that they feel do not affect them or there may be a lack of awareness of the issues that impact the wider API community such as immigration or housing. On the other hand, Southeast Asians may not be as involved due to feelings of mistrust towards the government, fear of retaliation or fear of being ostracized for speaking up and possibly bringing more trouble to an already vulnerable community. For example, from what we know about the history of the Global South, and the suppression of liberation movements during the 1960s-1970s, we see the impacts of that era through intergenerational trauma in our communities. However, NAFCON does believe that there is strength in numbers and we believe that it's important as a community to stay informed about what impacts our community so that we can stand together with a united voice.

E: Why is it so important for the API community to be aware of the census and in what areas do you think that the census will help API communities the most?

R: I think the census is important for the API community because it provides a snapshot of what the total population of the United States is. It shows a number of how much of us are actually here and exist. And we are here to stay in the diaspora. There's that. It also reallocates state seats in the US House of Representatives so if more API folks show that they actually exist we would have more representation in the gov't. It also allocates more funds in much needed programs like Medicare and funds for schools in our state. And it provides an accurate count of who is in our communities to prove funding for school programs and government benefits. I think most times people aren't actually aware of what the census does. The census results affect our community everyday. The data that is derived informs federal funding for more than a 100 programs that include school lunches, highway construction and support for families in need. So if we think about our morning commute for example, the census results can influence highway planning and can also provide grants to buses and subways to create a more efficient public transit system. If we also think of the example of our school, the census can also help to determine how much money is allocated for our Head Start program and grants for teachers in special education. And in a more relevant example it can also help plan for programs to help respond to disasters such as what is happening with the COVID 19 situation. It can help secure

more funding to build more funding for hospitals, fire departments, prevent child abuse and provide housing assistance for seniors.

E: Coming from the API community what might some of the concerns have about

R: I think that people are going to be naturally concerned because of their immigration status. I think that we should be clear that the census does not ask what about your citizenship or not it won't ask you what your immigration status is. I think because of scams or what not, that often prey on seniors. We need to be clear that they are not going to ask about your social security number or any credit card information and if it does then it is not the census. I think we need to highlight that there are acts in place that protect API folks who are filling out the census. For example it won't share information with other federal agencies. The US Code Title 13 guarantees that census information is confidential and can't be used against you in any way and there are actual penalties for sharing that information. And there is also the federal Cybersecurity Enhancement Act of 2015, which protects and secures our data from cyberthreats if people do decide to go online and fill it out.

E: Do you have any last encouraging words for our API community that you would like to share?

R: As an API community, we need to think about the census as an empowering act of civic engagement. It empowers us to state that we exist, that our families exist, and that we count. By counting ourselves in, we get to help formulate what the direct needs of our community are and provide quantitative data on how we can create better living conditions essentially for ourselves, our families and for our communities. There are several programs that I think our API community can benefit from...whether it's about housing, especially in LA and the issue of gentrification. We also need protection with small businesses, especially with COVID 19 we already see impacts of racism especially impacting our API small businesses. I think that we also need more access to healthcare, specifically cially for our community. We need to be talking about mental health...the potential of having mental health care clinics...we also need more youth programs. There are still issues of gang involvement in the Filipino and Cambodian communities and using hip hop as a way to tell their story. Lastly, I think that we can benefit from language access and having more translations for Filipino, Vietnamese, and Cambodian so that API people can feel like they are a part of this country.