



NEWTON THEATRE COMPANY  
NEWTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS &  
NEWTON YOUTH SERVICES PRESENT

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# THE MONOLOGUE PROJECT

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VOICES OF COLOR

2018

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## Temporary Silence - Anisha Aziz

Silence, easy to do, but heard to unravel.  
Ever since I was introduced to American society,  
I learned silence was the safest option.  
Those who have chosen silence  
did it for the sake of keeping themselves  
or others  
safe.

I,  
on the other hand,  
do it because it's easier than putting together  
my already puzzled mind.  
I am still trying to figure out my place in society  
and why my appearance is so hard to accept.  
But then I wonder:  
*what's the use of my voice if I only release it  
when it's socially acceptable.*  
I stand back and stare at myself,  
*Who am I and what do I believe in?*  
Why can't I express my thoughts without judging myself?

I'm my own wall.

Should I break it down and be seen?

*I've wondered.*

No! No!

I would become a target.

*It's better to stay silent.*

These are thoughts that went through my mind.

As a child, finding my morals was hard  
I had many influencers around me  
Instead of learning, I copied how to be them.  
As I grew through hard times  
With myself,  
with others  
I learned that staying silent lasts  
only temporarily  
until I blow.  
Looking back, I wish I knew this earlier  
but it's okay  
because I learned from my mistakes.

Flower Rising – Samantha Balcanoff

*Don't step on the flowers please, she said, my soul is etched in its roots*

I promise I won't they said, as they destroyed it without hesitation

*Don't pull my daisies from the root, she said, they're awfully beautiful and hard to grow*

I promise I won't they said, as they ripped it from its home within the ground

Days passed, and the once flowers were nothing other than a crumbling essence, nothing other than a distant memory

You have shattered my soul, crushing it, unable to grow, unable to decorate the world with its newfound beauty

You pulled my daisies just as you stripped away my identity, leaving me a lost soul, leaving me an empty canvas

Once a weak, broken seedling

Is now a precious, blooming flower

I am nature's most prized possession

I am a mixed girl in a world full of flowers being stepped on

I will not allow you to label me, for I have labeled myself, as strong, as beautiful, as kind

And I will sprout from the ground, and flourish, even on the brink of death

Hello world, I have risen, try to stop me now

## My Story - Kenzel Barros-Brown

Ever since middle school I realized what I am, and that is a minority. I have never in my life felt targeted until one day. It was a peaceful afternoon, and we were coming from the movie theater after seeing the new movie Spiderman: Homecoming. I was with three of my friends, who are practically my brothers, just chillin' in the back seat. I was looking outside the passenger window while my dad was driving down this long strip coming on to Washington St. over the bridge. Suddenly, flickering lights started coming out of nowhere. My dad saw a whole line of cars behind him, so at first, he wasn't worried. I looked behind and saw that this cop car had skipped all the other cars and went behind us to tell us to pull over.

I was so confused. My dad got so upset because the cop car skipped ahead to get to us to make it seem like we did something wrong. He had stopped traffic to pull us over, to cause a big scene. At this point my adrenaline started to kick in. Can you believe that?

The police officer came and told my father to roll down his window and as he did, the officer told him that the windows were *too tinted*. In my mind I was saying, *what's wrong with having the windows tinted? We want to have some privacy*. Maybe what was wrong was that there were five black men in the car with the tinted windows.

My dad started to get angry and yelled at the cop, who was a white male. The cop then came over to my side and asked for the window to be rolled down. My dad explained that the window was broken. At one point my dad took off his glasses because he was so furious. The cop shined his flashlight to see through the other windows, which were easy to look through since he had his face just inches from the glass. Mind you, the reason why me and my dad were furious was because this generation, (or should I say this society), is making it so people of color are perceived as aggressive people who are willing to hurt others, which is *not* the case.

I thought I was going to get shot.

I thought my dad was going to get arrested.

I thought that I was going to be the next Oscar Grant.

It's okay.

I'll get through it.

R.I.P. Oscar Grant

## The Trunk in the Attic – Kari Brabender

Pale faced, lavishly dressed, posed stand the porcelain dolls in my family's living room. Enclosed in protective glass. Looking out, to be seen, but not touched. *Hanetsuki* paddles hung up around the door frame. I've seen pictures of people playing the badminton-like game but have never played it myself. Books about Japanese children who travel to Japan, stories from internment camps, board books with simple Japanese words and illustrated with smiling Anpanmans. Displays of elegantly decorated bowls, teacups, a drawer full of chopsticks.

My sister ate Honey Nut Cheerios out of a bowl covered in cherry blossoms this morning. A traditional Japanese print on fabric passed from my grandmother to my mother, and someday, to me, hangs proudly on the living room wall. The shiny silver rice maker sings out its little song to let us know that the steaming white rice is cooked. It screams: "Look! We're Japanese!" If that were true, why don't I know more than a few phrases of the language? Why is it that my Norwegian dad is the only one who eats with chopsticks some nights? Why is it that I don't feel like I'm Japanese?

My mom never had a good relationship with her Japanese mother and heritage that must be why. She renounced her Japanese-ness. She changed her name from Jennifer Megumi to the more American Jennifer Grace when she was in elementary school. But of course, giving herself an American name didn't really change anything, she was still Japanese. People still took notice and teased her, called her names. Yet as she got older, she learned to love being Japanese, and American. She took Japanese classes, learned to play the *taiko* drum, tried to immerse herself in being Japanese.

And maybe it was the trip to Japan, or maybe it was the Parkinson's Diseases slowly consuming my grandmother, therefore ruining my mother's main connection to Japan, but something made her want to make sure I knew I was Japanese. Like the speaker in Kimiko Hahn's poem, "The Dream of a Lacquer Box," she was "hoping to give something Japanese to [her] daughters" (Hahn, 12). So, she gave me and my sister Japanese names. Emiko for me, and for my sister, our grandmother's maiden name: Yamada. Of course, it wasn't enough. Just like her having an American name didn't make her one hundred percent white in elementary school, having a Japanese name doesn't make me more Japanese.

One quarter is not a lot. "It was enough during World War II, it's enough now" my mom told me. It was enough for the wrong reasons. It was enough to not be American almost 80 years ago, now it's enough to be Japanese but not enough to feel like it's right.

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In my family's attic there's a heavy, metal trunk. YAMADA is printed in white paint on the side. It's the trunk my grandmother brought with her to America. It was loaded on a boat and sailed all the way to the west coast of the United States. From there it traveled to Arkansas, then New Jersey and Maine, to New York, and now it's in my attic. Inside it are the colorful *kimonos* that my grandmother had no need for here. Printed fabrics in every color imaginable. At least that's what I've been told. It's been locked for as long as I can remember. Perhaps there are "hairpins made of tortoiseshell or bone/...[or] ticket stubs from the Bunraku" (Hahn, 3-10) nestled in the folds of the *kimonos*. I wish I could open the trunk and drape the silky fabrics around me and tie them at my waist with an *obi* and say, "Yes, this is what it is to be Japanese."

Maybe I just need to find the key, lost in time and travels. Look around my house, the retirement community where my grandfather lives, go back to Maine, to New York, Arkansas, Japan. My sister's looking too. She watches Japanese tv and practices writing Japanese in her workbook. She takes a *bento* to school every day. She meticulously molds the rice into Snoopy, or Hello Kitty, or Doraemon.

Cuts pieces of dried seaweed to make intricate designs. Maybe someday she'll form her sushi rice into a perfectly shaped key and place it gingerly into her bento box, go to Japan like she's always planned, and speak beautiful Japanese. But she has trouble with the accent. "How do you say this, Kari?"

I sigh and sound out "do -rla-a-mon," pointing at the blue cartoon character, "Remember, r and l are combined." She says it again, but it's mumbled and quiet. She's not used to the foreign sound. By the time she was old enough to understand, Mom had stopped waking us up saying, "*ohayo gozaimas!*" She was told "be careful!" not "*ki o tsukete!*" The cd of Japanese children's songs was scratched, and Grandma was too sick to write out our names in Japanese anymore or speak Japanese to her friends and relatives on the phone.

I want to know why I'm like this, given more of Japan in culture than in blood, and consequently feeling like a fraud. So, I asked my mom about Grandma again. "What did she think about Japan?"

I guess I was surprised by what she said. "She didn't feel like she belonged there, but she didn't feel like she belonged here either. She wasn't raised in Japan, you know that, she lived in India and Taiwan when she young. When her family moved back to Tokyo and she couldn't find a husband, everyone told her she should go to America to find someone to marry. She wasn't close with her family, so she left. She decided to go back to school in America, in Arkansas. Before she met your grandfather, she had a proposal from a Mormon man, but she didn't want to convert, and another proposal from a Chinese immigrant who was training to be a doctor. She declined him too. She never dated a Japanese man." Apparently, my grandmother did not intend to marry within her own race. Securing the fate of her children to be "hybrid daughters" (Mura, 4). Children stuck between two identities. My grandmother didn't love being Japanese. But what about the generations in between? The ones who are Japanese but not all the way? How are they supposed to feel? I asked my mom; "what about you?"

"The first time I thought about it I had just taken a standardized test in elementary school. I didn't know which box to check, white or Asian. When I asked my mom, she said, 'Oh, you're white.' For a long time, I thought of myself as white, but if I was just white, kids wouldn't have made fun of me. Still, your grandma didn't really ever teach me anything Japanese, we were in America, we were Americans. My sister and I are half white, and that was enough to be American. We should embrace that. Yet as I got older, I learned to love being Japanese. I took Japanese lessons, learned to play the *Taiko* drum. It's cool that I can be both. I don't have to make a choice"

My mom tried to make me feel Japanese by surrounding me with Japanese words and food and books when her own mother hadn't. Why was it important for me, with only a tiny bit of Japanese blood, to be Japanese to her? All those cartoon characters, songs, and homemade sushi were all superficial. Because when she picked up *Taiko* sticks and played with Genki Ya, she felt right. Every time the *bachi* hit the massive drum, it rang out clear: "I am Japanese!" with "Japanese feelings and Japanese pride" (Okada, 15). When she took me to a workshop to learn how to play, the big drumsticks were clumsy in my hands, and I couldn't make myself chant with the other women. I felt like I had failed at being my mother's Japanese daughter. It all felt like a vain attempt to make me more Japanese than I am. No matter how many books I read or how much sushi I eat, I'll never be Japanese enough to fit into that world, but I still exist in it. No matter how much you push I will never be able to squeeze into my *obaasan's* kimonos and I have no desire to fake it and pose like a porcelain doll.

Still, the trunk remains in the attic. Unopened, but jarringly large and unfaded by time. I don't think I'll ever get into it. It's been too long that the key's been missing. But maybe "there is no in... [maybe] the outside could be the inside if they would stop all this pushing and shoving" (Okada, 160). Okada refers to how Japanese Americans (and people in general) try to fit themselves into categories.

How it isn't as simple as Japanese Americans going into the army and becoming American or going to prison and staying Japanese during World War II. For me, maybe trying so hard to push being Japanese on me has kept me from it. Because I still remember the words to the classic Japanese song, "*Ue O Muite Arukou*," but first remembered it by its irrelevant English title made to better suit American tongues, "Sukiyaki."

My feet are too big and too American to fit my grandmother's *geta*, and, even if I were to open the trunk, I have no idea how to put on a kimono. So maybe what's in the trunk doesn't matter. My grandma didn't feel at home in Japan. I thought she would've, she was Japanese after all, but turns out, she never felt like she belonged anywhere and all she wanted was for her daughters to belong. Identity is not as simple as one or the other. That is what makes it so complicated and confusing, but it's also what makes it so dynamic. It can shift and change.

You can play Taiko drums and be Japanese, and you can watch cowboy movies like Japanese-American poet David Mura and be American, both in one day. You can you can italicize words written in Japanese romaji and they'll fit into your English sentences. The trunk in my attic probably won't move for years, we'll continue to stack other things on top of it, and eventually it will get buried and forgotten. That is until someday we come across it again. Maybe it will be my own children or grandchildren, and they'll remember their great, great grandmother Kyoko Yamada, who came to the United States just after the second World War to find a husband, and in the end found a home for the generations to come.



girl/OTHER – Viviana Bonilla

*Who am I?*

I am asked.

But how do I respond?

My parents are Peruvian and Puerto Rican.

My first language is Spanish,

I am fluent,

but only to the nonnative speakers.

At one point I used to think in French,

But I have forgotten most of it.

And I was born in Florida

So,

*who am I?*

Am I American

even though I feel part Peruvian,

part Puerto Rican, and even part French?

But those parts of me are too small,

and are only filled with stories

and memories of the past.

A survey asked my ethnicity

and I circled Hispanic/Latino

It then asked my race,

but I didn't think I was black

or white

or Asian

or Native American

So I circled OTHER,

as in someone different,

but really,

*who am I?*

I think

I am a little bit of everything,

but too little

to be anything.

## Privilege – Valerie Goldstein

In elementary school, my race did not make me feel different. I guess that was part of my privilege. I could pass for white, so I wasn't even really aware that I was different for the first ten or so years of my life. Then, one day in fifth grade, a memory I still remember clearly despite forgetting everything I learned about electricity and weather that year, that difference that never bothered me before was suddenly staring me in the face.

We were reading *Wonder*, which is ironically a book about accepting differences, and one of the characters in the book, Summer, is biracial. Our teacher puts down the book and asks if anyone knew what biracial meant. I had never heard that word before, and didn't want to guess what it meant, but one classmate raised his hand. When the teacher called on him, he said, "It means a person like Valerie." Everyone in the room turns around to look at me, and I suddenly feel uncomfortable and alienated. The teacher, a little flustered now, asked the student if he had permission to share this information, and asked me if I was ok with it. Somehow, the teacher's reaction made me feel even more separate, so I quietly nodded and tried to retreat within myself, trying to find that privilege that had protected me before.

I pushed that incident to the back of my brain because of the cloud of uncomfortableness surrounding it and tried to let things go back to normal. But as I was getting older, I kept being reminded of my difference. I used to wear glasses, and once when I took them off, a friend came up to me and said nervously, "I don't want to be offensive or anything, but you look...Asian without your glasses." People would say, "Oh, biracial people are so pretty, I wish I was like you." Those who do not mean to offend me say these things, making me feel uncomfortable, but then I feel guilty about being uncomfortable because it could be worse and it's not like they were trying to hurt me.

The privilege of passing as white to people who don't look too closely protected me from ignorant questions my friends got when they were asked "How do you say my name in Chinese?" or "How do you say this in Mandarin?", even though my friends don't all speak Mandarin, and not all names just have a Chinese equivalent that everyone knows.

But this privilege also makes it hard to fully feel like I belong. Ever since that day in fifth grade, when my difference was revealed to me and the rest of my classmates, I've always been "not Asian enough" for the band kids' Asian Awareness day because "do you even speak Chinese?" or not white enough to satisfy people so they have to ask, "what exactly are you?" People are never really satisfied. It feels like they want to fit you into a clear box and have it match what you look like, but when I tell them "what" I am, they refuse to accept it. Do they expect me to say, "Yes, I was wrong, I am not half Chinese, I am Native American or Filipino or whatever you think I look like just because you said so"?

I had the privilege of looking inside myself and deciding what part of my identity I wanted to embrace. I could choose to embrace my Asian heritage and proudly identify as a person of color, or not fully embrace that part because lots of people think I am white at first glance. I could decide to showcase my difference or continue in the comfort of my privilege of passing for white. I never thought I had to make this decision before, and I did not have to until I was ready to think about it

But when I heard other students of color sharing their experiences, I started thinking about all these things in my past, stories I had mostly kept to myself to ignore my difference, and I decided that instead of hiding behind my privilege, I will speak out. Yes, I am privileged, but I am also a person of color.

## Where Do I Belong? – Raghav Kadambi

I wish I wasn't an Indian American, and I was not presenting this monologue as a minority representative of this group of people. My parents and my brother are from India. My parents moved here because my brother has cerebral palsy and they wanted him to be part of an inclusive school and to be as independent as possible. So, I grew up as a brown Indian, with a challenged brother. The story of my brother is for another time. I was born in the United States, a second-generation immigrant. I have little connection to India except through stories that my parents recount and an occasional visit to my grandparents whom I mostly speak to over the phone. Perhaps the way I can describe myself is mostly as a white American covered in brown skin. I am the same as most kids my age in America, but I do not think either an American nor an Indian fully understands me.

Let me describe a scene at my lunch table:

I am sitting with my classmates in the school cafeteria. My friend, another Indian American makes crude jokes about himself and other Indians. The jokes are almost always degrading and portray Indians in a bad light. These jokes that my friend makes are not original. They are poor copies of a popular stand-up comedian of Indian origin called Russell Peters. My friend imitates the comedian and just repeats these jokes at my lunch table in a manner so cheap and to a point where it makes me feel horribly uncomfortable.

By replicating an Indian accent, he tries to make Indians sound clueless and stupid. My other friends egg him on, thinking that this is absolutely hilarious, and then feel that it's okay to start repeating these jokes over and over again. This is a never-ending cycle. I do not like it, but I feel I am now caught in it forever. I often get mad at my Indian friend and ask him why he feels the need to say things like that over and over, although he has not given me an answer, and he probably never will.

There is a kind of humor or comedy in which a person singles out another individual within the group and makes them feel uncomfortable or stupid - it is this that I am talking about that hurts me and which I feel is a form of bullying. When my Indian American friend makes these jokes, it gives other friends in my group an unspoken license to stereotype. These jokes are not funny to me anymore. It's demeaning, and they hurt more and more. The constant butchered Indian accents that I hear people try to imitate whenever I'm in school while talking to me, or saying my name are irritating.

So many people have made repeated jokes at me that I forget who has and who has not. When I hang out with someone Indian at my school I am automatically asked, "Oh, are you guys brothers?". It

gets more aggravating when it comes to my teachers who are Indians. "Oh, that's not fair, she favors you with better grades, she's your mom". Every time we have a history unit in class about India, I get mixed looks from a few people in my class. They give me the look of, *oh is that really what you guys do? Wow, these people are so weird.* I wonder why these people in my class suddenly think that from a short history lesson they know everything about Indian culture and its people. I feel that they look at me sometimes with the face of, *these people are barbaric like animals.* All I feel like saying in defense of these looks is *hey, we are all not the same; we come from different families and places and have different values.*

Many stereotypes have been directed at me because I am Indian American, and over time it gets difficult to control myself after constantly hearing these comments. My temper tends to run loose, and I react by snapping back with a stereotypical comment back about Americans. I know it's wrong, but I don't know any other way to make people shut up. It is also interesting to see the reaction that I get when I make jokes about my white friends. The first person to come to the defense of the white person is a person of color at my table, ALWAYS! I believe the reason they do this is to appease and fit in with the majority at the table. I sometimes feel sad that they have taken the easy way out. They have accepted racism as their destiny and see no way out. They are unable to speak up when they see something wrong.

The adults around me have always tried to teach me strategies to cope: take deep breaths, relax and ignore the remarks, talk with a trusted adult (even though in the school context this would be tattle tailing and completely unacceptable to my peers and myself). Newton is a progressive place but even here I find that people are not well informed about other cultures. Hence, this advice coming from some teachers almost sounds out of context, as they don't relate to me. They have never really experienced being a minority, and if I mention it, then the confused and innocent response is immediate: *that is not true!* When I was younger, one of my teachers always greeted my parents by saying *Namaste*. This was very nice the first time but after a little and when my friends started repeating mockingly, the nice part melted away.

Clearly, the current strategies do not seem to work, and it is difficult for me to figure where I belong.

Dear Friend – Zoë Kronberg

Dear Friend,

There was another incident in class today. My teacher showed my class a video of a slave being raped. There was no warning before or discussion afterwards. As one of very few kids of color, the only one or one of few African Americans my class, things like this make me feel so alone. This school is huge, and it is hard to not feel like a little mouse in a room full of giants, where no one can hear or see you. It's sometimes difficult to be who I am in today's society.

Recently, someone I'm close to identified me as white passing. When these words left his lips I tried not to stutter, *is that really what you think of me? Have you not been listening?* It's a constant battle of others misidentifying me. They put me in a little box or label me something I am not. I am not Nike or Adidas, I am a human being. A breathing, beautiful, colored, human being. Apparently, that is not what everyone sees when they look at me. He is right. Despite my best efforts, I'm just "white passing".

I am still trying to understand the sticky balance of racial labeling. But what is so bad about white passing? Why does this term make me feel dirty inside, like I am a lesser person if people think of me as white? I think the reason is that I have always thought of myself with a darker phenotype, that I should just automatically fit in with a group of black people. I honestly feel more comfortable in a room full of black people than a room full of white people.

Whenever my identity is challenged, I respond with a detailed explanation of my heritage. My instant reaction is to defend myself and I should never have to do that. Some people will never be satisfied by my appearance or by the way I act, whether I am too white to be black, or too black to be white for them.

When I was little I compartmentalized race. All my teachers were white, some of my friends were white, in Jack and Jill there were black people. I have always said my father is white and my mother is black, but some people just don't understand the concept of being mixed or that hair can be curly. I think this is the hardest part, because I often identify more with black culture than white. Maybe if I rejected a part of myself then it would not be so hard to keep my head high in these halls.

I have learned that it's not my choice and it doesn't matter if I choose one side or another, people will always see me and box me based on my outer shell. I just have to suck it up and constantly be misidentified. People will continue to laugh in disbelief and tell me I'm not black, and that my family's history does not matter, at least when it comes from me.

I will never know how it feels to be completely black for my skin doesn't reflect how I feel it should look. I will never experience firsthand the dirty looks or being followed in stores, but I can understand when it happens to my mom and me. When I was eight years old I remember being followed in Hermés. I was with my Mom and we were looking at the new Spring collection of scarves. I noticed a beautiful navy scarf and was about to point it out to my mother, when my she announced rather suddenly that we must leave. The men guarding the doors were behind us and from a distance they followed us to the entrance of the store and back to their post positions in the entrance. As we left I remember glaring at them for not allowing me to show my mom what scarf I liked best. I have grown up now and there was so much more to that situation. I wish I had more than just glared.

Though all this sticky mess I have realized that I am happy with myself. I am 100% white *and* 100% black, and I am proud of what my father has given me and what my mother has given me as well.

## Chink - Wendy Li

“Ok, what about ‘chink’? Has anyone heard it before?” my sixth grade English teacher asked, cautiously. Our class had begun a novel about the Holocaust a week ago, and it was supposedly a good opportunity to expose us to racial slurs. I watched my peers ask one another silent questions with their eyes, looking for someone who was more likely to know an answer. I tentatively raised my hand. I waited for the teacher to awkwardly call on me before mumbling, “I have. I don’t know what it means though.”

I felt the teacher’s look of sympathy wash over me like a wave.

We had been on our way to a bus station in Boston when it happened. I didn’t remember what the man had looked like, or where he had appeared on the sidewalk. But I remembered that when I asked my mother what the word meant later, she didn’t know either.

“Chink,” I learned, refers to a narrow opening or crack. It’s also a racial slur that first appeared in the 1880s, when Chinese migrant workers began to dominate the working class in the United States. In science class, we learned that cracks on the Earth are called “faults.” When the plates of the earth that meet at a fault cause too much friction, they produce earthquakes. I thought to myself, “If faults are the chinks of the earth, then what’s going on inside of me must be some kind of an earthquake.”

The inside of my house was on one chunk of Earth, and the outside of my house was on another. One side held the steamed buns I had for breakfast, and the other side held the pizza slices I ate for lunch. One side held friends who exclusively spoke Chinese to one another, and the other held friends who barely survived one term of their first foreign language in high school. I felt like a walking contradiction, with a never-ending earthquake rumbling inside of me. I had to decide how much of my ethnic lunch I was willing to bring to school after being teased for the strong smell. I had to decide how much Chinese I wanted to speak and retain. I had to choose, with every new teacher, if I was going to let loose and be loud or if I was going to be the quiet, reserved girl in the corner.

Although I desperately wanted the earthquake to stop and let me clear out the rubble and rebuild the collapsed infrastructures of my identity, the finality of these decisions was daunting. So, like everything else in my life, I let time decide for me.

The reality of who I am today is the product of friction, earthquake, and a constant cycle of rummaging and rebuilding. I take Chinese in school to maintain the language. I bring Chinese food to



school when it's convenient. I turn on my loud personality in some classes and not in others. I've accepted the reality of being a "chink" in America. I decided that no amount of patchwork or decision-making would erase my "chinkiness." Instead, constant compromise and accepting an identity that will constantly shift through shades of grey permits a sense of belonging. I believe that identity is not as rigid as we believe it to be. The best parts of an identity are formed in the patchwork creation of something unique and fluid.

## Will I Still be American? – Wendy Li

I imagine myself as a thirty-year-old woman. She has high heels, fierce eyes, and a coffee mug. She is rattling off something annoying on the phone, loudly, but she's had a long week and doesn't care what people might think of her. I imagine myself as a seventy-year-old woman. She has laugh lines, an arched back, and maybe a walker. But when I picture a stranger running up to help her cross the street, fractured English stumbles clumsily off her tongue, abrasive and foreign, "Sank... yu." I am eighteen years old, and I've grown up in nowhere but America.

Asian Americans will always look different. Their eyes will be too wide, too flat. Their hair will sit too straight, too black. They will sound different, with exotic accents and angry attitudes. They will walk funny, with small steps and timid motions. They will do your math homework if you ask nicely or challenge them to a fight. Don't worry, they won't fight. They will do better than you in school and work harder than you at jobs, which is good because someday, they'll work for you. But don't lean in too close. They smell like weird spices and smoked meats.

We all know that Ling Long Lee was born in New York City. We all know that black slaves have been a part of our history. We all know that Jennifer Lopez dominates with full legality. But the "United States of America" on our birth certificates, the several hundred years of legacy and the continuing success in this country all don't matter. We aren't white, so we don't fill in the picture.

A non-white face fails to complete the American identity. Our faces attempt to paint in the picture with vibrant colors and diverse experiences. Their faces tell us that we are tainting the purity of their identity. The American identity protects one particular identity.

It protects the people in politics, on television, and at the heads of companies. It protects the majority. It's why minority families are underrepresented in media. It's why makeup lines market fifty shades of white. It's why most of the people in offices and making impactful decisions are white. It's why every patriotic little boy holding an American flag is a white little boy. It's why when my Asian American friends and I picture ourselves at seventy, even we see someone foreign. This conscious and subconscious protection of a white American identity is why it is so systematically hard for minority families to succeed in society.

But if we've grown up in nowhere but America, who protects our identity?

## More Than a Name – Carriane Mamba

My name is Carrieanne Maglay Sumigad Joaquin Mamba. I go by Carrie.

I'm told "Carrie" is easier for people to pronounce. "Carry" is what everyone does when they're lifting their weekly groceries. "Kerry" is your local PTA mother, the pediatrician you've had forever, and the foreign arrangement of letters the barista writes on my cup when I tell him who that venti iced chai is for. You see, "Carrie" is familiar to everybody except for me.

*Carrieanne* is not familiar; *I* am not familiar. I am not conventional. *Carrieanne* fills the room and demands attention. She requires all the bubbles on the standardized tests. She takes up all the space on the dotted line. "Carrieanne" is two American names that make up one very *not* American girl. "Carrie" is from Karing, is from Zacarias, is from Hebrew, meaning "Remembered by God." Anne is from Anicia, is from "because Inang liked the name." Both my parents, like their daughter, go by names not their own, but names that make it easier on other people. Zack. Annie. Carrie. Each a pitiful reminder that we have forfeited a piece of ourselves to be accepted.

I am more than Carrie. I'm even more than Carrieanne. I am Maglay, I am Sumigad, I am Joaquin, I am Mamba, in that order. Never separate, but always working together in my favor. I am Maglay for Margarita and no, before you ask, not like your overpriced alcoholic drink at the bar, but rather for the pungent fields and fields of me that grow in abundance and are a force to be reckoned with. I am Sumigad for reasons unknown and probably will never know because the valley I am from holds many secrets, Sumigad included. I am Joaquin because the Spaniards forced me to, and that's from Joachim meaning "lifted by God," and as time goes on I wonder if I really am remembered and lifted by Him. I am also Joaquin for my mama who made damn sure that piece of her was not going to fade away when she, when we, the females of the household, took on Mamba. For the last time, no not Mamba like Kobe, but Mamba like the fierce and venomous snake unafraid to threaten those that stand in her way, and like the African tribe who once stood mighty and resilient on the land they called home.

I am all these things and more, and this is why I am not, nor can be "Carrie." How much harder is it for you to say that last syllable, those last four letters, in order to complete me?

"Carrieanne" is ten letters that represent the ten fingers on my body that count the many times people have tried to force me into a name that is not mine. I am Carrieanne Maglay Sumigad Joaquin Mamba, every name pulsing through my veins, permeating my bones, and seeping out of my skin into the world as if to say, "We are here! We are here, and you cannot have her without us. *All* of us."

## Pieces of an Identity - Katya Obeid

### One

Their backs beaten like silent drums. They are left with nothing but family, which is also stripped away far too often. Children alone. Parents alone. Smiles. Tears. Laughter. Cries. They are no different. We are no different. Supposed terrorists and drug dealers. Supposed failure and crime. Just wanting to get a taste of rich and new opportunities.

### Two

There was once a family. They were picture perfect on the outside. A house. A dog. A car. Nobody knew they were broken. Nobody knew they were different. Separated. Struggling. Their bond was strong. But it was not enough to hold the family together. To keep the father figure home with the helpless kids. Now a single mother. Debts to pay. Fears to soothe.

### Three

The little girl is quiet. Reserved. Whispering cautious Spanish words to herself. Her wild hair escapes the tight ponytail. Creating a halo of little curls around her small head. The friends she invites are greeted by the salty smell of lentils and beans. They watch her eyes light up as her lips meet the crisp seal of the sacred empanadas. A culture lost and a culture gained.

### Four

She steps hesitantly. Unsure of where she stands. Unsure of what they see in her. Unsure of what they think of her. She is not one or the other. She is not this or that. They approach her with caution, stepping on their toes around the glass shards of her identity. Not wanting to offend. Yet offending nevertheless. Her success comes as a shock. She doesn't know if it's because they don't know what she is or because they do.

### Five

She has a family. She wants to pass on culture. She wants to continue tradition. She shows strength. Teaches what she knows. Her mother continues to inspire in the culture driven world she has grown up in. The late nights of music and dancing are memories that will last forever. My suffering is my strength. My memories are treasures that unravel themselves with every breath.

A Nation of Immigrants – Nadya Obeid

“Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...”

A sick joke

That no longer stands

If it ever did at all.

“A nation of immigrants”

That’s what it’s called.

A nation against immigrants,

Closing off borders

And denying entry.

A nation that was built off the backs of others,

Slaves,

Immigrants,

But won’t accept them.

Not like everyone else.

Shunned away,

Racism,

Pain.

A nation of immigrants,

The ones who suffer.

“Yearning to breathe free”

In a world where they choke on their silence.

They can’t say a word.

The “huddled masses” are locked out.

They can’t say a word.

Because who can say a word

When you’re drowning

In the criticism and preconceived ideas?

The stereotypes?

A nation of immigrants?

Funny.

## Her - Adalia Xiony Rodriguez

Her government name is Adalia Xiony Rodriguez. Adalia was Googled by her father and Xiony came from a girl from her mother's 1st grade class in Costa Rica. Ever since she was born her family calls her Xiony, but for some random reason, after kindergarten, she became Adalia to the public eye. She never thought much about having two names until she hit second grade where this boy started to tease her for how "Xiony" sounded. See, she had been going to school with her brother and, because he's family, he called her Xiony all the time. Anyways, the boy heard him call her and started to yell "Sardines?" She had then caught on, and her being a 2nd grader, began to cry on the wall of the gym floor while everyone from her bus was running around playing games. Eventually, the teacher who always monitored there saw that she had been bawling and came up to her.

"Adalia, why are you crying?"

She looked at her and managed to blubber, "That boy called me sardines. That's not my name." The teacher stared at her, and then the boy.

"It's going to be okay," she said, as she awkwardly as she patted her shoulder. And that was that.

She then proceeded to shut down any form of "Xiony" at school. Xiony was no one, except to her family. She was no longer Adalia Xiony; just Adalia or Xiony.

But Adalia still exists in the outside world. Of course, she gets mispronunciations of her names, but with Adalia, she learns to suck it up and go with it. But when it came to Xiony, she couldn't deal with saying it out loud. Adalia would be fixed with her only saying it once, or twice, three at the most. But Xiony? Forget it. Her instinct was to flinch back when a stranger she just met got their ear right up in her face asking her to say Xiony again. It would become a back and forth game, trying to get the stranger to say it right after the eighth try. She couldn't do anything about it through, especially not with her mother standing right next to her the whole time.

Ever since the first grade, her mother loved the name Xiony. That's what she wanted to name her daughter, regardless of who she married. But her mother can sometimes be a little extra. So, when her daughter was born, she took the original spelling, S-I-O-N-Y and swapped the S for an X and made sure that she wore that name with dignity. Knowing that her daughter only introduced herself as Adalia to not struggle with pronunciation, she glared at her every time her daughter held out her hand to

shake. When she would complain about this, her mother would give her a stern look and would respond, “You are Adalia Xiony. I don’t care what you think but since I call you Xiony there’s no reason for other people not to call you that”. And that was that.

She becomes stuck. Stuck between two names, two worlds and she throws a wall up to prevent them from colliding. Adalia was an Americanized child. When leaving home, she became locked in a cage because she was the only one that looked different. She listens to pop because she could understand it and trained herself in the 6th grade to learn Spanish without the authentic accent because she didn’t want to sound different. At school, her family roots were dumb, and she wished for soundproof walls, so she didn’t have to hear all the pots, pans and music. Xiony was the opposite. She would belt out Marc Anthony’s *Presioca* at the top of her lungs, sit in the kitchen smelling the freshly made sofrito, and watched YouTube clips on how to dance Bachata. She thought by keeping them separate, she wouldn’t draw attention or be looked at differently at school and in her neighborhood.

By now, you’re probably expecting an “aha moment”. The story where the two worlds combine, and she becomes Adalia Xiony. But there isn’t one, because she never woke up one day with a smile on her face thinking *it’s time to share my story and my culture with the world*. It wasn’t a story that changed her, it was something else. Acceptance. Acceptance of the fact that her family wasn’t going to magically turn Caucasian. Her father wasn’t going to stop playing Salsa in the evening and her neighborhood wasn’t going to change, and by luck she found people like her. People who were different, who didn’t judge, who understood her struggle. Unknowingly, they pushed her to who she is today. She’s come to accept both worlds and mend them into one. She is both Adalia, and Xiony. One does not outweigh the other and that came to be because she realized she wasn’t alone.

So, I stand here as Adalia Xiony telling my story now for awareness for people all across the country and world deal who with this exact struggle. Like me, they are swept to the side, and feel that same hopelessness. This is for the ones whose names are different, the ones who are the only person of color in the class, or the ones who feel that they don’t belong. Their identity is stripped down, leaving them torn, not realizing that their name is more than a mispronunciation. I wish I knew, back when I sat on the wall in kindergarten crying that it is okay to be different; to stand out in a crowd. That both of my names could live in the same world, under the same identity. I wish I knew that a name is more than just one more thing people will remember you by as you create your own story.

## **Writer Bios**

### **Anisha Aziz**

Anisha is a rising senior at Newton North and this is her second year in The Monologue Project. Anisha has also participated this year with The Monologue Project at the Many Faces of Newton event with Newton Free Library and at MLK Jr. Day at the First Baptist Church.

### **Samantha Balcanoff**

Samantha attends Newton North and this is her first year writing for The Monologue Project.

### **Kenzel Barros-Brown**

Kenny is a new addition to The Monologue Project and has been attending meetings since January. He is a sophomore at Newton North.

### **Viviana Bonilla**

Viviana is a sophomore at Newton North. This is her first year participating in The Monologue Project. She believes this is a good chance to give people of color a chance to speak up and find their voice.

### **Kari Brabander**

Kari Brabander is 18 years old and a senior at Newton North High School. She wanted to be a part of The Monologue Project for her grandmother who couldn't and her mom who didn't have the opportunity.

### **Valerie Goldstein**

Valerie is a freshman at Newton South. She is participating in The Monologue Project because she loves theatre and she thought it would be really interesting to hear other students' stories and to share her own.

### **Raghav Kadambi**

Raghav is a 16-year-old rising junior at Newton North High School. He joined The Monologue Project to share his voice in society.



**Zoë Rebecca Kronberg**

Zoë attends Newton North High School, is 16 years old, and is a sophomore this year. She chose to be in The Monologue Project because her DLS adviser really wanted her to express how it feels to be biracial in Newton.

**Wendy Li**

Wendy Li is a senior at Newton North High School. She is a part of The Monologue Project because she wants to share her story unapologetically.

**Carianne Mamba**

Carianne attends Newton North. This is her first time writing for The Monologue Project.

**Katya Obeid**

Katya Obeid is a junior at Newton North High School. She wrote and performed in The Monologue Project last year. The written words are strong, but the spoken words are powerful. That is what she loves about the show and hopes it will continue to be expressed in these monologues.

**Nadya Obeid**

Nadya Obeid is a junior at Newton North High School. She was part of The Monologue Project last year as the Stage Manager but this year decided to write. She wanted to be part of this project because it is something she feels strongly about and would like to share her experiences. She has studied immigration and thought it would be a good place to start for her piece of The Monologue Project!

**Adalia Xiony Rodriguez**

Adalia Xiony Rodriguez is a sophomore at Newton South High School. She decided to join The Monologue Project because her English teacher pushed her to go to a meeting. After that, she realized that she wanted to do this project because she wanted to share her story to raise awareness about these issues.