**#ThisIs2016**

My whole life, I have struggled with this feeling of “otherness” – this feeling that I just didn’t belong no matter how hard I tried or how much I pretended. It’s a feeling that comes with being Asian American in a country that still, despite all its heralding of being a country of diversity where “all men are created equal”, somehow holds onto a frame of mind that equates being American with being white.

I am a first generation American. Born to immigrants with an immigrant older brother, I am the only one in my family who is fully American, and yet I still constantly feel the need to prove that fact to others, as if being born in this country and growing up in it my whole life isn’t enough to make me American. This is not just due to my insecurities as a person – it has been shown time and again that there really do exist people in this country that harbor those beliefs, that believe that just because my skin is not white that I must be a foreigner making my way in a foreign land.

I personally have never been the victim of a malicious attack on my race, but I have had numerous encounters with “innocent” remarks that reveal an inherent belief that I am more Asian than I am American. On one recent occasion, I had a woman come up to me and try to speak to me in Chinese because she thought I was a Chinese tourist. She had only good intentions at heart of welcoming me to the US, but her actions reveal the truth of how many white Americans view Asian Americans: foreigners. Sometimes, when I’m in an area where there are a lot of actual foreign Asians, I feel the need to talk just a little louder to make sure that the people around me know that I speak fluent English – to make sure they know that I am American. It’s ridiculous when I stop to actually think about it – why should I care whether these random strangers think I’m a foreigner or not? – but this is only a part of the constant need I feel to prove to the world that I am indeed American.

Too American to be Asian and too Asian to be American – this has been the echoing mantra of my life. I’ve always felt trapped between two warring worlds, unable to take the leap to fully be a part of one side, but that doesn’t mean I haven’t tried. I tend to hide little things that make me Asian. I don’t use chopsticks because “only Asians” use chopsticks. I downplay my love of anime because “all the Asians” like anime. I avoid getting Asian food because that’s just “such an Asian” thing to do. I don’t want to be Asian. I want to be Asian American, but in an effort to prove that I’m all-American and nothing else, I have ended up suppressing the Asian half of that term. Over time, I’ve come to realize that being American doesn’t mean I can’t be Asian as well, just as being Asian doesn’t make me any less American. It doesn’t make it any easier, but it’s an important realization that I need to believe first if I’m to expect others to believe it as well.

There is this idea of a “model minority” that is so often associated with Asians and Asian Americans. We’re smart, we get good grades and go to good colleges, we win awards in math and science and whatever other nerdy subjects you can name. And yes, sometimes it is true that we do these things, and as a whole the Asian and Asian American community constantly perpetuates this idea. But just because these are so-called “positive” stereotypes doesn’t mean there is no racism against Asian Americans. I’m often reluctant to call racism when there could be some other – any other – explanation. But I can’t deny the fact that it is very much alive and well today, and that it is very much ignored when it comes to Asian Americans. This is 2016, but it doesn’t have to stay this way. We are all American. We are all human. The battle against racism started centuries ago and still rages on to this day. For us Asian Americans, the battle has only just begun, and this time, we will fight until we find our victory.