

## STANDING OUT AS HAPA

“Standing Out As Hapa” was a Greater L.A. JACL Zoom program on August 8. On the panel were Andrew Gruhn, Erica Harris and Mylee Sumoge, three of GLA’s hapa young adult members. Following are the summaries of their panel discussion.



*Andrew Gruhn*

**Andrew Gruhn** is Leader, Young Adults Group of GLA. Many Hapa face challenges when trying to find a sense of belonging within their communities. Because Hapa do not cleanly fit into any single group, people from both sides of their cultural heritage may see them as outsiders rather than members of both groups. This position between two cultures can easily lead to a crisis of identity that must be reconciled, lest they abandon one of their cultures. Being Hapa is at times a struggle, but I am proud to be part of this diverse group. The cultural duality with which we live has helped me to become more open-minded and see things from different perspectives. This position between two races allows us to serve as a bridge between communities and lead to better cross- cultural understanding.



*Erica Harris*

Hi, my name is **Erica Harris** and I am attending the University of California, San Diego. I am a Nisei through my mother and my father is Caucasian, and they currently live in Georgia where I lived until moving out to California when I was 18. I have two hapa brothers and one half-brother. Growing up, I was able to connect with my father's culture more than my mother's, especially because I was never taught Japanese. Even when I visit my grandparents in Japan, we often talk through my mother as she is the only one who speaks both Japanese and English fluently. Since moving out here to California, I've been working harder to connect to and learn more about my Japanese heritage, not only so I could be more knowledgeable about the biculturalism that makes me up, but also so I can be more understanding when it comes to learning and interacting with others and their cultures. I believe that being biracial helps me to keep an open perspective and be more accepting of others, and that I can use my personal experiences to help connect all of us because every culture is equally important and everybody should be able to celebrate and be proud of the cultures they belong to.



*Mylee Sumoge*

Hello, my name is **Mylee Sumoge**, I'm 19 years old and a 4th generation (Yonsei) on my father's side and my mother's side is African American. I was born and raised here in Los Angeles and I'm currently attending UC Santa Barbara. I'm going into my second year and majoring in sociology. During our Standing Out as Hapa program, I talked about my experiences dealing with the stereotypes of being both Japanese American and African American, the unique challenges hapa are put in when it comes to forming their identity and how important hapa are for being bridges to different communities. Hopefully, we can help lead to a better understanding of different people.