

CONVERSATIONS : 2024

A United States Election

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The Newsroom

Citizens, Artists, Designer, and Journalists Fall 2024

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“What does this election mean to you in 2024?”

These are their answers, comments, along with the writers’ commentary, and images that respond to the articles.

The tradition of journalism is revered, despised and misunderstood, as well is a lifeline to the truth. Margaret Gordon of the West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project helps us navigate perception of West Oakland in the face of real environmental challenges for her community, Amelia Wiley of Atlanta speaks about her experience as a generation Z grappling with an intersectional reality, Justin Hall tells us the story of his comics and the LGBTQ perspective, Igor Tregub mentions his responsibility of a newly elected leader, David Howse touches on the crisis of higher education, Marlene Watson speaks about Indigenous perspectives on the election among many others.

Today we practice the longstanding journalism process of researching, investigating, interviewing, writing, and editing as well as art, photography and design. We are presenting the election issues of traditionally marginalized voices that are often kept out of the national dialogue. We sought women, folks of color, Indigenous, young people, LGBTIQ community, labor, higher education, technology, environmental justice, elected leaders, and others whose voices became a tapestry, a marker in time for the most consequential election in modern history for the United States.

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Indigenous Opinion

By Tristan Zhan



In this year's U.S. national election, things feel different. More people are tuning in, paying attention to issues that go beyond the usual political talking points. According to the Indigenous representative I interviewed,

"I think it is different because there's more, I think it touches more of the individual people that aren't usually, um, in tune with a lot of the policies and how the government works and how decisions are made"

this election is hitting closer to home for many, especially in Indigenous communities. People are thinking more about everyday matters—education, food security, healthcare—and realizing how these issues directly affect their lives. With media access expanding, more voices are being heard, and people are looking at a wider range of topics than ever before. It's no longer just about who's running for office but about the real impact policies have on communities.

One of the things the guest highlighted is how vital it is for Indigenous people, especially the younger generation, to participate in this election. She explained that voting is more than just a right—it's a way to ensure that their voices are heard, "the best message to give to them is, is their, their voice, um, for their future, um, generations, you know, future requires education and opportunities for their families and their next generation". Many in the Indigenous community may feel disconnected from the political system or unsure how much their vote matters, but she stressed that this election could shape the future of Native lands and their people. The decisions made now will affect the younger generation's future, so encouraging them to get involved and make their voices heard is critical.

She also touched on the ongoing issue of energy exploitation on Native lands, which is one of the major concerns for Indigenous communities. Too often, natural resources are being taken from their lands without proper protection or oversight, leading to environmental degradation and long-term damage.

"They extract out of the ground and then, um, you create, um, nuclear power, and they call it clean energy, but it's not. It has radioactive, um, tailings that poison the water and the people for decades. And, um, The government is not, it's not taking its part to clean it up or the companies that caused it".

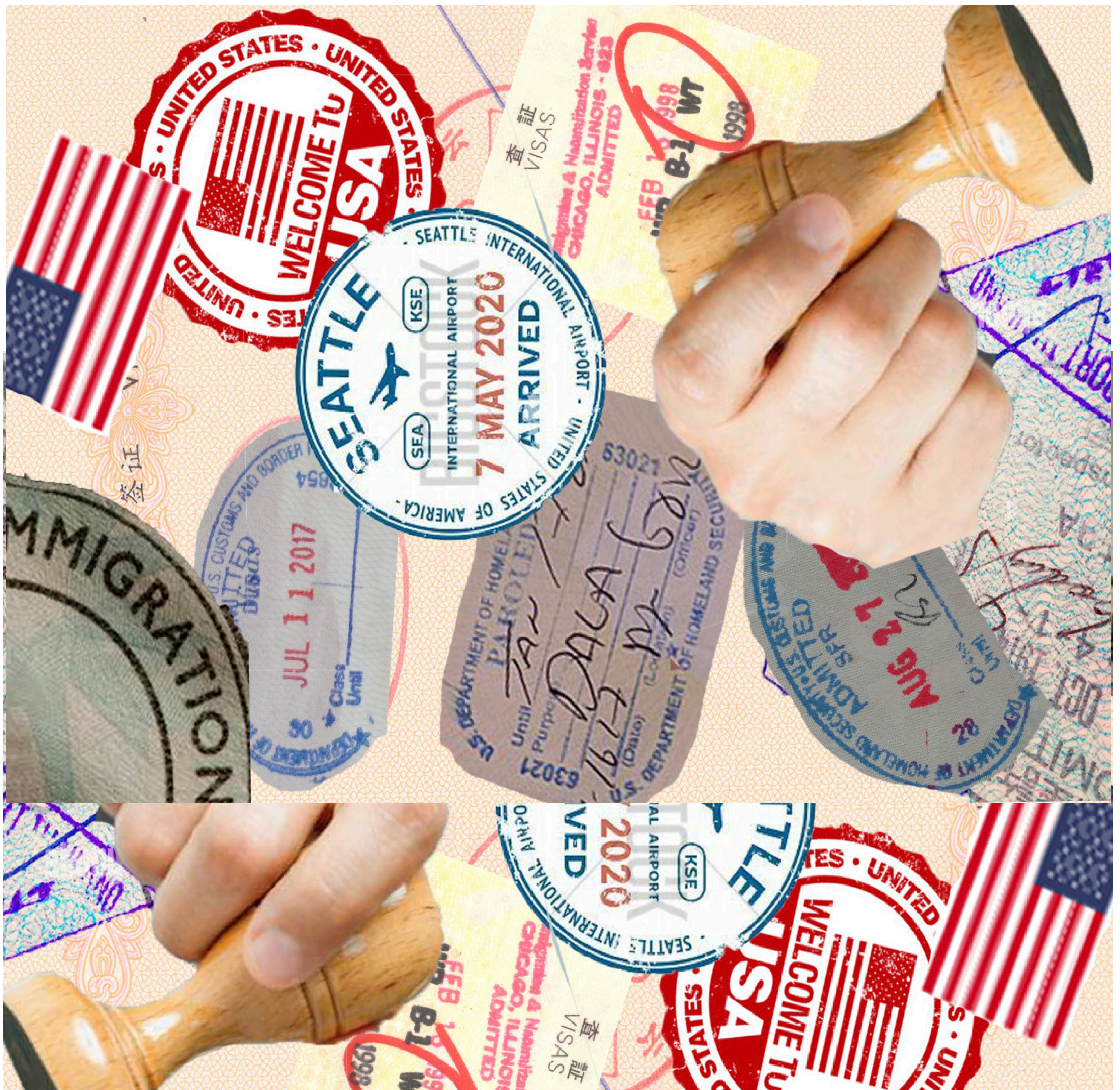
These lands are more than just sources of energy; they hold cultural and spiritual significance for the Indigenous people who live there. But as energy companies continue to exploit these resources, the community is left to deal with the consequences. She emphasized that more needs to be done to protect these lands, "You can't just come through here, and you have no regulations, no permits, um, but Yeah", she said, both through policy and community action.

Beyond the environmental and political issues, our guest spoke passionately about the importance of building a strong sense of identity and spirit within Indigenous communities. In a world that often overlooks or misrepresents them, it's crucial for Indigenous people to stay connected to their heritage while also finding ways to thrive in modern society.

"For me it's to the way you live your life. It's what, you know, you project. The filter that society sees you, that's one thing, but the way you live, your life is different. You don't let the society define, define your identity. You don't let institutions define your identity. Or organizations. Because all of it, it's been in the works for centuries. So generations have been able to try to define what a Native person is. So, what I offer to the society is, who I am is who I was created".

Strengthening their identity is not just about survival—it's about thriving, standing firm in their cultural roots, and pushing back against the forces that try to undermine them.

In closing, she urged the local community to get out and vote. It's a message of empowerment, especially for the younger generation. Their future depends on the decisions they make today, and by participating in the election, they have the opportunity to shape the direction of their communities and protect their land, culture, and rights.



Voices from Bay Area Immigrants A First-Generation Perspective

By Yangjingyi Liu

Jason, a first-generation immigrant who arrived in the U.S. three years ago and now resides in San Francisco, California, shared his thoughts on the upcoming 2024 election. As a U.S. citizen, he reflected on the significance of this election for himself and the broader working-class immigrant community.

In our conversation, Jason emphasized how crucial this election could be for shaping his future and the futures of other immigrants like him. He remarked on the election's competitiveness and how its outcome would not only impact the U.S. but also resonate globally.

From the perspective of a Bay Area resident, Jason highlighted some of the most pressing local issues: **“The biggest issue here are the crime, crime rate, homeless people, and car break-ins, stealing, rubbing,”** he said. With personal safety already at risk, he hoped the incoming government would take meaningful steps to address these problems. *“It is the biggest thing I wanted to get improved”* he added.

When discussing immigration, Jason shared a balanced view, stating,

“Immigration for this country should providing a great value for each other, for the country and also for the one who is immigrating.” He believes that when immigrants integrate successfully, both parties benefit—immigrants contribute to the country’s growth while finding opportunities for personal and professional development.

Voting, for Jason and many others in the immigrant community, is more than just a right—it’s a way to ensure their voices are heard in shaping the country’s future. **“Every voice should be included”** he explained. He, like many others, feels a deep sense of responsibility to participate, hoping to contribute toward solutions that address both local and national challenges.

In conclusion, Jason’s voice represents the diverse perspectives that immigrants bring to the table, especially as the country heads into the 2024 election. As citizens of the United States, first-generation immigrants like Jason are voicing their hopes for economic recovery, improved safety, and a future where the mutual benefit of immigration is fully realized. For those who have made cities like San Francisco their home, their love for the region fuels their desire to create positive change for all.

Navigating Identity, Art, and Democracy:

A Parent's Reflection on American Elections

By Micky Fang



Justin Hoover, Executive Director, Chinese Historical Society.

Being a student in CCA, I wonder how parents think about the election that is coming up very soon, I held an interview with Justin Hoover, he is a professional artist, a sports coach, a parent with three kids, and a mixed American-Chinese. I did half of hour interview with him, he have many things to talk about the election, impacted by his kid's future and also what a parent, and artist would be thinking.

He said **“As a parent, artist, and a mixed American-Chinese individual, the American national election carries profound significance. It's not just about political choices but about shaping a future that will impact my children, their sense of identity, and the society they will inherit. In my household, the election isn't just a civic event—it's a reminder of the values we stand for as a family, and as a community.”**

When he think about the American national election, it feels deeply personal. It's more than casting a vote; it's about ensuring that the future reflects a country that celebrates diversity and inclusion. For my children, who straddle two cultures—American and Chinese—it is essential that they grow up in a country where their identities are not only accepted but embraced.

As an artist, Hoover see the election as a way to influence the policies that shape creative expression and cultural dialogue. He noted that art thrives in environments that support free expression and provide platforms for marginalized voices. Hoover thinks the voices of artists and creatives are often missing when people talk about economic and social policies. He said **“The role of art in shaping culture and community is sometimes underestimated, even though it can be a powerful tool for activism and change.”**

Hoover hope that both national and local governments invest more in education too, particularly arts education, which is critical for nurturing the creative minds of the future. **“It's vital for my children to be educated in environments that celebrate diverse perspectives and experiences.”**

“When it comes to voting, I am unwavering in my commitment. I've voted in the past, and every time I do, it feels like a way to actively shape the country I want for my family and my community.” He encourage others to vote by reminding them that, like art, voting is a form of self-expression. It's a way of contributing to a larger vision, and every voice matters in creating that picture.

As an artist and a parent, Hoover contribute to his neighborhood by organizing community art projects and creating spaces where people from diverse backgrounds can share their stories and cultures. Just like what Hoover did in Chinese culture, Hoover is also a martial art artist, he often attend to activities and shows to present his way of understanding the martial arts from China. **“Art brings people together, and I believe it fosters a sense of belonging and connection.”** For me, equity and inclusion start with making sure everyone's story is heard, especially in the spaces where my children will grow up.

Being of American-Chinese heritage shapes my understanding of American democracy. I see the importance of representation and inclusion from a unique perspective. There are gaps in how multicultural experiences are represented, and I feel responsible for helping close them, both for myself and for my children. As a parent, he want to pass on the value of civic engagement to his children. Hoover thinks that minority group's voice really matters. He want them to be proud of their heritage and know that they have the right and responsibility to speak up for what they believe in.

Being an artist and a responsible citizen aren't separate roles for him—they're intertwined. **“Art can inspire change, challenge perspectives, and bring people together, all of which are crucial in a functioning democracy. By balancing these roles, I aim to use my creative platform to engage in meaningful conversations and influence positive change in both my local community and the wider society.”**

Generation Z : An Interview with Amelia, an 18 yr old from Atlanta

Amelia Wiley, currently a student at Emory University is in Atlanta, Georgia. Wiley talks about her views on the upcoming election touching on topics from voter participation to the role of leadership in addressing key social issues.

By Shuoning Liang

Amelia expressed concern that voices from marginalized communities—such as those living in poverty or belonging to minority groups—often go unheard in national conversations, despite their crucial role in shaping election outcomes.

“I mean, I think there’s a lot of people that, like, are necessarily political. They wouldn’t necessarily call themselves politically active, but they’re like, really, really important to elections.”

She admitted that her exposure to election news primarily comes from mainstream media, which tends to overlook less prominent perspectives. The challenge, she noted, lies in hearing from those not widely covered by traditional outlets. Amelia Wiley thinks the national government should prioritize domestic issues over international affairs, citing income and education inequality as pressing matters. Locally, she emphasized the urgent need to tackle homelessness in Berkeley and the Bay Area.

Amelia Wiley argued for abolishing the Electoral College, describing it as an outdated mechanism that no longer serves the needs of modern elections. **“The Electoral College is an indirect system for electing the president and vice president of the U.S. Instead of citizens voting directly, a group of electors representing each state’s vote casts ballots to decide the election.”** She also views voting as especially significant in swing states like Georgia, though she acknowledged that the process can confuse young voters. Her past experiences highlighted the need for a more accessible voting system.

In order to encourage greater youth participation, Wiley suggested promoting group voting activities or providing simplified voting guides, which would make the process more approachable for first-time voters. Rather than pursuing government roles, Emily expressed a preference for grassroots efforts to drive social change. She believed direct action could be more effective in achieving tangible results.

For Amelia Wiley, a strong leader is honest, transparent, and committed to implementing a clear policy agenda. Following through on promises is essential to earn public trust. She drew from her involvement in student organizations to advocate for inclusivity and equality, highlighting her efforts in creating a more welcoming environment. Amelia Wiley’s curiosity about policy stems from conversations with family and friends, as well as reading radical literature. She is particularly interested in learning about historical policy changes and their impact.

Historically, young people have been sidelined in policy discussions, according to Emily. However, she remains optimistic that their voices will gain more influence in the future.

Wiley actively participates in movements supporting Palestine and opposing the “Cop City” project in Atlanta, reflecting her commitment to social justice. “Cop City,” or the “Atlanta Public Safety Training Center,” is an 85-acre police training facility in Atlanta. It has generated controversy over concerns about police militarization and environmental damage to South River Forest.

She hopes for a ceasefire between Israel and Palestine and sees collective boycotts as a viable strategy for achieving meaningful change. She is confident that voting can bring about change, especially when candidates like Trump have drastically different stances on critical issues. For her, the election represents an opportunity to influence the direction of the country’s policies. Amelia Wiley’s perspective offers a glimpse into the thoughts and priorities of young voters, who are increasingly seeking to make their voices heard in the political process.



“Change Higher Education, We Have to Make it More Accessible and More Equal”

By Linda He

As the 2024 U.S. presidential election approaches, discussions around higher education have become increasingly prominent, particularly focusing on how we can make it more accessible to a wider range of people. To dive deeper into this topic, I had the chance to interview President David Howse from California College of the Arts (CCA). We talked about the potential impact of the election on higher education and how the U.S. education system needs to evolve to meet the demands of a changing society. With rising tuition costs and increasing inequality in opportunities, figuring out how to make higher education affordable and accessible for more students has become a pressing issue.

President Howse highlighted the crucial role that the economy plays in this discussion. He pointed out, **“A lot of people are struggling to make ends meet, especially in high-cost cities like San Francisco. For students, the link between the economy and higher education is undeniable.”**

In today’s system, U.S. universities are becoming less attainable for the average person. Many students are under intense financial pressure, and as living costs continue to rise, it’s becoming harder for students to cover both tuition and everyday expenses. This is why he urged students to use their right to vote and speak up about economic and educational issues, especially during this election, as voters’ voices will be crucial in shaping future policies.

When talking about access to educational opportunities, President Howse noted the clear inequality in the current higher education system. **“We’re seeing that opportunities at higher education institutions are often stratified. Some people have plenty of resources, while others are severely limited,”** he explained. This uneven distribution means that wealthy students can attend college without worrying about the high costs, while those with fewer resources struggle to keep up. The middle class, in particular, is often overlooked, stuck between not being wealthy enough to easily afford education and not qualifying for enough financial aid. President Howse called for policymakers to focus not just on the extremes but to also support those **“in the middle.”**

When asked about how to address this inequality, President Howse shared his vision for the future of higher education. **“Higher education has to reinvent itself. We’ve been working with a system that has functioned for a long time, but we need to reimagine it to better serve students in the future,”** he said. The current model, which relies heavily on tuition, will become unsustainable as economic pressures grow. He urged institutions to rethink how they can serve more students, especially those who are struggling financially but still want to pursue higher education.

Looking ahead, President Howse was clear about one major reform he would implement: making higher education more affordable. He sees financial burden as the main reason why so many students are unable to pursue a college degree. To solve this, he called on policymakers to introduce more measures aimed at reducing financial barriers, such as lowering tuition fees and increasing financial aid, particularly for students from middle-class and low-

income backgrounds. President Howse suggested that the U.S. government contribute more to higher education.

In discussing the role of creative fields in addressing social issues, President Howse emphasized that art and design have always played a key role in driving societal change. He mentioned, **“Artists and designers have long used their work to address social issues that are hard to express in other ways. They are the catalysts for change and policy shifts.”** He believes that CCA’s students and faculty will continue to use their art to influence and inspire society, contributing to the reform and progress of the education system.

Overall, the 2024 election will undoubtedly shape the future of higher education.



President David Howse from California College of the Arts (CCA)

“A lot of people are struggling to make ends meet, especially in high-cost cities like San Francisco. For students, the link between the economy and higher education is undeniable.”

The U.S. Election Through the Eyes of an International Student

By Ivy Zhang

As the U.S. prepares for another election, millions across the country are ready to make their voices heard. But for Kyrie Zhang, an international student at the University of Southern California, the election is something he must observe from the sidelines. Like thousands of other international students, Kyrie's future in the U.S. is shaped by election outcomes, even though he cannot vote.

"The American election matters to me, even if I can't participate," Kyrie said. His words carry the weight of someone who understands the stakes, despite not having a ballot. Immigration laws, visa regulations, and education funding—all of these issues are part of Kyrie's reality as a foreign student.

Unlike U.S. citizens, who may take the election process for granted, Kyrie knows how policies impact his stay. **"The decisions made here, especially around immigration, change the trajectory of my life,"** he explains. For Kyrie, an election isn't just about choosing the next president—it's about securing his future.

Polarization and Political Chaos

One of the things that stands out most to Kyrie about American democracy is the sharp polarization in its political landscape. He finds it both fascinating and troubling. **"In China, politics isn't as openly debated. The government doesn't face much opposition, and decisions are made more quickly. But here, the debates seem endless, and sometimes it feels like no one is interested in solving the issues—they're just arguing,"** Kyrie observed.

This polarization, he believes, makes it difficult for meaningful change to happen. Kyrie's experience with a more centralized, albeit rigid, system contrasts sharply with what he's seen in the U.S. **"Sometimes I wonder if the U.S. would be better off if people found more middle ground,"** he said, highlighting the inefficiency he sees in American democracy.

Still, Kyrie admires the freedom of expression in the U.S., even if it leads to conflict. **"People here can criticize the government without fear,"** he noted. That kind of freedom offers a level of personal and political autonomy that doesn't exist in China.

The Unseen Stakeholders: Immigrants and International Students

For Kyrie, the election represents more than just political theater; it directly affects his day-to-day life. International students like him contribute to the U.S. economy and research institutions, yet they are often left out of national discussions. **"We're part of the system, but our voices aren't heard,"** Kyrie reflected.

The uncertainty of his future weighs heavily on him, especially regarding visa policies. **"There's always a fear that a new policy could make it harder for me to stay or work here after graduation,"** he said. While Kyrie is committed to his studies and hopes to continue contributing to the U.S., the bureaucratic hurdles of staying post-graduation add stress.



A Call for Inclusivity

Kyrie's journey as an international student is shared by many others—students who live in the U.S. but don't have a voice in its political process. Kyrie remains hopeful. His presence, along with other international students, brings something valuable to the table.

"We bring different perspectives," he said. **"We help bridge cultural gaps, and that's something the U.S. needs more of."** As the election approaches, Kyrie's words remind us that while not everyone can vote, everyone is impacted by the outcome. For him, and many others, the stakes couldn't be higher.

In the end, his message is clear: elections matter to everyone, even those who can't cast a vote. His story underscores the importance of political engagement and its impact on individuals beyond the voting booth.

"We bring different perspectives,"

"We help bridge cultural gaps, and that's something the U.S. needs more of."

Queer Voices and the Election

Conversations with Comic Artist and Queer Historian, Justin Hall

By Lars Bauer

In anticipation of the upcoming primary election, I sat down with a pillar of San Francisco's queer community, Justin Hall. Hall is a comics artist, professor, and queer historian, who wrote the anthology, *No Straight Lines: Four Decades of Queer Comics*. I asked him a series of questions about the current political climate of the United States, these are the responses he gave.

What voices are left out of the national dialogue?

Hall: *A lot of marginalized groups are talked about but very rarely are allowed to talk for themselves. So, trans folks are at the center of this incredible amount of political controversy during the election, but rarely do we get to hear trans folks talking for themselves.*

What would you like the US, state, and or local government to do for society?

Hall: *One of the things that frustrates me about the US is the lack of social safety nets that is more prevalent in other developed nations. In terms of health care, elder care, early childhood education, protecting families, just a better sense of the social compact.*

If there is one thing you would like to completely change in our American democracy, what would that be?

Hall: *I think the most efficacious thing would be to fix gerrymandering. It doesn't happen in any other developed nation. Let's stop that and have the board come in and figure out the voting maps, I think then that would snowball out into less partisan folks being elected.*

Are you going to vote? Why or Why not?

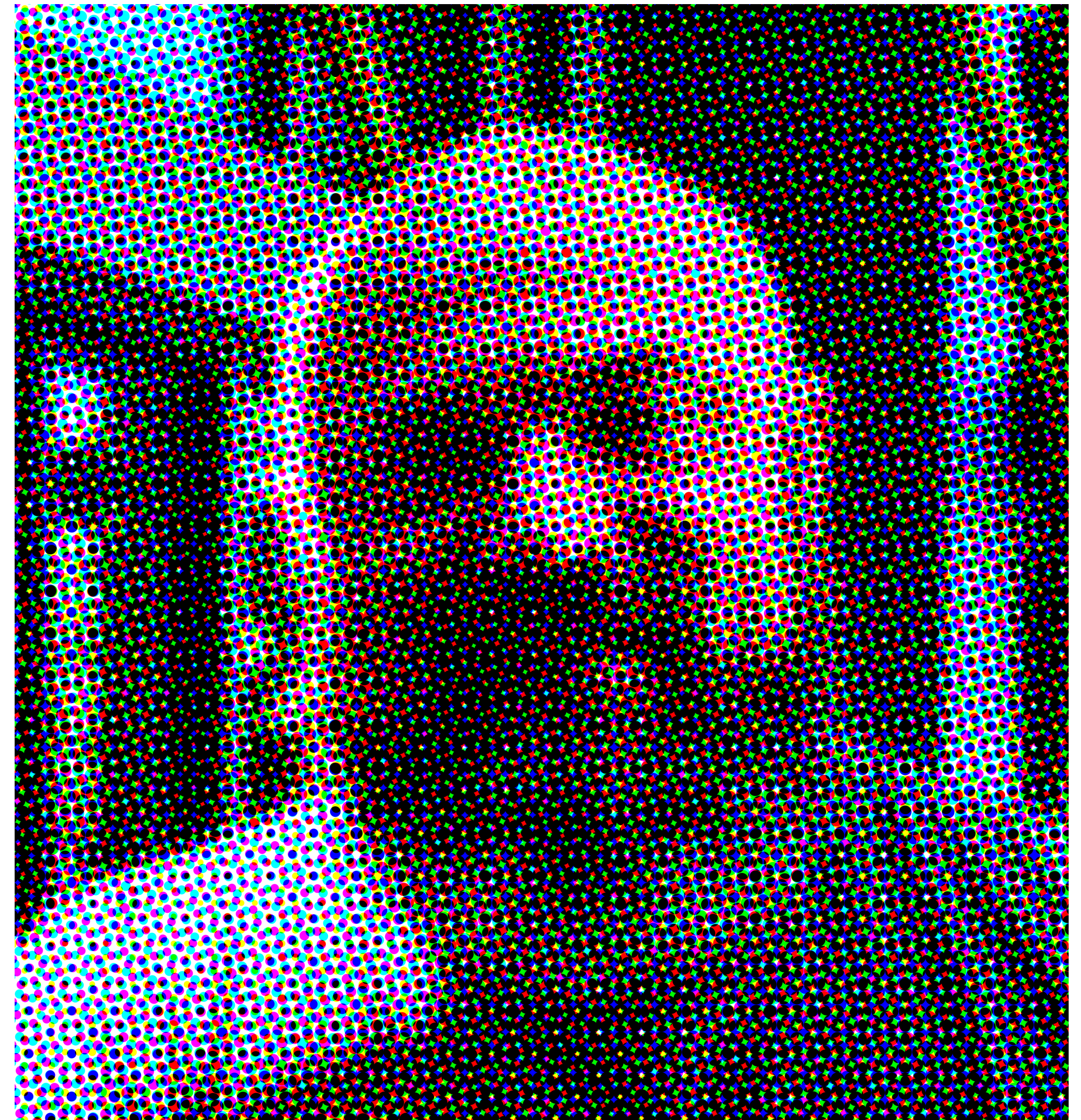
Hall: *Yes, I do believe in that sort of civic duty, I'm part of a democracy, and I want to be part of a democracy, and as flawed as it may be, I want my voice to be heard.*

In regards to your book *No Straight Lines*, could you elaborate more on the making of that book and on portrayal of queer people in media and politics?

Hall: *For a long time any comics that had queer content weren't necessarily 'queer comics' they were underground queer comics because the mainstream would just stay away from any depiction or representation of queer people, so we had to move to underground comics. It was in danger of vanishing as the queer media world started to fall apart, because some of that work was not going to cross over [into the mainstream]. So I was really interested in making sure that material didn't vanish.*

If you could pick anyone in the world to run for president that you would support without a doubt, who would it be?

“The vast majority of any political action of mine has been hyper focused around queer comics. When I first started making comics, queer artists were absolutely marginalized. We were not even part of the conversation and part of the work I was doing early on was to bring queer comics to the rest of the comics world.” - Justin Hall (2024)

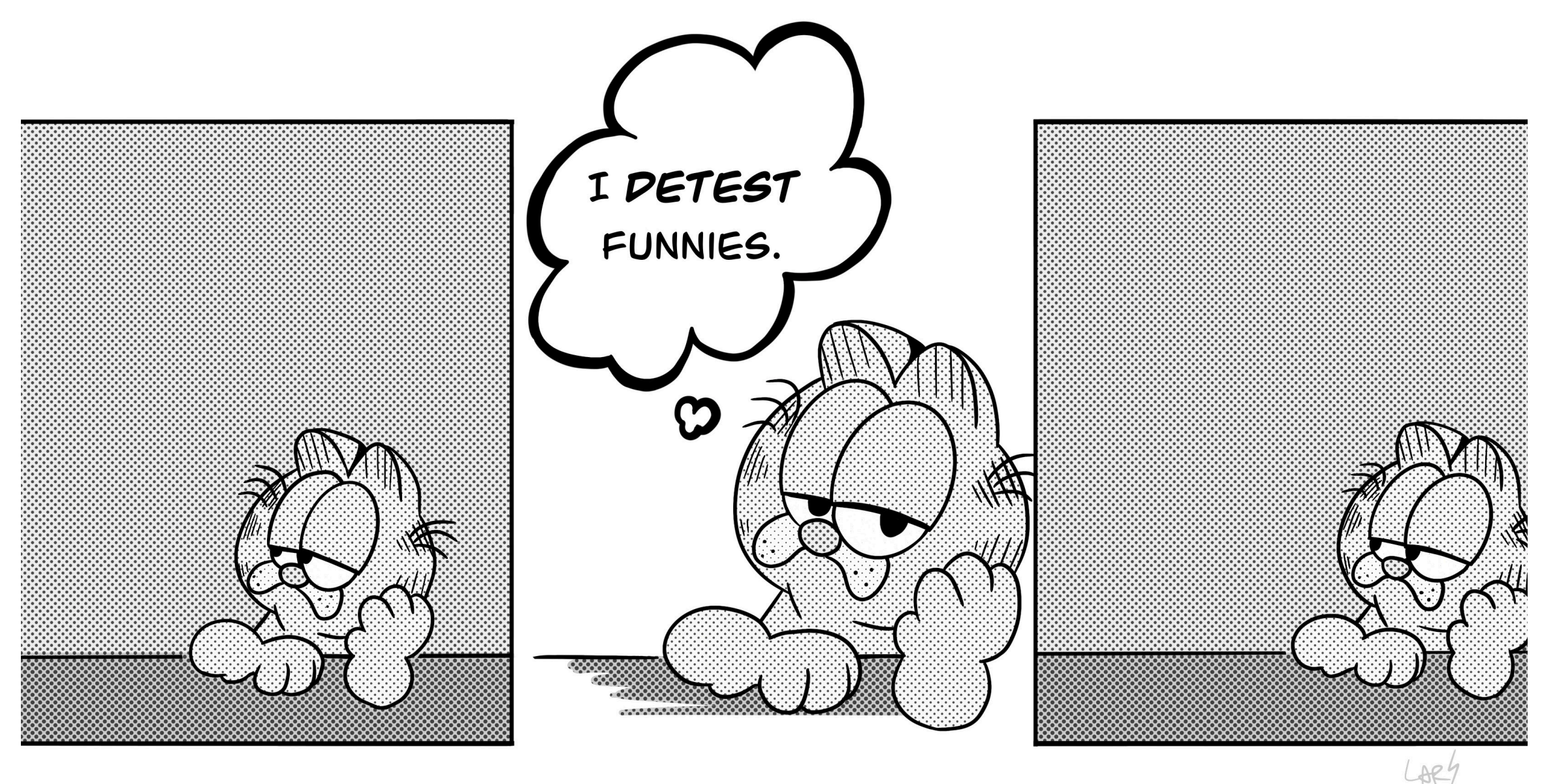


Hall: *You can't get anything done politically without compromise, so I would want someone who could actually make those decisions about compromise knowing that you can't get them perfect, but that should not be the ending of it. I don't need to have a beer with my president, I want them to be sort of a little bit dorky and awkward but a brilliant tactician... but we can't just go for the completely noncharismatic technocrat, you do need someone with a bit of flair as well.*

What is your opinion on the government's attempt to control the media in the US? i.e. the banning of Maia Kobabe's gender queer and social media such as tiktok.

Hall: *Part of the issue is just watching our politicians trying to deal with these things they clearly have no concept of. Its moving so fast and nobody knows what's next especially with AI... and the idea that legislatures would move quickly enough and thoughtfully enough to actually enforce the right changes and build guardrails, is a lot to ask, but it feels especially ridiculous when you hear the legislative sessions trying to talk about social media and they're getting all the words wrong and they don't know what they're talking about.*

As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I'm glad to have Justin Hall Represent the queer majority in San Francisco, his passion about preserving queer works and his call to action on political legislation to protect transgender citizens is an inspiration to queer activists everywhere. I recommend that readers check out his work *No Straight Lines*, and for students at California College of the Arts to take a class with Hall, if given the opportunity.



A conversation with two women, Tessa Wright and Sinclair Watkins

By Lucy Harrington



Sinclair Watkins



Tessa Wright

As our nation prepares for the upcoming election, we invited two women in different parts of the United States to weigh in and show us the true experiences of being a woman. Women's perspectives shape our society, influencing critical issues such as reproductive rights, economic empowerment, and social well-being. We wonder how women can provide an inclusive and equitable United States? Can the 2024 election present a pivotal opportunity to harness women's power and create meaningful change?

In a captivating dialogue, with two young women from opposite sides of the country - 21 year old Sinclair Watkins, a Criminal Justice major at Appalachian State University, and 21 year old Tessa Wright, a spatial data and technology student at the University of Oregon, to explore

their unique experiences and views circulating the upcoming presidential election.

When asked about her initial thoughts on the 2024 presidential election, Sinclair Watkins candidly described this election as **"anxiety-ridden."** She elaborated into her anxiety stating : **"The election weighs heavily on my heart, just because I know that either way it could go means a lot for our country and specifically for women"**. She feels that the pressure circulating the upcoming election has been leaving her with "a little bit of fear" tied to the current candidates we have in this next election.

Growing up in Dallas shaped Sinclair Watkins political outlook. With a democratic mother who worked on Obama's Campaign and a Republican- leaning extended family, she gained exposure to very diverse viewpoints. Now living in Boone, North Carolina a small blue zone in a red state- Watkins reflects on her upbringing in collaboration with her home now, noting, **"It's given me a good understanding of both sides and has helped me come into my own identity when it comes to politics"** Sinclair also elaborated on how she grew up never feeling super pressured to choose a political party and stand by it. This allowed her to approach politics with a more open mind.

In conversation with Tessa Wright, University of Oregon student, shared her experiences as a woman and her passion for political awareness, offering a unique West Coast perspective that connects and contrasts with Sinclair Watkins' views from the East Coast. After asking Tessa what she hopes to see in her lifetime regarding women's empowerment she quickly dove into stating **"the little ways that sexism is still ingrained in America"** and how she craves a **"different conversation"** regarding it. She passionately elaborate on the societal expectations placed on women, discussing the traditional roles of "stay-at-home" mothers and/or wives and how these roles connect demographics in the upcoming election. She stated **"Just being in relationships and feeling like, oh well in the end i'm just gonna have to take care of everyone"** Her insights highlighted some of the roles women still face in today's society.

Both Wright and Watkins emphasized the significant role social media plays in the 2024 election, acknowledging its benefits and highlighted its flaws. Both women noted that while social media facilitates information dissemination and engagement, its dominance in modern politics can be perceived as very superficial or even **"stupid."**



Mr. Z: Democracy, Dollars, and the Everyday Struggle

American Labor Perspective

By Wise

In a lively and eye-opening conversation, Mr. Z, a proud member of the Communication Workers of American Labor Union, shared his candid thoughts on some of today's hottest topics: elections, democracy, and the challenges that working people face in the U.S. His mix of serious reflection and casual honesty paints a real picture of life as seen through the eyes of an everyday worker navigating a rapidly changing America. Mr. Z wasted no time when asked about the importance of the U.S. election. **"Don't get fooled by the word 'national,'"** he quickly pointed out. Sure, the election happens in the U.S., but it has ripple effects far beyond its borders. The world watches because, in many ways, the U.S. election touches on everything from global diplomacy to international markets. **"A change in leadership here changes a lot of things elsewhere,"** he explained. But for all the global attention, Mr. Z reminded us of those often left out of the spotlight: Indigenous people, youth, and other minority voices that he feels deserve much more attention. **"They should be put on the face of the dialogue,"** he stressed, talking about the vital but often overlooked role these communities play in shaping America's past, present, and future.

When the conversation shifted to what issues the government should tackle next, Mr. Z went straight to healthcare and affordable housing. In his view, while the U.S. shines in areas like technology and infrastructure, the basics—like getting to see a doctor or finding a place to live—are still major struggles for many. His take? The government has yet to build a solid system to keep housing prices within reach for regular people. **"You can build houses,"** he said, **"but you cannot build a system to provide affordable prices on those houses yet."** When asked about American democracy, Mr. Z revealed both pride and a little frustration.

He joked that if he could, he'd get rid of a certain past president (hint: a familiar face with bright orange hair), but quickly

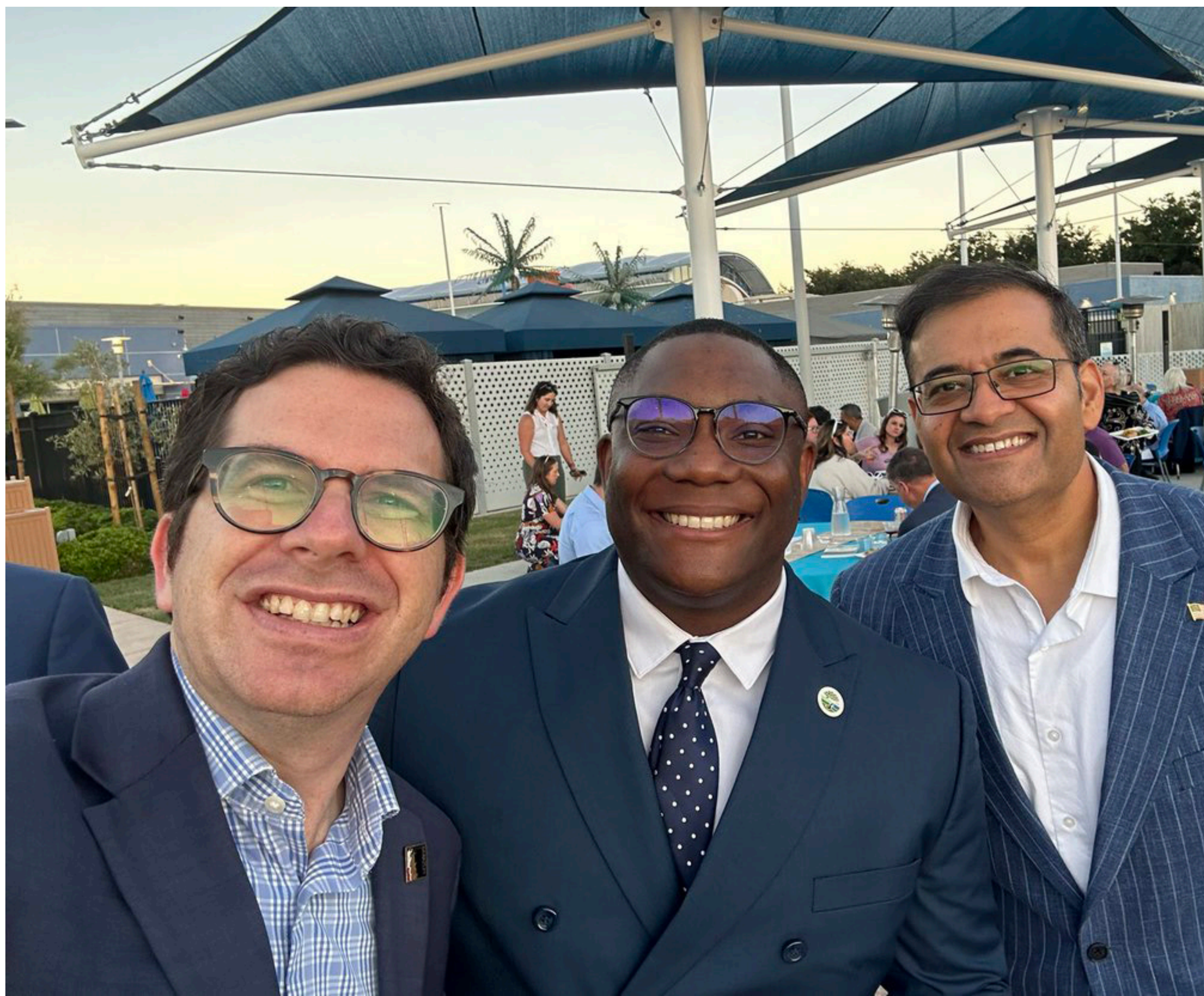
circled back to a serious point: the voting system needs some work. **"There's only a certain percentage of people voting,"** he said, disappointed at how many people, especially young ones, just aren't getting to the polls. When those promises are broken, people just stop caring. **"They need to take more accountability,"** he emphasized, pointing out that hope and confidence are built on trust, something he feels is missing in much of today's political landscape.

When the big question came up—whether the U.S. is still the global leader in democracy—Mr. Z responded with a mix of pride and realism. He acknowledged that America remains a leading democratic power but cautioned that countries like India and Japan are catching up. Maintaining leadership, he said, requires constant effort. **"There are always pros and cons,"** he noted, adding that democracy is a delicate system that needs care and attention. The conversation then turned to the economy, where Mr. Z didn't sugarcoat things. Sure, the U.S. is still a leader, largely due to the strength of the dollar as a global currency. But he had a warning: this might not last forever. If the dollar were to lose its dominance, the U.S. could face some serious challenges. His suggestion? America needs a **"backup plan"** to stay strong if the global economy shifts.

All in all, Mr. Z's reflections were both realistic and hopeful. He sees the challenges in American systems, but believes change can come—starting with individuals and growing into broader government action. His message was clear: we can't control everything, but we can each do our part, starting at home and building outward.

Increasing Diversity in Political Office: Insights from an Interview with Berkeley City Council Member Igor Tregub

By Ruihan Wang



In an insightful interview, Berkeley City Council Member Igor Tregub shared his thoughts on the challenges and impact of increasing diversity in American politics. As the 2024 elections approached, he emphasized the importance of representation and its potential to shape the future of governance in the United States.

Challenges for People of Colour in Politics

Tregub highlighted several barriers faced by people of color running for or holding office, such as the “glass ceiling” effect. He cited Vice President Kamala Harris’s experience as an example, explaining that if she were to be elected as president, she would be the first woman and first woman of color in that role, breaking multiple barriers. He noted that these challenges are often compounded by systemic issues, such as implicit biases and the lack of generational wealth, which hinders candidates of color from accessing resources that are critical to pursuing political careers.

Impact of Diverse Representation

Despite these obstacles, Tregub believes that increasing the visibility of candidates from diverse backgrounds can inspire greater voter participation, especially in underrepresented communities. “When someone on the ballot looks like members of historically underserved communities, it provides an incentive for participation,” he explained. This visibility helps create role models and encourages future generations to consider leadership roles.

Tregub further emphasized that having leaders with diverse lived experiences leads to more inclusive policies, as they can better understand and address the needs of their communities. He argued that diversity in political offices has a transformative effect on policy-making, ensuring that more voices are heard and represented.

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There’s a correlation between how democratic a nation is and the inclusivity of its elected officials

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Progress and Future Outlook

Reflecting on past progress, Tregub acknowledged the significance of electing the first Black president in 2008 and the subsequent increase in diverse representation. However, he cautioned that there is still much work to be done. “We need to make sure that once we break these barriers, we open more doors for others to follow,” he stated. The goal is not just to elect diverse candidates but to ensure they are not the last.

A Global Perspective on lasting change

When comparing the diversity in American politics to global trends, Tregub pointed out that more democratic societies tend to embrace diversity in leadership.

“There’s a correlation between how democratic a nation is and the inclusivity of its elected officials,” he said, suggesting that increasing representation strengthens democratic values and fosters a more equitable political environment. Tregub noted that more democratic societies tend to embrace diversity in leadership, highlighting a correlation between inclusivity and democratic values. He argued that diversity in political offices isn’t just about representation but driving substantive policy changes. Supporting candidates based on qualifications and varied backgrounds will create a political landscape that reflects the nation’s true diversity, leading to a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

“Sometimes, when someone looks less familiar to voters, they may hesitate to vote for them due to implicit biases, even when they’re well-qualified.”

Art to Bridge Cultures and Advocate for Change

Interview with Marlene T

By Joy Jia



Marlene T

An interview with Marlene T offers a look into her life as an artist, activist, and advocate for social justice. Originally from Silver Spring, Maryland, Marlene moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1970s. Her journey into the art world began as a model rather than a creator, but this changed when she joined a mural project in the West Bank, which became a turning point in her life and career.

In 1988, Marlene joined a team of Jewish women artists in Palestine during the First Intifada, a period of intense political conflict. The project aimed to show solidarity with Palestinians, making it clear that not all Jews supported the Israeli occupation. Although Marlene initially doubted her artistic skills, she embraced the opportunity to learn through this apprenticeship-like experience. During her time in the West Bank, she worked on a large mural installation in a community center and several smaller projects in childcare centers and theaters.

Upon returning to the United States, Marlene dedicated herself to art, exploring figure drawing, portrait sculpture, and eventually, stone sculpture. Her journey took her back to Palestine in 2001 for another mural project. Over the years, she has explored various art forms, including pastels, watercolors, and found-object sculptures. Marlene sees art as a powerful tool for fostering dialogue and understanding, using her work to bridge cultural divides, especially in conflict zones like the West Bank.

In the interview, Marlene shared her concerns about American politics, particularly the upcoming national election. She is strongly opposed to Donald Trump and supports Kamala Harris as a candidate, viewing Trump's presidency as damaging. Marlene also emphasized the lack of representation for marginalized

communities, such as low-income individuals and people of color, in the national conversation.

“I very much would like to see more of an emphasis on making our healthcare system more available to everyone. I would like to see our educational system more equal so that everyone has the same chance to a good education, and not just if you have money. I would like to see more training opportunities for people who are who are coming out of high school. Maybe they don't want to go to college, but they are smart and have skills.”

Marlene also addressed the issue of homelessness, which she has witnessed in San Francisco.. For her, the housing crisis reflects broader societal failures, including the lack of support for vulnerable populations.

“Yeah? Well, that's another very, very important part of things, is that there should, I believe, be housing available for everyone who wants to, wants to be housed. That that it's could be, it should be affordable and and a nice place to live, even if it's a simple place, so that everyone has shelter that's super important.”

When discussing changes she hopes to see in American democracy, Marlene expressed a desire to shift from a consumer-driven economy to one focused on service, where people are rewarded for helping each other rather than for material consumption. This shift, she believes, would create a more compassionate society that prioritizes human well-being over profit. Marlene also highlighted the undervaluing of creative professions in the U.S., where financial success often takes precedence over artistic achievement. She believes that more support for creative fields could help shape a more empathetic and culturally rich future, with art playing a key role in inspiring new perspectives and fostering a shared sense of humanity.



Addressing Environmental Justice

The Crucial Role of Elections in Protecting Vulnerable Communities

By Yansong Teng



Ms. Margaret Gordon, West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project.

In this interview, the Margerate Gordon highlights the environmental stakes tied to national elections, emphasizing the impact that policy decisions have on the quality of air, water, and soil, particularly in vulnerable communities. They express concerns about how marginalized groups, including residents of inner cities and rural areas, suffer the brunt of environmental damage, experiencing higher rates of asthma, respiratory diseases, and cancers due to pollution. These health impacts, according to Margerate Gordon, are directly linked to a lack of government intervention and poor regulatory enforcement.

“We need to amend the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act. We also need more protection for communities facing sea-level rise because when groundwater comes up, it pushes contamination up, and people end up walking or driving in it. We need soil remediation in many areas, including West Oakland, where there are at least 60 sites that haven’t been cleaned up.” Such instances of environmental neglect are emblematic of larger systemic issues, where communities most affected by pollution are often left out of critical policy discussions.

A major point of concern is that these problems are not just environmental but also deeply rooted in social inequity. The interviewee argues that government agencies must collaborate more effectively to address these intertwined crises. By forming inter-agency working groups, federal and state funds could be better utilized to tackle environmental problems comprehensively. They believe that community engagement must go beyond token gestures—equity needs to be implemented through action.

In the realm of environmental policy, the Margerate Gordon advocates for the strengthening of laws such as the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act. **“We need to amend the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act. We also need more protection for communities facing sea-level rise because when groundwater comes up, it pushes contamination up, and people end up walking or driving in it. We need soil remediation in many areas, including West Oakland, where there are at least 60 sites that haven’t been cleaned up.”**

When discussing how to mobilize public support for environmentally conscious candidates and policies, Margerate Gordon emphasizes the need for environmental organizations to better engage the public. They argue that the focus should shift toward climate justice—ensuring that environmental initiatives address both ecological preservation and the health and safety of the people most affected by pollution.

This interview reveals how deeply intertwined environmental issues are with questions of social justice and equity. The Gordon’s view on the national elections is a pivotal moment for addressing these concerns, particularly for marginalized communities that often bear the brunt of environmental degradation. The focus on health impacts, such as asthma and cancer in polluted areas, underlines the urgency of policy change.

What stands out most is Margerate Gordon’s commitment to shifting the conversation from traditional environmentalism to a broader framework that includes the human costs of pollution. This perspective calls for a balance between ecological preservation and addressing the immediate needs of people affected by environmental harm. As they emphasize, real change requires a sustained focus on both voting and grassroots action to ensure that marginalized voices are included in policy decisions.



Citizens, Artists, Designers and Journalists