



*Perfecting the Act of Giving Back.*



# NEWSLETTER

**November 2024**

## DIVIDED BUT UNITED

I believe that we, as humans, are naturally selfish. Accountability is a sign of strength, but nobody wants to be wrong. Words build a reputation for our identity, but the thought is a true reflection of self. Nonetheless, no two people hold the same opinion in every aspect of their lives, but more importantly, no two people share the same history. Stigmas and credit are due where these things create differences in thought and identity- and what effect comes of those concepts.

Culturally, logically, and emotionally- you cannot please everyone. Perfect people can't exist, and pursuing that concept will only destroy you in the process. Bad and good people are also not concrete, those terms are subjective after all. No matter what guides us, we create a bias for ourselves, and truthfully, it shifts relationships and once more- your reputation (words.)

I am a fifteen-year-old socially inept girl, and even as I navigate all types of environments, whether political, cultural, physiological, or professional, I realize that you are always in a place susceptible to criticism among praise, or the latter. My parents hate horror-based media while I am indulgent, and we have overall opinions that cause conflict in our relationship, nonetheless, we are connected, and I don't think it's an accident. Likewise, My favorite TV shows are Arcane and All Saints Street while my best friend's is Trigun; I disdain Tres leeches while she loves it- same song and dance.

Different but divided, I think respect is a pretty hard thing to grasp in general. History affects us, and thus does bias, but what does that mean? Albeit, as much as I have been just talking- this comes back to the idea that no two... anything is the same.



You are bound to be divided by something, whether minor or major, your association with people can also affect who you are, but that's only based on perception, not truth. What truth becomes is a sense of unity- coexistence, acknowledgment, and respect, something that is not instinctual, but can be learned.

After all, we are human, and I believe that is what makes us common beings.

**- Allyson Nguyen**

## **GROWING UP BETWEEN TRADITION AND CHANGE**

Growing up in Vietnam, my world was shaped by deeply rooted conservative values. Confucian ideals of respect for authority and family harmony were ever-present, seamlessly aligning with the socialist framework emphasized by our government. From a young age, these values were carved into my mind and behavior, shaping my daily norms. I remember being hit with a long, hard ruler for misspelling a word in my essay or receiving harsh feedback if my handwriting didn't meet the standardized scoring system.

These rules weren't just guidelines—they were non-negotiable. To stray from them was to invite scrutiny, steeped as they were in centuries of tradition, history, and generational trauma (yay!).



Vietnam's tumultuous history—marked by colonial rule and conflict—has forged a collective identity steeped in nationalism and a fierce desire to preserve cultural integrity. Stability and tradition were paramount, and questioning these norms often felt impossible.

Everything changed when my loving parents, recognizing my potential, gave me the opportunity to leave what they described as the “four-wall prison” of my local school and enroll in an international school. Suddenly, I was navigating a world where individualism thrived, where voices—no matter how young or what gender—were encouraged to question and debate. Growing up in this environment felt surreal, even unsettling at first, yet it was the best possible setting for personal growth. In this new world, gender roles blurred, social norms shifted, and conformity gave way to self-expression.

This duality became a defining feature of my identity. Over ten years in this international setting, I learned to balance perspectives that were far removed from my upbringing with a deep understanding of traditional Vietnamese etiquette. It was a delicate dance between two vastly different systems of thought.

Today, I carry the ability to distinguish and adapt between the systems of my home country and the ever-modernizing world. I am grateful for my upbringing and proud of our historical and cultural weight, yet I also hold space for growth and progress. This balance—respecting the past while embracing the future—shapes how I view the world and my place within it.

**- Ngoc Huynh**

## WHERE AND WHO WE ARE

Our election is now about one month behind us. The people have spoken, or at least the half of the eligible population that bothers to vote. We will have a new Administration. About half of the people voted one way, the other half the other way. And this time, our transfer of democratic power will proceed smoothly – as it has in all but one of our elections (hint: 2020). But the big winner in our election is and was...democracy.

In our country, the people choose (in our case, indirectly) our leaders. In much of the world, this is not the case. From China to Cuba, Vietnam to Venezuela and North Korea to Nicaragua, and many others – the populations of those countries simply do not enjoy the right to choose their leaders and representatives. And they can and do get thrown in jail for even suggesting or advocating this simple freedom...that many in the world don't even give a second thought.

In the United States, our elections represent our national will. And that is only part of the appeal that makes our country so compelling to others, many of whom risk their fortunes or even their very lives to come to the United States. Our country was founded on many ideals, but among them are the right to live free from political or religious oppression, and in a society that recognizes the rights and abilities of everyone to pursue economic freedom as well as...happiness. Except for Native Peoples (who were here already) and African Americans (who were brought here in chains) virtually every other "American" comes from somewhere else - at some point. They came for the same reasons that people seek to come to the U.S. today...freedom to practice their religion, freedom to express their political preferences or speak freely and gather freely, and freedom to economically care for their families. In their sometimes frantic and deadly search for these freedoms (which we all take for granted), our newcomers don't only want to be among us, they want to BE us. And who can blame them? At some point in our families' histories, someone or several others felt exactly the same way – and acted upon it. Whether on foot, by car, by steamship or airplane – or in a rickety boat in the South China Sea, they came. And once upon a time, we welcomed them.





Our elections should represent the best aspirations of the American people. Often however, they do not. Our elections should represent our hopes and dreams – but often they represent our fears.

It is my honor to work with and get to know the students of AASuccess – for about a dozen years now. The young people of AASuccess represent the very best of our country's future. Every one of our students is a future leader, in their communities, in their future fields of endeavor or in their families. And we are all imbued with the values of sharing the wealth of our experiences, our knowledge, our dreams and our energy to give back to the society that has nurtured (and continues to nurture) us.

## **GENERAL CONSENSUS**

The concept of keeping aware no matter the place is the most important concept to informatively thinking. No country is immune to politics, war, famine, or restriction. Awareness, in that sense, preserves history as is regardless of age. It's better to have a younger generation unable to vote remember an event prime and detrimental in history than a bunch of older individuals who won't tell. I'd like to quote Kingston Ho on this one, that "Though I am able to vote, I believe it's essential for students to stay informed about politics, even if they cannot vote yet. Many policies and laws directly affect students' lives, whether it's education or social issues. Staying informed helps students develop educated opinions and engage in meaningful discussions about important topics.

It also prepares them to make responsible decisions when they eventually gain the right to vote." Because truthfully, history, thoughts, and decisions, affect us too. Ignorance is bliss, but that doesn't mean you can evade the consequences in the future.