

Foreign Eyes
Theresa Azemar

In collaboration with first and second-generation Americans of varying ethnicities and backgrounds, who anonymously commented on their experiences and opinions. All italicized lines in this piece are not my own, but rather those of consenting members of the first and second-generation American community.

1.

Wide-eyed and curious, they say they can see it in your eyes
That you are *other*
if only for a fleeting flash of time it makes you feel that you aren't really different,
but are still characteristic enough to walk with pride.

I don't really think much of it but some say they can see it in my eyes.

Today, we know it's just another way to foreignize.

But the things we can control convert more cohesively than God's contributions.

What happens when we wash away the bloodstains and don the white wallpaper?

Could the way you walk or the way you talk be the saver? Or the changer?

Foreign eyes listen closely. Foreign eyes always recognize.

People look at me, see what I'm wearing, and automatically assume things about me.

2.

Big surprise! Even foreign eyes foreignize before the forced allies arise

Turns out foreign eyes can't recognize the ties behind all lies.
eyes.

Even those who look like me assume I'm like them. But no one gives me the chance to show them who I really am. A girl who might look like everyone else but has her own thoughts.

What does it mean if those who look like you can't really see you?

What does it mean?

What happens to you if you can't be seen?

My cousins who were born and lived in Vietnam most of their life sometimes belittle me for not having a correct viet accent or not knowing certain viet foods. I hear people throw around the phrase: "You're not a true asian if..."

...you can't be seen.

on earth, or in the media, or in between.

3.

When foreign eyes read it for the very first time, culpability strikes.

The chorus chunks till it chokes and it cuts like ice

It's a substance you trusted, so cold now it bites:

When people are whitewashed they completely abandon their culture to assimilate.

I think being whitewashed means losing or forgetting about your family's culture.

*It makes me think of a person being overly influenced ... and losing their original identity.
culpability strikes just like the backhand of a long-lost motherland.
When you're whitewashed, it's like you've betrayed your people.
It pulls back and hits you like an ageless rubber band.*

4.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE FOR AN EYE FOREIGN EYES let's make 'em cry
sever all ties

There's no need to force someone to keep their culture if it makes them unhappy.

 this is
 where the where the
cells start to cells start
 to to
 divide.

Lovely Lady liberty is your lucky-charm warden
 with the keys
 she swings that gate
 wide.

But, wait.
*...It's important to be able to assimilate to a culture without losing all of the original.
Why should we live in a world where everyone is the same?*

What an easy way to become invisible.

*Yes, I am abandoning my culture. It concerns me because I feel like it should be something I own
and am proud of.*

My mom... she tries to keep certain traditions alive at home but, no, it's not ever enough.

Foreign eyes, it should take more than the outside forces
 that foreignize
before you hit home run and bat foreign eyes to that rigor mortis close.
 trust me, there's nothing you need to internalize
 from infertile cries that die with time.
 and then, who knows?
 either way, your blood is forever
 and you cannot lose yourself.
I have to try to find a good balance between the two or else I become someone else.