

The Asian Reporter

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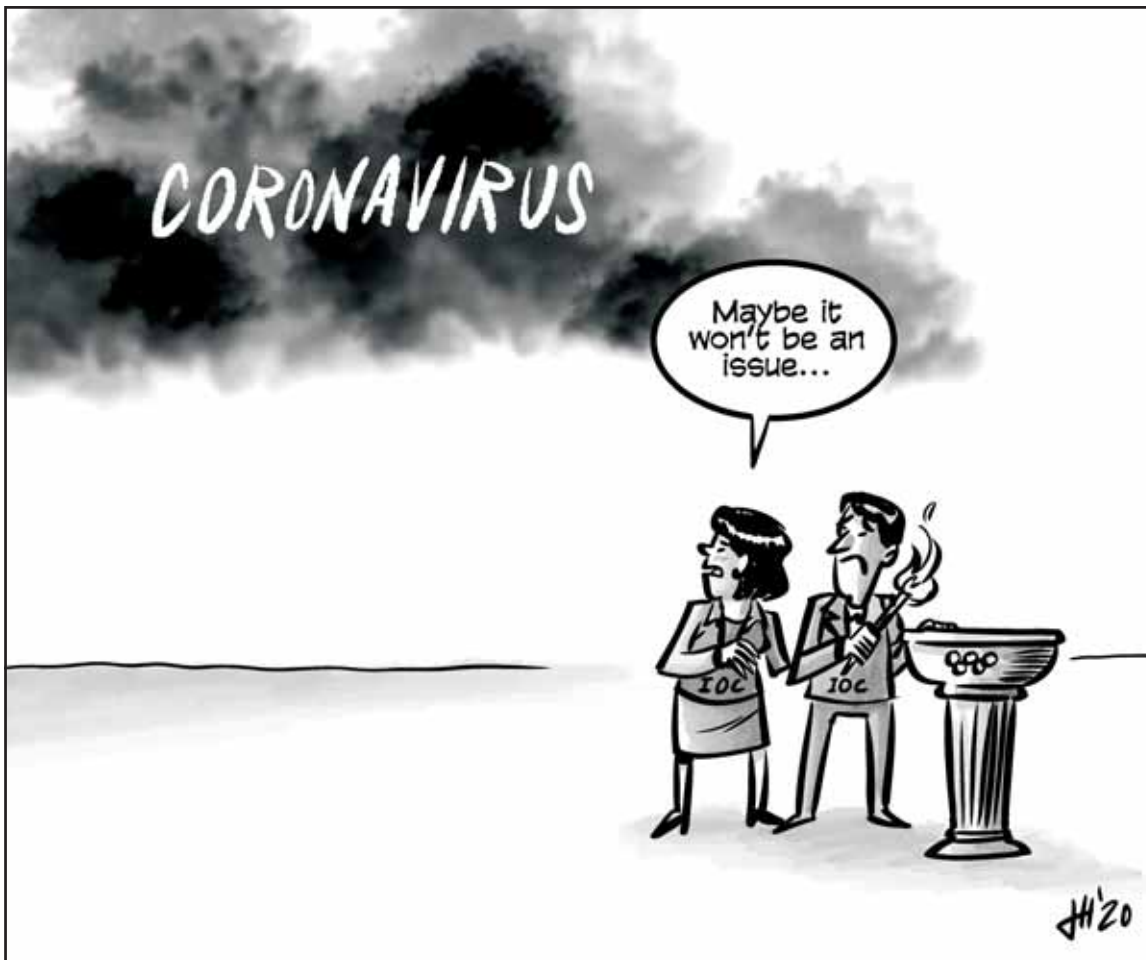
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MY TURN

■ **Dmae Roberts**



APIs count!

When I was more active in public radio nationally as an independent producer, I distributed my own work and collected data about the stations that broadcasted my documentaries. The more stations that carried my pieces, and the greater my track record, the more likely I would garner future funding. While promoting *Crossing East*, an Asian/Pacific Islander (API) history series, I was told by station managers and program directors that they would not run the eight hours of programs because they didn't have Asian or Pacific Islander listeners. I asked, "How do you know?"

After more investigation, I learned APIs were not counted in Arbitron ratings (an audio broadcast ratings system that has since been bought by Nielson). To my knowledge, Asians are still not counted in the Nielson audio ratings. The reason? Our numbers are too small to be tallied. That's just wrong.

It's important to be counted. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, along with indigenous communities, are often excluded and generally whitewashed culturally. Take, for instance, the recent Tilda Swinton fiasco.

In 2016, Swinton took on the role of a Marvel Comic character that was originally an Asian monk in the *Dr. Strange* film. In February, it was announced that she was spearheading the television series adaptation of the 2020 Oscar-winning film *Parasite*. Instead of hiring Asian-American actors for much-needed representation on television, she would play the matriarch of an all-white family. Apparently, Asian Americans still don't count when it comes to working on an adaptation of an originally Asian film.

With the new coronavirus (COVID-19) scare, it seems the only time Asian Americans are noticed is when they cough. Yes, perhaps this is a bit of an exaggeration, but I've read stories about Asian-American students who were asked by their professors to leave classrooms even when white students also coughed. In addition, there are reports that Asian Americans travelling within the U.S. are being stopped and interrogated by airport security even when they are not travelling internationally.

My point is that it's important for APIs to be counted, not for racial profiling, but for the *right* reasons. It's like being listened to. It's a sign of appreciation and respect. Which leads me to the 2020 U.S. Census. Whoa, wild turn there? Not really. The U.S. Census has great importance to our communities. Here's why.

Data collected during the census helps guide real

dollars in federal assistance for the next 10 years. This information determines the amount of funding that neighborhoods, towns, and cities receive for schools, hospitals, roads, and other public spending. It also establishes the number of seats states have in the U.S. House of Representatives, so Oregonian voices can be heard in Washington, D.C. Nationally, the census also governs dollars for programs such as Medicaid, SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), and Head Start.

The U.S. Census is mandated by Article I, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution. That's right, THE CONSTITUTION! Every person who lives in America needs to be counted every decade, regardless of age, ability status, sexual orientation, race, ethnic group, gender identity, or (and more importantly) citizenship status. Many immigrant and refugee communities may feel suspicious and fearful of the census because at one point the Trump administration tried to require a citizenship question on the form. It is not. And nobody should be asked about their documented status. No one. *All surveys are confidential.* Under federal law, census responses cannot be shared with any other federal agency until 72 years after the collection of the information.

The Census Bureau is mailing and hand delivering census packets across the country with information about how householders can fill out the 2020 form. Some households in rural areas will be surveyed in person.

APIs are the fastest growing demographic in the United States and have been historically undercounted. Locally, the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO) is working to canvas all APIs and is especially seeking to provide services for under-represented communities such as Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders. To ensure all API demographics are recorded, APANO is training volunteer canvassers, hiring field teams to do outreach, and translating census materials into multiple languages.

I hope all readers find time to fill out the survey. There is also an option to reply over the phone to 1-800-354-7271. To learn more about the census, visit Oregon Counts 2020 at <<https://www.oregon2020census.gov>>.

To serve as a volunteer ambassador, be hired to work on the field team, or obtain help — especially with translation — visit <www.apano.org> or drop by the APANO office in person at 8188 S.E. Division Street in Portland.

Remember, you count!