

Transcript of Inter(n)generational: Q & A

Ali Smith: So, in the interest of time, I want to open up for Q & A and things you're thinking about. It can be more under projects maybe that they're working on with 1882 as well. Just things that their presentations are helping you connect with after being such thoughtful listeners. If you all maybe, whenever asked a question, maybe stand up and, you know, address—

Yeah. I see you raising your hand.

Audience member 1: I'll start. Yeah. That's awesome. What you guys have put together is so cool. I think—really I go to all these events because, one, I care. I'm also like, it's a family thing. But I had no idea, like the meaningful in-depth of what you've done. It's really, really cool. I—and I'm really interested in what's next. Like, the summer's over, and I honestly think that a lot of that stuff has great potential for traveling and have more traction, probably with the curriculum to research further, in Greek life, to even getting shirts and a tour going. So, maybe going down the line quickly, have you guys thought about what's next with your particular projects and, yeah, where do we buy shirts and stuff?

Unknown speaker: Which direction?

Audience member 1: Whichever.

Unknown speaker: Take a leap.

Jiajia Zhang: So, starting up in the fall, I'm going to be the president or the chair or whatever it's called of the Asian American Center for [unintelligible]. And so obviously the support of this organization wasn't active before. Or like, I was part of it last year I just wasn't [unintelligible], but it's also been active since the 80s? 1984, I think? Right now we're trying to establish an Asian American studies major at Amherst College by 2025. Wait—yes, 2025. We're working with committees and the administration and stuff and then we'll kind of at a steady rate hire a new faculty member every year or every two years until we have enough to create a major. We're also trying to work with some of these guys and their respective colleges to create sort of a coalition between universities and create sort of a manifesto document on why we need ethnic studies and have people sign it and try to publish a book of different written stuff.

Gabi Chu: As for the walking tour, I'm not from the area so that makes it a little difficult if I want to give it regularly or advertise it to the public, so I'm hoping to create a pamphlet or booklet so it will become completely self-guided for anyone who's interested. But I also do plan on doing it

one time hopefully when it's cooler, giving a full run through of the tour to—probably internally, if anyone is interested—but advertising it as a real tour. It won't be regular, but I do want to give one full iteration of it.

Audience member 1: People will love that. I think it'll be really cool.

Abby Li: I haven't created an active account yet, [unintelligible] but then I'll do that. It's all custom-made, but—[shrugs]

Jamelah Jacob: So, with Asian American literature, I mean, hopefully with a blog where people submit reviews, but Asian American literature in general, I'm taking my second poetry class this semester and we have to make a collection and hopefully it will be around—something around Asian American literature. Also, I'm starting to really consider an honors thesis in Asian American literature.

Emily Wang: At school, one club that I'm involved in is Media in the Museum and what we do is, we design tours for local schools at the Met. So I want to use this experience of taking a piece and being able to talk about the diverse narratives behind it and really bring this to my curriculum design team because the Met is a very predominantly white, kind of a pretentious, privileged place and so I think with these skills we can help make the Met this—you know, a little more inclusive.

Bianca Villao: I personally have been interested in doing academic research on this topic for a while because I feel like there isn't a lot of research done on it so I'm hoping to fill in the gaps as that goes on.

Audience member 1: Very cool. Thanks so much.

Smith: We have a question. Sir? We have two, Ting-yi and over here. [Addressing the presenters] Guys, stand up. Come on, up. [Addressing the back of the room] Ting-yi, come on out.

Ting-yi Oei: Yeah, I just wanted to—these are amazing projects all around. I'm really just impressed with what you did, that. If I could limit myself maybe just to two quick questions: the students who were joining these Greek letter organizations, did you find much in the way of other information about, say, Chinese or Asian Americans who joined mainstream Caucasian or mixed-ethnicity different Greek letter organizations, and also, sort of the reverse of that. Were there others that were actually trying to diversify themselves in becoming a little more open, first maybe for Chinese-Americans, then more other Asian Americans but maybe getting others involved as well? [Unintelligible] and I'll have the same question for you, in a second.

Villao: So actually, I didn't really look as much into the presence of Asian Americans in dominantly white fraternities and sororities, but from my experience at GW, a lot of people who are identifying as Asian American and join a so-called typical white frat or sorority, a lot of people didn't know that multicultural Greek was an option. I know I didn't when I went into it. I was very adverse to the thought of joining a sorority, thinking that it would just be like, you know, everything—that horrible thing you see in the news and TV and I didn't know that was an option. So, I think, a lot of people join these organizations and they're completely happy in them but a lot of times, they didn't—just weren't aware of their options going into it. So, that could also be a reason why maybe there aren't as many people participating in Asian—specifically Asian-interest organizations, and also we always stress that it's Asian-interest, nowadays hoping to be more inclusive because we actually do have people in our sorority who aren't Asian American, who are Caucasian and also African American. But we're—it's sort of a safe space that we've created for people who are interested in Asian culture, want to learn more about the plight and the history of Asian Americans in America. And also, most of the organizations that I mentioned that were formed in the early 20th century started off as specifically Chinese-Americans and Japanese-Americans but all of them—and there are, on the west coast mainly, more specific Filipino-American organizations, Japanese-American, Korean-American—but a lot of them, they're not going to be like, oh, you can't join because you're not Chinese-American. A lot of them have branched out to being more Asian American.

Smith: Yeah, how about your question?

Audience member 2: Thanks, y'all. This was like, I feel like I'm repeating what everyone else was saying because it was really hella dope to see all y'all do this. I—people from GW know—we don't have much of this, if any, you know. So yeah, this was great. I kind of want to ask about—and this is sort of a general question—about the identity of the Asian American, because that's a political term. Some dude was just sitting there and was like, oh, there's people there from The Asia. Let's call them Asian American. And, obviously we're not a monolith, you know, I'm Filipino. You know, there's so many differences, so many of us and oftentimes the Asian American narrative is something that we're just sort of figuring out as we go along. Here, like, sort of constructing and then other people are saying what it should mean that aren't Asian American. You know, all this stuff. So, what is the value of creating an Asian American narrative? Like, and is there one to be created? It's sort of like something that I was picking up from everyone. Of course,

we all have such different experiences here. So, what does it mean to be creating an Asian American identity?

Zhang: I was just going to say, from a historical standpoint, the term Asian American was coined by Yuji Ichioka and Emma Gee in the Asian American movement which was in—it was like late 1960s through the 1970s. And the Asian American movement was very pan-ethnic and interracial. And before that, the Asian American activism that was happening wasn't very much like—they were kind of singular in terms of the ethnicities that were involved. So, you have the Chinese-American court cases or the Japanese-American Redress Movement but they weren't really like, working together. And like, the Asian American Movement brought those groups of people together. So, I think one reason for coining the term Asian American was to sort of really bring the communities of different types of Asian Americans together and also really stress that these people are Americans because the movement worked a lot from African Americans and Latinx Americans as well. Yeah.

Chu: As for your question about what is the importance of building an Asian American narrative, like what is it? I mentioned this in my presentation, but it really is this idea that the Asian American movement has this kind of identity crisis of—they don't know what is, what isn't, and how to really create bonding between these groups. But for a lot of Asian Americans, the stories they have are very similar. If, like, in groups like this, in settings like this, stories like, 'my parents are immigrants, they came at this time, and they've had these hardships,' are very common and they're very normal but it's almost surprising when you move into a predominantly white space how interesting or how special that story is to them because it's just not common. So, bringing these groups together, again, fights the divide and conquer of the—like, that we can treat minorities as little voices, but then the Asian American story, narrative, if brought together under one voice, is a lot stronger than its parts. The sum is greater than the total of its parts.

Jacob: And also I think, continuing with what Jia just said, also, I think that Asian America, as it stands now, is a result of an effort to stand up against things silenced for so long, like things like the Exclusion Act and all of these exclusionary immigration policies as well as the model minority myth that we're more familiar with. And so, I think creating an Asian American narrative is just continuing that effort to actually voice out our stories.

Beth Zhao: I also think that Asian American term can help kind of create an Asian American voting bloc because a lot of our issues do get ignored

within—you know, when it comes to elections, especially with this one coming up. And so, with just Chinese-American, Filipino-American, or Indian-American, that is already—like, that's even smaller than we already are. So, creating an Asian American narrative, at least when it comes to voting, could force candidates to care. Which sounds very pessimistic, I know, but it would force people to start caring and, but also just like, to exist within the community. I think they're—like, obviously we're not a monolith, so there isn't any 'pre-req' to be part of the community, but also the community needs to exist to force white candidates, or candidates not of Asian descent to care about the Asian vote and we don't get ignored with elections, et cetera, et cetera.

Smith: Any other questions or reactions before we kind of break up into just more conversations? We're still open for the #WhyAPIALit. We're still accepting submissions. Any other last thoughts? Yeah.

Audience member 3: I just want to thank you. You're so lovely. I'm in awe of all of these things. I am a native Washingtonian. I've learned more in the last 2 hours about the Asian American community and I'm just so grateful. And I think all of your programs are—the Greek, I want to take this tour, the t-shirts. It was so—all of your projects are just so creative, so I'm just awestruck. Thank you.