

Hiring Now: Asian American Pacific Islander

Artist's Statement - Katrina Li

Background and Inspiration

Hiring Now: Asian American Pacific Islander is a website featuring a job post meant to serve as both a critique of how Asian Americans are treated and used in this country, as well as to serve as an opportunity for individuals identifying as part of the Asian American community to reflect on their own experiences and position.

This piece was inspired by legal scholar Mari Matsuda's essay, "We Will Not Be Used: Are Asian Americans the Racial Bourgeoisie?". In her essay, Matsuda states that like the bourgeoisie who are the "wannabes" of capitalism, Asian Americans seem to play the racial equivalent of that role¹. Matsuda argues that because of their position, Asian Americans are used both as a way to disavow any responsibility for the mistreatment other marginalized groups face and, simultaneously, used as a punching bag and scapegoat². Political scientist Claire Jean Kim's theory on the racial triangulation of Asian Americans also played a role in inspiring this piece. Rather than seeing each racial group as independently racialized or falling into a racial hierarchy, Kim theorizes that there exists a relationship of civic ostracism and relative valorization that results in Whites as "superior" and "insider", Blacks as "inferior" but "insider", and Asian Americans as "superior" to that of Blacks but "inferior" to that of Whites and an "outsider"³. Finally, the current Supreme Court Case, *Students for Fair Admissions v. Presidents and Fellows of Harvard College (2022)*, was another main point of inspiration. The case argues that affirmative action is hurting Asian American applicants; however, to what extent that is true versus to what extent it's using Asian Americans as a facade to remove opportunities for minorities (including themselves) is unclear⁴.

Outside of literature and legal cases, Kieth Obadike's *Blackness for Sale* was a key artistic inspiration for this piece. I loved how Obadike's work took a familiar framework (an eBay ad) and restructured it to make a statement on the exploitation and capitalization of Black culture⁵. By staying true to the structure of an eBay ad, he allows that argument to truly sink into the mind of his audience. This thus inspired me to do something similar, where the framework of the piece itself serves as an actual framework for the argument to be presented.

The Piece Overview

This piece is titled, *Hiring Now: Asian American Pacific Islander*, and is set within the framework of an Indeed job post. Throughout the literature that has inspired this piece, the point of Asian Americans being used as a tool stood out to me. In particular, the notion that Asian Americans can be used to reinforce white supremacy suggests that they can be used to maintain a system that has deep roots in the foundations of this country⁶. As such, because job postings are made to hire people to support the mission and foundations of companies, framing the overall piece within a job posting helps underscore this point. Furthermore, because Indeed is seen as having more jobs that are more likely to be lower-quality, lower-income jobs than those of other sites like LinkedIn⁷, the choice of using Indeed thus

hints at the role of Asian Americans as “bourgeoisie”—not at the bottom, but not at the top either. The salary for the role reflects the salary range of the middle/upper middle class as well⁸, another indication of the “bourgeoisie” reference from earlier. Note that the job title, “Asian American Pacific Islander”, describes an identity and not an actual job. This was meant to further emphasize the idea that Asian Americans were seen as “tools” to be used however needed rather than as individuals with their own personalities and lives.

For the employment type, “contract” was used because contract workers work for a company but aren’t truly part of it like full-time employees are. Furthermore, under the job schedule, this job may require working outside the normal workweek. Putting two and two together, the job schedule and contract employment suggest that regardless of how much work Asian Americans put in, they will still be seen as foreigners and “not part of the company”. Hence, this is made in reference to the perpetual foreigner stereotype⁹.

Throughout the rest of the job description, there are multiple references made to the stereotypes that characterize Asian Americans as subservient and the “model minority” to look up to¹⁰, the “bamboo ceiling” Asian Americans face as they are perceived as “doers” and not “leaders”¹¹, the role Asian Americans play as being the “punching bag” of America¹², the use of Asian Americans as a servant to the current infrastructure and a wedge dividing minorities¹³, the ostracization of Asian Americans when convenient¹⁴, and the expectation that Asian Americans must assimilate to a culture that doesn’t treat them as its own¹⁵. These points were all inspired by the literature aforementioned and referenced in the corresponding notes.

A line in particular to note is the requirement of “Eligible to be considered a person of color”. Although Asian Americans are people of color, because of their position as a “model minority”, that very identity can be taken away¹⁶. This, in turn, not only gives the false impression that Asian Americans are “equal” to whites, but dismisses the racism and discrimination that Asian Americans face on their way to success and even after they become “successful”. Following this theme, there is an overall dismissal and almost degradation of the struggles that Asian Americans have faced. This is meant to reflect how Asian American success is used against the community itself so that struggles are seen as a failure of the individual for not achieving the “standard”—instead of a failure of the corporations and politicians who put profit before people¹⁷. The overall blanket descriptions of the Asian American experience further dismisses their individuality and reflects the monolith myth surrounding Asian Americans¹⁸.

Finally, the job posting is meant to be ugly in its verbiage and description. On one hand, it asks the question why anyone would sign up for this sort of job? On the other hand, it asks why this sort of job exists and continues to exist? The fact that this job posting hasn’t been reported not only intends to point to the invisibility of Asian American racism, but aims to challenge the audience to reflect on how they respond when that racism is revealed.

Final Thoughts

In her essay, Mari Matsuda tells the story of the Portuguese *luna*, an overseer who “rode on a big horse and issued orders to the Japanese and Filipino workers”. He parades around thinking that he is better off than the other workers, but actually, “he does not realize that the plantation owner considers the *luna* subhuman, just like all the other workers”¹⁹. Although Asian Americans are depicted as a “model” to follow, we are still treated as second-class citizens and perpetual foreigners. The illusion that we are better off than other racialized groups pits us against them and, in turn, can manipulate us into stripping away the very structures built to free us from social injustice. Thus, regardless of how valorized our achievements may be, we are all still prisoners of color.

Notes:

1. Matsuda, Mari J. “We Will Not Be Used: Are Asian Americans the Racial Bourgeoisie?” Essay. In *Where Is Your Body? and Other Essays on Race, Gender and the Law* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 150
2. Ibid., 152, 154
3. Kim, Claire J. (1999). The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans. *Politics & Society*, 27(1), 105–138. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329299027001005>, 108
4. NBC News. 2019. “Here’s What’s at Stake for Asian Americans in the Harvard Affirmative Action Case | Think | NBC News.” *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyszuiYvJe2E>.
5. “Blackness for Sale | ELMCIP.” n.d. Elmcip.net. Accessed December 10, 2022. <https://elmcip.net/node/15818>.
6. Matsuda, Mari J. “We Will Not Be Used: Are Asian Americans the Racial Bourgeoisie?” Essay. In *Where Is Your Body? and Other Essays on Race, Gender and the Law* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 151
7. “LinkedIn vs Indeed: Which Is Better to Land Your Next Job?” n.d. www.harrisonbaron.com. <https://www.harrisonbaron.com/blog/linkedin-vs-indeed>.
8. US Census Bureau. 2018. “Household Income: HINC-01.” *Census.gov*. August 16, 2018. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-hinc/hinc-01.html>.
9. “Combatting the AAPI Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype.” n.d. New American Economy Research Fund. <https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/aapi-perpetual-foreigner-stereotype/>.
10. Kim, Claire J. (1999). The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans. *Politics & Society*, 27(1), 105–138. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329299027001005>, 117-121
11. “Asian Americans in the Workplace | McKinsey.” n.d. www.mckinsey.com. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/asian-american-workers-diverse-outcomes-and-hidden-challenges>.
12. Matsuda, Mari J. “We Will Not Be Used: Are Asian Americans the Racial Bourgeoisie?” Essay. In *Where Is Your Body? and Other Essays on Race, Gender and the Law* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 154
13. Ibid., 150, 153
14. *Korematsu v. United States*, 343 U.S. 214 (1944)

15. "Essay 13: Asian Americans and Cultural Retention/Assimilation (U.S. National Park Service)." n.d. [Www.nps.gov.
https://www.nps.gov/articles/aapi-theme-study-essay-13-cultural-retention-and-assimilation.htm](https://www.nps.gov/articles/aapi-theme-study-essay-13-cultural-retention-and-assimilation.htm).
16. "Washington School District Says Asians Aren't 'Students of Color', Now Counted with White Students." 2020. NextShark. November 18, 2020. <https://nextshark.com/students-of-color-washington-asians-with-whites>.
17. Matsuda, Mari J. "We Will Not Be Used: Are Asian Americans the Racial Bourgeoisie?" Essay. In *Where Is Your Body? and Other Essays on Race, Gender and the Law* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 154
18. "Asian Americans in the Workplace | McKinsey." n.d. [Www.mckinsey.com.
https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/asian-american-workers-diverse-outcomes-and-hidden-challenges](https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/asian-american-workers-diverse-outcomes-and-hidden-challenges).
19. Matsuda, Mari J. "We Will Not Be Used: Are Asian Americans the Racial Bourgeoisie?" Essay. In *Where Is Your Body? and Other Essays on Race, Gender and the Law* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 151