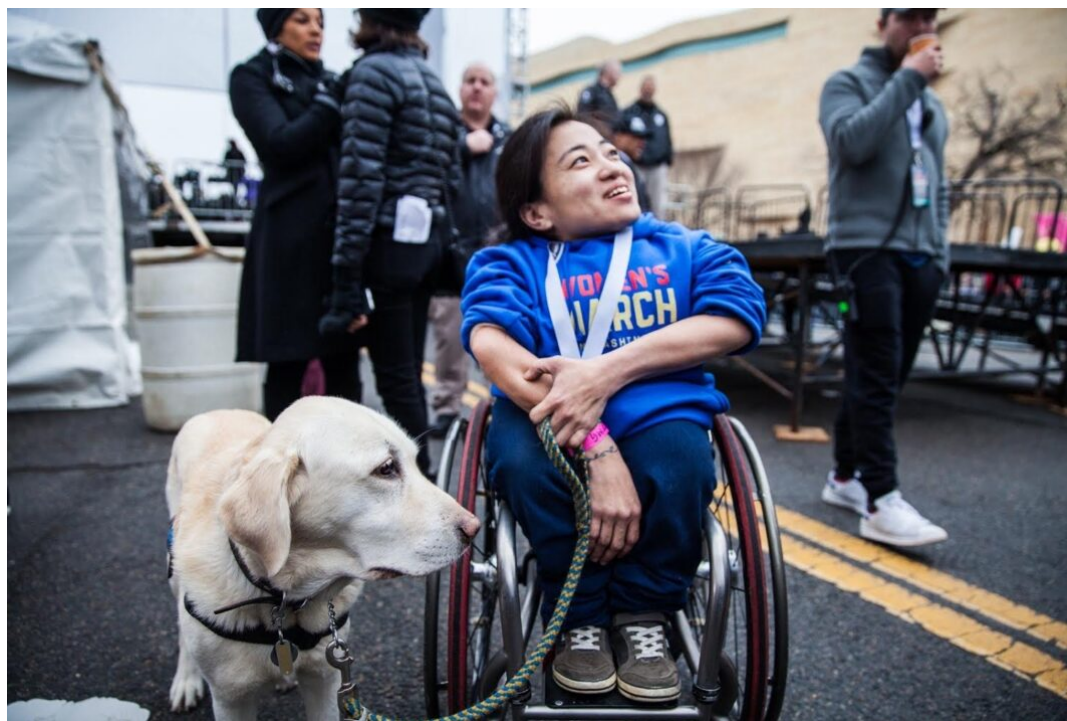


## Racism and Ableism



*Ives-Rublee Behind the stage at the first Women's March. (Credit: Kisha Bari)*

POSTED BY SHRUTI RAJKUMAR APRIL 20, 2021

*Mia Ives-Rublee behind the stage at Women's March (Credit: Kisha Bari)*

**By Shruti Rajkumar, AsAmNews Intern**

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, disabled Korean and transracial adoptee Mia Ives-Rublee would leave the house in North Carolina wearing a mask to protect others as well as herself due to her reduced lung capacity. Her ensemble was completed with a hood and sunglasses, which she wore to try to mask the fact that she's Asian as a way of avoiding racist comments.



“If they see that I’m Asian, and I’m wearing a mask, how are they going to perceive that?’ It was just like, how do I make sure I don’t get hate-crimes by wearing a mask and being Asian, and how do I make sure I protect myself?” said Ives-Rublee.

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), approximately 1 in 10 Asian adults have a disability. Disabled Asians, such as Ives-Rublee, face the dual struggle of experiencing racism and ableism in their everyday lives.

In the 1990’s, chair and co-founder of [Asian and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities of California \(APIDC\)](#) Patricia Kinaga said that she didn’t notice a lot of non-profit organizations out there supporting disabled APIs. After doing research, she found that some nonprofits were focusing on mental disabilities but not on physical or developmental disabilities. “Let’s face it, as APIs in general, we’re often invisible. So the additional overlay of APIs with disabilities [are also] invisible,” Kinaga said.

This lack of intersectionality was something that Ives-Rublee noticed as

^ never felt herself in those spaces.



A photo taken during Mia Ives-Rublee's work on the Warren Campaign. She was the Community Regional Organizing Director and was helping to do outreach to the Disability and AAPI community. This photo is of Ives-Rublee, Loren Whitaker (an organizer)(the tallest), and a

^ munity, and I'd be like, 'I'm very interested in healthcare, and education, but I'm also really interested in what it means to be a disabled Asian American, and what it means to face discrimination as an immigrant and what it means to be a person of color.' I never really felt like I was seen, I would either have to be promoting one side of myself, or another side of myself," Ives-Ruble said.

In order to help the API and disabled communities reach one another, Kinaga connected with disability rights advocate Gordon Anthony, Hope Yasui, and Dr. Chong Suh to hold a statewide conference that brought together mainstream service organizations for disabled people, such as the Department of Rehabilitation, and API nonprofit organizations. That was the genesis of APIDC, Kinaga said.

APIDC aims to put a face to APIs with physical, mental, and developmental disabilities. Kinaga said it also puts a focus on empowering disabled APIs, connecting them with one another through conferences and their Youth Leadership Institute, as well as to educate policymakers on challenges faced by people of these two communities.

"Our thought is that will be how we can further build, empower, [and] educate. The intersection...that's what we're trying to [do], that's why we exist," Kinaga said.

Kinaga said that although the organization covers a lot of different topics and does support K-12 and college students, there is a focus on young adults. This is because primary schools and colleges have strong special education programs and student disability services offices to support disabled students, but there is little support for young adults.

"After graduation, there is a cliff. What we have focused on [at APIDC] is

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ifer Kumiyama, who identifies as a Black, API, cis-woman with a disability, said APIDC came into her life when she really needed it. At the time, it was the 20th anniversary of the Americans With Disabilities Act, and she was a performer at Disney California Adventure Theme Park. She said she had been dealing with mental health issues, and was feeling the pressure of being an advocate for the disabled community.

“I think APIDC was proof that there were people not just in the API community, but in the API and disability community, with their boots in the ground, really doing the work to advocate for the betterment of the quality of life for people with disabilities. If I could describe meeting APIDC at the moment in my life where I did, I would describe it as a big hug,” Kumiyama said.

Ives-Rublee said she had somewhat of an atypical experience dealing with oppression since she grew up in a White family. Although she experienced a lot of alienation at school, ableism was talked about a lot in her family. Her parents always made sure she got the accommodations and medical care she needed, which taught her how to self-advocate. She knew how to deal with disability, however, she said she didn't know how to deal with racism.

“Growing up, I just didn't have the words to describe my experience very well. I don't really fault my parents for that...they never had to experience it. They didn't really know how to explain the issues that I was experiencing, and so I didn't really talk to them about those issues. I don't know if I really identified as being Asian American as a kid, because there's just not really something we talked about,” Ives-Rublee said.



In reflecting on the recent hate against not only the API community but also the Black community, Kumiyama said it's important for there to be discussion on how disabled people within those communities can likely be in vulnerable positions when faced with hate crimes.

“I just think hate...regardless of what your color is, should always include the discussion of how it affects the disability community. We're stuck in our houses already due to this pandemic, and then we have these hate crimes that are going on. How much more exclusive can things in our society be at the moment for people with disabilities?” Kumiyama said.



*Ives-Rublee at a Black Lives Matter protest with my friend Keri Grey. We organized to support Black disabled lives. Photo credit: Jennifer White-Johnson*

Within the education system, Ives-Rublee said the history of different communities are taught in silos, such as a Black history unit and women’s rights unit, which leaves out the experiences of those living intersectional lives. She said that it’s important to acknowledge how systems of oppression are interconnected.

“We really can’t be just fighting for one group’s rights without fighting for all of these other groups’ rights, because we’re not going to fix the system without completely rewriting it. Being able to connect all of those dots, and then being able to have conversations with people... that emotte what is going on in each community, and try and build those bridges in those gaps is extremely important to me,” Ives-Rublee said.

Rather than sticking to one silo and participating in organizations that have no interest in developing an intersectional lens, Ives-Rublee said she finds fulfillment in talking to organizations about how disability intersects with their work and how they can do better.

“I just think it’s important to gain more understanding about what ableism and what racism are, and how they interact with each other, and how they interact with so many other ‘isms’ that are out there. The





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