

In thinking about what to write for this prompt, I found myself not reflecting on a revelation, but rather feeling haunted (for lack of a less visceral term) by a singular concept. We spoke on it lightly in class, but it wasn't until we saw Marc Lamont Hill's debate with Chris Rufo that I began to earnestly consider my own relationship with my white identity.

My mother moved from Vietnam to the United States when she was young. She met my white dad from Kentucky and they got married, once in an American way, and then in the Vietnamese way. I was born in Georgia some time after, and then my younger brother, and divorced. My mother never taught me my language, but I had more blame for my father who never tried to learn the language or any of the culture. Growing up where I did in the United States, I never knew any other Vietnamese people outside of my family, couldn't speak with my own family, and had to constantly explain that Vietnam was more than a place the United States bombed and left. I wanted desperately to learn about my Vietnamese side because it was always taken away from me. In undergrad I was able to visit Vietnam for a study trip and felt emotionally exhausted at seeing the amount of tourism and white hierarchy applied to Vietnamese culture – I wrote a long paper about how Vietnamese art museums, where blank walls hung traditionally trained paintings, were considered “lacking” because they could not take care of their “history” the same way countries in Europe were able to, and the only Vietnamese visitors were people who wanted to take selfies. Meanwhile, whenever we went to visit shrines and temples, people were coming and going, laughing, we saw how well kept the places were, how swept and clean everything was, and I wondered how art curators were holding Vietnam's art history to a Eurocentric center when it was obvious the people themselves cared more about the temples, which is a different kind of art...

All that to say, I'd been harboring some intense aversion to my own whiteness for quite some time. The “white” parts of me were the parts that I disliked: when my mom called me a hillbilly, when I didn't receive A's in classes and “lost my Asian card,” when I was picky about food and couldn't eat with chopsticks.

In making fun of and also analyzing Rufo's behavior, I felt it was important to decide something that I liked about being white as a way of analyzing my own bias and not being a hypocrite. Minimal research on my part found that there were not any immediate results of *anyone* being proud of their whiteness without extreme guilt or jingoism involved. There was no healthy in between. The couple of results I did skim through, I found people saying that what they liked about whiteness was that they didn't have to think about it... but even that made them feel guilty. Reasonably.

In taking this class, I felt privileged to see the way you modeled your own relationship with your whiteness. I had never met a singular white person who was able to acknowledge their privilege without any amount of awkwardness and simultaneously wield the motivation to learn and teach about what to do with and in spite of it. It led me to speak with one of my other white friends who had a similar upbringing and felt regret that their white families, even though they were immigrants, assimilated so violently that they wiped out the cultures that they had brought with them to the United States. I thought of my mother who didn't teach me Vietnamese and how to speak with half of my family, but also my dad who I'd never had a conversation with about his whiteness or where he even came from, past Kentucky. It made me think about how a lot of conversations nowadays go to this exact route, of looking to our histories and pasts and to things we may not have even done ourselves. Isn't it the same microaggression as asking an immigrant where they're from— no, where they're *really* from?

I'd known my Dad and my Mom all my life, for both better and worse. Maybe I didn't know where exactly they came from or how they used to live or what they used to do, but I saw the way they acted in US culture. I wondered suddenly why that never seemed to count. I think often about the way we treat restaurants like Chipotle and Panda Express as "not authentic" when it's real food that can be eaten, but isn't considered real Mexican or real Chinese food, regardless of if real Mexican or Chinese people made it, it had something to do with where the recipes were trademarked instead. Both Chipotle and Panda Express are United States food.

That shouldn't be lesser than a restaurant opened by immigrants (though there is something to say there about capitalism, brands, small businesses vs chain fast food restaurants), just different. Isn't the beauty of capitalism that we have choices available to us, even in places to eat?

I wanted to seriously look at and consider my US identity. I learned in my trip to Vietnam that I did not belong there and I wouldn't unless I moved there. The only places I ever belonged were the places where I lived. That was a freeing thing to realize. It was difficult to come to terms to though because I had so much social anxiety and never felt *invited* to a community, the way that people think you need to be if you don't have confidence, but I had to realize and acknowledge that the living was still me being alive. That my house and apartment still existed and I went to that school. Like my parents, I had known my culture all my life. I didn't need to go looking. I'm a white-passing US citizen.

Sifting through my personal history and what I had done and was proud of, I found that one of the things I am proud of being white is the way I handled my education as a student, and eventually as a teacher, which formed my current beliefs in education. I believe that students have a right *and* a responsibility to speak up in class, for themselves, for their classmates, and for their teachers. Even as an anxious person, I know I learn best when I receive immediate feedback from my educators on lessons I'm participating in, and I hope that my classmates will be able to learn from my mistakes and my successes the way I learn from theirs. I also know from the other side how important it is to communicate my level of understanding, so that the educator can have the opportunity to adjust their teaching accordingly – which I also think teachers should, if they truly believe and wish to model an equitable classroom. No one should leave a classroom confused, and everyone should be able to come away with something they hadn't thought about before, whether it's in a new light from a new perspective or a completely new concept.

I believe that students are equal human beings to their teachers.

I believe that students should strive for their individual bests and compare themselves only to their past selves and track personal growth based on personal goals.

And I believe that education is forever. That we're always learning, but we're also always teaching. And that we should! It's not just a right, it is *also* a responsibility. Every conversation that I have with someone, I hope that they can change my mind about something. I hope to see something in a new way every time I have an interaction with someone because I know that humans inherently have vast, various lived experiences and I hope that people share some small part of theirs with me, and are curious about mine as well. I believe that people need to stay curious about each other to live peacefully, creatively, harmoniously, and together on this planet.

These are all beliefs that I feel privileged to have and hold fast to because I am white, and specifically I'm white in the US. I know and imagine there are places where turning in a paper like this would fail me, invite my human peers or authorities to berate me violently and physically, or be banished entirely from the country. That's what happened to the people who wrote these philosophies first. I'm privileged to have been able to read their works in a specific time and place that was physically safe for me and my body, with others who were also safe.

And I hope that my classmates who do not identify as white can have these beliefs too, but I have to know and say that where they came from, for me, and the ways in which I enact them are white. Specifically speaking to the way I order my ideas and the way that I speak, which are both heavily influenced by the Academic English students were graded on exercising for the majority of their lives which asks us to over-clarify, and assume we are speaking to a neutral but oblivious or ignorant entity who has no experience in anything whatsoever. The pros to having been used to that language is I love to clearly define and talk about how I got to the things I got to. The cons are that it's a figuratively violent way of speaking, that no human beings speak to each other like this because there are *no* situations that *exist* in which people are speaking to neutral, oblivious, ignorant entities, because *everyone* has their own valid and true

*lived* experiences. I constantly think about the work that I do and the work that I hope everyone in academia does to bridge the gap between the metaphysical conceptual theoretical and the humans we're talking to. I also deeply wish for the opposite, that the classmates around me are able to apply all of the big words to the little things they do on a daily basis. It's a difficult cycle to keep moving, but if that's not the point of education I truly do not know what is.

To end my paper, I'd like to thank you Vanessa for holding the space that you did for myself and my classmates, and bringing your authentic self that everyone has been telling us to do. I know and remember that you said you can't *not* do that, as a person, but I have to express my gratitude towards that for the sake of recognizing how it affected me. I have a lot of hopes for education – mine, the people around me, yours, the students I have taught and will go on to teach – and so I hope in voicing some of them while acknowledging the bias and aversion I was personally struggling with, having shared a small piece of my perspective, we can all move forward together. I'll teach and learn and act differently carrying this new revelation with me, now that it's been internalized and processed, and I'll be able to examine it further and discuss it with more depth than I ever have before. And that is all that I can hope to ever do during my short existence on this turning planet.