

The Intersection of Multiculturalism and Racism

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I want to first take the abstract to congratulate the Society for Multicultural Community Studies on its 35th anniversary and would like to thank the organization for allowing me the space to express my thoughts on multiculturalism through the vast art of writing.

This piece explores the intersection of multiculturalism and racism, drawing from my personal experience growing up as both Japanese and American. Reflecting on fears of racism while living in California and leading a diverse robotics team, I argue that racism is often taught subtly through societal norms and divisions, but can be unlearned through collaboration and embracing diversity. By examining these experiences, the story highlights how cultural differences can either divide us or drive creativity and innovation, ultimately challenging the very systems that perpetuate prejudice.

The hum of the air purifier of the laser cutter fills the air as my team gathers around the table, our eyes scanning the intricate design and 3D blueprint. We're not just building a robot—we're building an understanding, a collaboration between individuals who have traversed distinct cultural landscapes. For me, managing diversity in this space feels like second nature. I've spent my life bouncing around various international schools in Tokyo, grappling with the duality of being a citizen of two nations—each with its own history, language, and worldview.

Growing up as both Japanese and American has always meant juggling multiple identities, and nowhere was this more evident than when I moved to California at nine years old. Before stepping into my new school, I had a deep fear of being bullied because of my Asian background. It wasn't just a vague anxiety—it was rooted in a history I knew all too well. California known for its vast Japanese American population in the 1940s had what I would call a historical blunder; in the spirit of relocating, I say we, we falsely imprisoned and ruined the lives of thousands of Japanese-Americans. But back to that later; I had heard the stories of racism and exclusion and feared I would face the same. Would they make fun of my Japanese water bottle? My lunch? Would I ever fit in?

I wasn't bullied in the way I had imagined, but that fear never entirely left me. What I came to realize over time is that racism is rarely overt; it's often taught subtly and subconsciously. It's woven into societal norms, into classroom discussions, into everyday interactions. And it's taught from both ends of the spectrum—from the casual jokes and stereotypes thrown around on playgrounds to the deeper societal lessons about which histories are told

and which are omitted. In many ways, the racism I feared wasn't a product of my peers' actions, but a product of the lessons society teaches—sometimes without us even knowing it.

One of the clearest moments of this realization came when I started learning about movements like Black Lives Matter. BLM opened my eyes not only to the fight against police brutality and systemic racism but also to the ways in which people are divided into categories: Black, White, Asian, immigrant, and native-born. These divisions, while sometimes necessary for creating awareness, can also reinforce the very boundaries they aim to dissolve. Racism doesn't just arise from hate—it arises from a lack of understanding, from people being taught that there is an “us” and a “them.”

Although controversial, BLM raised \$90 million US Dollars in 2020 which is a staggering number, but most say it is a fair amount for reparations and the deep-rooted racial divide that exists in the United States. However, do you see Japanese-Americans asking for reparations from the World War? I took a quick look on The National WWII Museum and was shocked for lack of a better word. The sentiment in the words, “camp residents,” and “surviving individual.” On one hand, they were camp residents like oh let's go to summer camp with my friends! We're Summer Camp Residents! It's an indictment of the rights of Japanese-Americans, but do you see Japanese-Americans marching? No.

Back to the matter at hand, this understanding has been crucial in shaping how I manage diversity in my robotics team. Robotics, after all, isn't just about engineering; it's about teamwork and communication, often between individuals who come from entirely different worlds. In our team, we have members from various countries, each bringing their own cultural perspective. It's a microcosm of the larger world, where different beliefs and backgrounds can either lead to conflict or creativity, depending on how those differences are managed.

At first, I thought our success depended on technical skill alone, but I quickly realized that managing the diversity of ideas, experiences, and communication styles was just as important. Some members were more direct, others more reserved. Some were used to hierarchies, while others thrived on flat structures. In leading this team, I had to draw on my own experience of living between cultures, of understanding that not everyone



Multicultural robotics team

communicates or sees the world the same way. I found myself not only translating between languages but also between cultural norms and expectations.

But it wasn't just about keeping the peace—it was about fostering an environment where diversity wasn't just tolerated but actively embraced. Our most innovative ideas often came from members who initially felt sidelined or unheard, and our best solutions arose when we merged conflicting viewpoints. It wasn't always easy, and there were certainly moments of tension. But those moments were also the ones where we grew the most as a team.

Ultimately, robotics became more than just a technical project—it became a living lesson in multiculturalism. It reinforced for me that racism, prejudice, and division are not inevitable. They're taught, subtly, through the systems and narratives we internalize. But just as they're taught, they can also be unlearned, through collaboration, understanding, and shared goals.

Living between two worlds has given me the ability to see through multiple lenses, and it's a skill that has shaped my approach to both leadership and life. In robotics, as in life, the true challenge isn't just in building the robot—it's in building the team, one that thrives on its diversity rather than being divided by it.



Growing in diversity has given me multicultural lenses to see the world.

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アメリカン・スクール・イン・ジャパン（ASIJ）12年生。アメリカ・カリフォルニア州に1年間在住。高校生になってカンボジアで貧困家庭の子どもたちへのICT教育支援活動を始め、デジタル・ディバイドの調査も実施。さらにモンゴルでも、地方の遊牧民家庭を訪問した経験がある。日本国内では移住者の英語教育の支援活動にも取り組んでいる。多文化研ユースに所属。