

Q&A with Our Youth Activists

Over the last several months, young people from across the island have organized large-scale marches, sit-ins, and rallies to support the Black Lives Matter movement. We reached out to leaders of the newly formed Youth Activists of Alameda to ask them five questions about their experience organizing large-scale events. The activists are:

- Randell Rubio, rising 10th grader, Encinal High School
- Venecio (Vinny) Camarillo, rising 10th grader, Encinal High School
- Amaya Edwards, AHS Class of '18 (now majoring in Photojournalism and minoring in Race and Resistance Studies at San Francisco State University)
- Nairobi Taylor, rising sophomore, Encinal High School
- Raquel Williams, rising 12th grader, Alameda High School

What moved you to organize these marches?

Randell: As of right now, I can't drive or leave the city, so I thought why not make [a march] happen here in Alameda? A friend (Vinny) and I also thought that we needed to break the bubble/barrier that the city has. We wanted action in our own city.

Camarillo: The number of nationwide protests, even in some small towns that were shown on TV, made me think that it doesn't matter if we're a big city or not. We have to fight for the way people are being treated. Many people feel as though we live in a bubble where it's perfect. No violence, away from the bigger cities in our area. But no, there is still violence, especially racially targeted violence. Once we had launched our Instagram account and planned our first protest, many people reached out to us feeling the exact same as us. They didn't feel comfortable being the first ones to start something, in such a predominately white city. And that is why we had to show the rest of the world that we aren't silent. We aren't



Randell Rubio, 15, of Encinal High School wanted to bring more activism to Alameda.

being complicit with white supremacy. We had to show, that we support the Black Lives Movement, today and every day.

Edwards: Being Black in America and feeling pure anger and heartbreak over the genocide of my people is what moved me to organize these protests.

Taylor: After viewing George Floyd's death on YouTube, and observing police officers treating citizens in such an inhumane manner around the world, I knew that I had to help change the system. This is why I became a youth advocate. I organize marches and rallies with the other youth activists and help ensure that we had a social media presence by hosting our Facebook account (I will be co-hosting our Twitter account and creating a Reddit account soon.)

Williams: I was moved this year to get involved by the need for change. I felt like my purpose right now was to stand up, so instances of racial prejudice, racism, and inequity disappear. I wanted Alameda to reach its full potential as a city and community for all. I am a part of multiple efforts of change in Alameda, especially of cultural expression.

Scholastically, I am the Black Student Union president and Diversity Commissioner at Alameda High School. In addition, I am a member of the Youth Activists of Alameda and the organizing committee for the rechartering of the NAACP. I also am participating in Rename Jackson Park and an organization focusing on ethnic studies called ACES. I work a lot to promote equity and to create safe spaces for people of color in Alameda, especially the youth.



1 Vinny Camarillo, 14, grew up attending rallies with his parents.

Have you organized marches/rallies before or been active politically before?

Rubio: I haven't organized marches/rallies before at all, but I was somewhat been politically active before organizing this protest.

Camarillo: This was my first time organizing a march and a rally. I've been politically

involved since 3rd grade. My family and I went to many protests throughout the years, such as LGBTQ+ protests for equality and equity in school districts. I've also been involved with the gun protests that sparked in 2018, after the Parkland Shooting in Florida. I have witnessed and been in a school shooting before, as well as seen many of my friends who are a part of the LGBTQ+ community be attacked and constantly not accepted by society.

Edwards: I have not organized before or been politically active in such a public way.

Taylor: I have never organized marches/rallies before. My experience in Youth Activists of Alameda has honestly been my very first time doing so. I have attended protests in the past as an ally for the LGBT community, although I'd argue that this is the most active I've been politically in my recent years.



Raquel Williams, a senior at AHS, is also president of the school's Black Student Union.

Williams: I have helped organize some marches with the Youth Activists of Alameda since the murder of George Floyd. I am relatively politically active promoting people to register to vote. I have helped with a voting registration campaign as well.

What were the challenges to organize these marches, and how did you address them?

Rubio: Some challenges that we had were making sure everyone will be safe, making sure the march will be peaceful, having things organized to the time, contacting multiple people daily, and many others. It was quite stressful, but we got a lot of help and support from adults in the community, we got plenty of help from Bayanihan Youth, Alameda Black Alliance, Black Student Unions from Alameda High School and Encinal High School, and many other kind people.

Camarillo: Some of the challenges as we began organizing the march and rally were crowd control, how we were going to deal with the police if there was an encounter with them, being shot with tear gas, as well as how the overall program was going to go. For crowd control, for the march to City Hall, we had reached out via our Instagram account and many people began volunteering for security and keeping the crowd safe. We had a fellow alumnus from Encinal who was willing to be our police liaison and talk

with them. We also had the National Lawyers Guild on standby in case of any arrests, as well as we had protesters write the number down on their arms.

There were many concerns when it came to the other protests around the country about what we would do if tear gas were to be shot. We had gotten many donations of water, as well as tear gas remedies. It's sad that we, as youths, have to deal with the possibility of being tear-gassed because we are exercising our First Amendment right. With the curfew in place at the time, we had to push back the time of our protest two hours because we wanted people to get home safely. Not only this, but we didn't know how long each speaker would take. We decided to have a few scheduled speakers, as well as an open mic to anyone who wanted to speak.

Taylor: I would say that we struggled a bit at times due to not having the necessary funds (which has led to us sometimes not having a speaker system at protests) but there is a Zumba donation event that will be going toward our group on August 8th, so I believe that that problem will be corrected soon!

Williams: The challenges I have experienced when it comes to activism is the balance between different work efforts. I tend to overcommit and not, reach out when I have too much on my plate. With activism there is a desire to change every aspect of the community and actively be involved with everything. This is not the healthiest mentally and resulted in me not putting myself first. I addressed this by delegating between my committee members. I also had to learn how to say no to new projects as there is only so much one person can do at once.



In addition to organizing marches, Nairobi Taylor manages the social media accounts for Youth Activists of Alameda.

These were huge marches for Alameda – possibly the biggest we’ve ever had. How does that feel – not only in terms of being an organizer but in terms of looking at where we are as a community and a country?

Rubio: We truly did not expect hundreds of people to come and show support! We really were expecting 100 maximum. Seeing so many people come to the protest we

organized makes me proud. We would never think that Alameda would pull through like that, at all.

Camarillo: I feel as though it was a huge success in terms of the number of people who came. I feel as though our generation are the ones that were going to make a real

change in our country. Just seeing the way our politicians and our leaders are handling the situation makes me feel as though they aren't even trying at all. Saying "Black Lives Matter" and saying you support it, isn't enough. They need to use their power and actually make a change in this society.



Edwards: It saddens me that it took this long to get a huge crowd of Alamedans together to face the racist history of this community and island. But it also gave me a tiny bit of hope that most of the people this town truly want to do better and progress into a future where Black people are not constantly in fear of their lives. We have a very long way to go in this country and especially in this town.

Taylor: I must say that it feels fantastic, honestly. As an organizer, I did not expect such a fantastic turn-out at our events! We have received an unimaginable level of support from our community, and as a black youth, this undoubtedly makes me feel a greater connection to Alameda at large. Regardless, I believe that we still have a lot of work to do in our community as we work toward ending systemic racism and making Alameda a better place for oppressed people. I have hope for our city, and for the country at large. I believe that I will see great change within my lifetime.

Williams: With the large protests in Alameda I was taken aback by the community support Alameda gave. It definitely felt like a step in the right direction towards change here. In terms of a nation, the protests shows the need to be unified on an issue of racism and discrimination which the US was built on. It has lost its room to debate because this movement is not a political issue instead a moral one.

Do you worry that people will lose connection to the urgency of this situation? How do you think we should address that?

Rubio: I don't think people will lose connection because it's only right. We want to unroot the racism in this country, which has been long overdue. "Matter" is only the minimum. And the youth will keep fighting for change because we're the future.

Camarillo: Yes, I do worry that people will lose the urgency of this situation. It worries me that people are going to go back into silence, and that can't happen. I feel as though funding for police should be greatly reduced and be invested into education as well as healthcare. Once our school district has more funding, of course, increase the pay rate at which teachers get paid and include ethnic studies as a class in all schools. People, especially the younger generation, need to know about the history of other cultures, not only the white Europeans who took America from the Native Americans.

Edwards: I do worry that people will lose a sense of urgency. But I'm more worried about white people or non-Black people of color losing their connection to this urgency. Black people have never lost connection because we don't get that privilege. I think we should address that by continuing to show up at protests, marches, rallies or whatever the event may be. And continuing to organize is a major part. We have to show people that we will keep fighting. I think that in order to address that we need to start bonding more and heal as a community.

Taylor: Yes, I undoubtedly worry that people will lose connection to the urgency of this situation - in fact, I fear that the interest in helping solve these greater issues is already dying down. Working on solving these issues is a process, and it is important for the community to continue supporting the cause. "Black Lives Matter" should not be a trend - as a youth activist, I will continue to fight for the black lives that we have lost. A revolution cannot happen within the time span of a few months. True change will only come as a result of a continued fight for justice, and I hope that citizens of Alameda are willing to acknowledge that.

Williams: I do worry that it will lose its urgency of the situation. The black lives matter movement has a history of losing steam for a while and surges up and down. I have already noticed the decrease of petitions and donations across my social media. As a society, we have a moral obligation to keep talking, working and demonstrating the need for change in America. There's no time to let up because this will result in another person or people whose lives have been changed forever by racism, police brutality, and white supremacy. We need to keep discussing ways of change with one another. We

need to keep posting this. We need to work to change the systematic problems within our community.

Is there anything you'd like to add?

Camarillo: I have one last thing to say, and that as a Filipino, I stand with Black lives and will fight with them no matter what. I know that I will never understand what Black lives go through each day. I know that. I will always stand up for them no matter the cause, because when I see some kind of injustice, I will fight. I won't turn my back the way many people do when they see something they didn't want to see.