

Essay sent in by Nazareth Velazco:

Rinku Sen (president and executive director of the organization Race Forward) mentioned that a recurring but very simple answer she gets when she asks what people like about Facing Race often involves their appreciation for the chance to be able to talk about race with people from completely different backgrounds. In the university, it is easy to forget that discussions on race and social justice issues are not as widely embraced in other parts of society as they are in educational settings. Reflecting on this privilege, I became more aware and thankful for the chance to attend a conference that brings people from all kinds of backgrounds, ages, and locations across the country together to discuss hard topics and social issues prominent in everyday life in the United States. My experience with Facing Race allowed me to further develop my opinions on certain topics within the social justice movement and expanded my mind to other perspectives on questions I thought I already knew the answer to.

Specifically, the first panel that started the conference which included Michelle Alexander, Alicia Garza, Zon Moua, Judith LeBlanc, Isa Noyola, Chris Crass allowed me to let go of my previous idea of the “community I should be serving” and expanded the ways in which I move forward. Alicia Garza spoke and said that there is no more time to simply think how does our “own community” need help but to examine how solidarity and allyship actually work. Alicia explained that, yes, we are all attacked in different ways but we are all being attacked. She continued by clarifying that it is crucial to recognize the difference in how groups are attacked but it is also important to unite and work together- definitely easier said than done, with so many things to take into consideration and be careful of. Throughout the conference several speakers emphasized that during this time there needs to be a mutual defense support and the “oppression Olympics” needs to stop, as we are all in the same boat.

Something I have also been reflecting on is the approach that Roxane Gay, Van Jones, and Jose Antonio Vargas advocated. They focused on the idea that in order to keep the movement going forward, we POC need to take positions in office and other jobs that are typically seen as working within the system. In contrast, several other speakers argued that “The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House;” this was also repeated throughout the conference. Whether people decide to work within the system or decide to go another route for social change, it is clear that we are heading in the same direction. The most important thing I learned was that we need to constantly be reevaluating ourselves before we go and evaluate others.

I would like to thank the UCSC Community Studies department for funding the opportunity to attend the 2016 Facing Race Conference. Attending this conference a day after the result of the elections was the healing space I needed.