At EMPOWERD Conference, Asian American Creatives Inspire the Next Generation

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Each year, the Asian American arts and entertainment group Kollaboration hosts its annual EMPOWERD Conference, showcasing talent and giving professionals an opportunity to connect with and inspire the next generation.

Like pretty much every other event on earth right now, this year's EMPOWERD summit has gone virtual, taking place online over Memorial Day weekend. The free event kicks off Saturday at 10 a.m. Pacific with a keynote address from Jeff Staple of Staple Design and rock climber Ashima Shiraishi.

Panel discussions run the gamut from digital campaigns to indie filmmaking and civic engagement. All eight panels, and performances by musical guests Run River Run and MC Jin, will stream live on Facebook and YouTube.

Telly Wong, svp and chief content officer at multicultural agency IW Group, will join the conference to discuss his agency's antidiscrimination digital campaign #WashTheHate. Wong said now is a perfect time for the conference, given the rise in anti-Asian bias related to Covid-19.

"There's a great deal of uncertainty right now in the Asian American community as a result of the pandemic," Wong said. "We can choose to remain silent and hope for the best or we can help contribute to a solution, which begins with raising your voice."

Wong's panel on Sunday will also feature designer Michelle K. Hanabusa, founder and creative director of WeAreUprisers. Hanabusa's company created a similar digital campaign, #HateIsAVirus, to combat the bias attacks against Asian Americans.

"Kollaboration is so important—in general but especially right now—because it unites 20-plus million AAPIs [Asian American Pacific Islanders] in this country," Hanabusa said. "It brings representation to our community. When people see faces and stories they can relate to, they feel seen, heard, and it gives us a platform to celebrate how proud we are to be Asian American."

Other leaders from the advertising, marketing and PR space speaking at EMPOWERD include Tim Wang, founder of TDW+Co; DJ Jiang, co-founder of Giant Leap Media; and Jeremiah Abraham, founder of Tremendous Communications.

Abraham and Broadway actor Diane Phelan launched the digital campaign "Unapologetically Asian" in early May, signing up influencers and celebrities to push the message of pride. They both speak on Sunday's digital panel alongside Wong and Hanabusa.

Abraham said it has been "daunting" to be Asian American during the pandemic: "We've been publicly assaulted, spat on and used as political devices by the highest forms of government."

"There's a tendency to always ask what more a campaign can do and how much bigger it can be, but some movements, like any other campaign, are designed to strike with precision," Abraham said. "They set the stage for the next conversation and the next one after that. The campaigns we've started are doing exactly what they need to do at the exact time they need to exist. I think that's why people have embraced the 'Unapologetically Asian' campaign, because it reminds them

that their voices are impactful, their stories are valuable and that they are not alone in this struggle.”

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