

Creative Project Reflection

Before this project, I had wanted to write a piece about my experience as an Asian-American on the Vanderbilt campus for a while. I've tried multiple times to start pieces like this in the past, but never managed to write a complete one until now. I attribute this completion to taking this class, to studying and reflecting on the Asian-American experience throughout the year, and being able to tie in the themes we've been discussing to finally write a cohesive piece. I realized while writing that there's been no other time in my life that I've so regularly reflected on the Asian-American experience and its greater contexts, partly because there are not many venues outside classes like this where that experience can be discussed. This realization was in part what made me decide to address the piece to AASA, the largest Asian-American organization on campus. As I said in my presentation, my largest critique of AASA is the over emphasis they place on showcasing so called "Asian" culture, and the lack of effort they place on actually discussing what being Asian and Asian American in this country actually means. On this campus, if you're Asian-American and looking to dance and cook and eat, then there are plenty of venues and organizations for you to take part. If however, you want to do more than just superficially engage with Asian-American culture, if you actually want to critically analyze the experience of Asian-Americans in this country and the ways in which they are othered, then outside this class (the first of its kind offered at Vanderbilt) you really have no venue to turn to. Part of what I wanted to do with my piece is disrupt this silence that blankets our campus, to voice and represent a small part of the Asian-American experience that has been historically ignored.

In this piece, I tried to address many of the topics and discussions we've been having in class. In my first section, I discuss the consumption of Asian bodies on this campus, and how much of Asian-American so called "cultural activity" on this campus is largely a phenomenon of spectacle, where Asian American bodies and culture is put on show for the gaze of others, to be both visually digested in the case of "Asian New Year Festival" and literally consumed in "Taste of Asia". Even the names of these events recall themes of consumption. This consumption of course brings me to address those whom I perceive as consumers of these Asian Bodies. That is, whiteness. I read the names and the nature of ANYF and TOA like events as acquiescence to the white majority and the power they hold on this campus. The amount of funding organizations get depends wholly on the number of people they attract to their events. Because of this, all of these organizations must take the white majority into consideration, account for them, and pander to them. It is this forced interaction with whiteness that I reject in my piece by framing it as a conversation between Asian bodies, and thus reversing the traditional campus gaze, relegating whiteness to the other and the excluded, discussed but never intentionally addressed. After framing the piece in this way, I delve into the history of this country's interaction with Asian bodies, and how it has repeatedly dehumanized those bodies and thus felt free to subjugate and abuse them. I do this both to give a historical perspective on the Asian-American experience, and to reject the model minority myth and thereby reclaim the right to Asian Anger. I think inherent to the model minority myth is the savior narrative, the idea that the driving force behind the success of Asian-Americans in this country is the country itself, and not their efforts in it. I

sought to reject that narrative, and any narrative that seeks to frame Asian bodies as anything other than what they are. That is, human. I ultimately sought to reclaim our bodies for ourselves, and write a piece that takes back the power these fabricated narratives have stolen from us.