



# First-Gen Voices: Creative and Critical Narratives on the First-Generation College Experience

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## Voices to Truth America! Exploring Hapa-ish

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1967

The U.S. Supreme Court unanimously overturns ***Pace v. Alabama (1883)***, ruling in ***Loving v. Virginia*** that state bans on interracial marriage violate the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

As Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote for the Court:

“There is patently no legitimate overriding purpose independent of invidious racial discrimination which justifies this classification. The fact that Virginia prohibits only interracial marriages involving white persons demonstrates that the racial classifications must stand on their own justification, as measures designed to maintain White Supremacy ...”The freedom to marry has long been recognized as one of the vital personal rights essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness by free men ... To deny this fundamental freedom on so unsupportable a basis as the racial classifications embodied in

these statutes, classifications so directly subversive of the principle of equality at the heart of the Fourteenth Amendment, is surely to deprive all the State's citizens of liberty without due process of law. The Fourteenth Amendment requires that the freedom of choice to marry not be restricted by invidious racial discriminations. Under our Constitution, the freedom to marry, or not marry, a person of another race resides with the individual and cannot be infringed by the State.”  
From this point on, interracial marriage is legal throughout the United States **(Almost)**.

2000

Following a November 7th ballot referendum, Alabama becomes the last state to officially legalize interracial marriage.

By November 2000, interracial marriage had been legal in every state for more than three decades thanks to the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), but the Alabama State Constitution still contained an unenforceable ban in Section 102: "The legislature shall never pass any law to authorize or legalize any marriage between any white person and a Negro or descendant of a Negro."

What's normal anyway?  
I mean what's normal anyway?  
What's normal anyway?  
What's normal anyway?<sup>1</sup>

Be in a crowd and not feel alone,  
I look around and not feel alone.  
I never feel like I belong.  
I wanna' feel like I belong,  
somewhere, somewhere, somewhere.

Be in a crowd and not feel alone,  
I look around and not feel alone.  
I never feel like I belong.  
I wanna' feel like I belong<sup>2</sup>, somewhere.

Don't let them change you.  
Just be who you are, who you are.  
Don't let them change you.  
You can't please them all, them all.<sup>3</sup>

--Miguel, "What's Normal Anyway"

**Hapa (hä'pä):** adj. 1. Of mixed racial heritage with partial roots in Asian and/or Pacific Islander ancestry. 2; If an individual has one parent whom is Asian/Pacific Islander, and one parent whom is of an ethnicity outside of Asian/Pacific Islander, they would generally be considered Hapa. 3. Slang. a person of such ancestry. {der./Hawaiian: hapa haole. (half white)} 4. Damn good-looking people

*Ex: Tina: God I love Hapa guys*

*Jennifer: Who doesn't!?!*

Throughout my life, I grew up in a way that was very different from my peers. I would later discover, embrace and learn more about my multiracial background through this journey with peers, family, food, cultures, religion and higher education.

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<sup>1</sup> Meanings: The artists *Miguel* in about the first, second, and third grade is where I think kids really start showing and expressing themselves. Children don't have a filter. When they notice there's something different about you, they voice it. That's when you become self-aware. That's a pivotal point in the way that we look at ourselves even, because depending on how you are accepted socially in those early, early circumstances you start to formulate your own insecurities, your own securities, and it is very much based on the opinions of others.

<sup>2</sup> Miguel is pretty much saying he feels like an outsider. In the intro of the song he says "Too proper for the black kids, too black for the Mexicans." He feels as if he doesn't fit in.

<sup>3</sup> You shouldn't change for other people because you'll never be who everyone wants you to be; Always be who you are don't let people change you

It was really different to have been in place where I was. I was the eldest child and was at the time the only child. All my other cousins lived further away and were also older. Growing up I never really realized or understood “the big” difference ‘till I was about 7 year old, when my classmates called me “*Chino*.” I would constantly say I am not “*Chino*” but “*Japanese*.” I would get upset; however, I understood that I didn’t necessarily look like my other classmates. I grew up in Montebello. Yet I was raised and went to school in Boyle Heights/East LA. Memo y Mana always watched me, took care of me, picked me up from school, and knew public transportation better than my parents. *Hable me solo en Español, no entiendo inglés. Mi Abuelo* (Memo – for Guillermo or Bill) y *Abuela* (for Romana) would always have *Canal 34 Univisión* News on and would play the Spanish Radio in the Kitchen with Mana cook or washed dishes. There were always *arroz, frijoles, and tortillas* ready to be eaten. Many will often refer to my childhood that is often known to be as the *Cholo Barrio/Hollenbeck Park*; others will often refer to this are as “the hood” or “The Ghetto.” I really didn’t see it that way, I saw a place where there was a mix of music from rap, *banda, cumbia, mariachi, and hip-hop!* There are tons of cheap fast food places and liquor stores. There was always an opportunity to hear cars come drive by with loud *ranchero* music as the Catholic Church bell rang. It reminds me of the time when we go to Quinceañeras and we participate in these traditional Latino ceremonies/festivities. They usually do announce and say the children’s name as introduction with everyone’s last name that will be things like Lopez, Sanchez, Ramirez, and then there is mine Ishii. Then receiving the follow up questions asking my family, or me if we are Latino. If we love the Latino culture? And when I state that I am, they usually question me further or don’t always believe me.

In addition I always remember and love Thanksgiving Day in Mission Viejo, Orange County. This area being the place where I would see the most whites, both ethnically and religiously diverse family. Thanksgiving Day included seeing my family and friends we don’t see but only around this time of the year or, sadly, at funerals. Smelling all the great food and hugging family members and remembering/learning names along the way. This picture is a bit different. It was a place where there were atheists, Jews, Mormons, Christians, Catholics, Buddhists, and Spiritual individuals all gathered to give thanks. Majority of the people in this picture were white but also seem to be ‘*hapa*’. What I began to see is on my *お父さん (Otouson- father)* side is white, Swedish and Japanese. This house at Mission Viejo felt like Costco in a way, in which I grab so much food, snacks, and wontons with no shame and have unlimited samples of everything. It was unique to have all different types of food present. We have pastas, the “traditional American” thanksgiving food (Turkey, ham, green beans, beets, yams, mashed potatoes) and then we have green salads, steamed white rice, soy sauce, wontons, and tamales. It was also a place to see football after a big fest in which eventually we would all get the “*Ishii Curse*,” “*the it is*,” the “*Food Coma*.” After this delicious meal, Auntie Signe’s (Swiss Background) homemade pies and treats are warm, out and open for slices. Homemade whip cream, chocolate cream pie, apple, pumpkin, Dutch cinnamon apple, and other treats. Uncle Jerry (my father’s oldest brother, Japanese-American and was born in the Internment Camps during the WWII) always encouraging getting some more and we would head over to the front yard with all our cousins for the grand turkey Piñata.

*Where are you really from? You don't look Mexican? Which half are you more of?* When people look at me, no one has been able to find or fully identify to what I am, misreads me, and hear about everything. People can come up to me and talk to me in many languages from Chinese to Togoloog. I then proceed to thank them, not feeling bad, for allowing me to be recognized, and then I admit that I unfortunately cannot speak those languages, YET! Maybe I can learn the bad words first just like everyone else does—with a foreign language—somehow those words are faster to learn, who knows why!

I can speak, write and comprehend Spanish and it is amazing to see those facial reactions when I talk or defend others or myself in the language. I am also not afraid to communicate in Spanish to my family, strangers or friends, and it feels great! I see it as an asset. When my dad and I were at the grocery store, a lady in her late 40's had her grocery cart blocking one of the isles we needed to get through and we moved her cart to the side, and went forward. She then went ahead and starting talking and saying rude and mean slurs to both my father and I in Spanish. She was upset and yelled at my dad and I, calling us "*Estupido-puto Chinos...*" Let's just say, there was more of this as we were going up and down the aisle trying to find the supplies. My dad can understand some pieces, but I understand everything. Even though I could have given her the middle finger, I decided to defend my father and I in Spanish. The look on her face—priceless! Just like a fish out of water, her eyes got bigger, she let out a gasp and went away. This is not the first time I had to do this. I did the same in the States, in Mexico, and enjoyed it when I was in abroad.

I can learn many new things each day, I also identify as a learner and activator- so watch out world, America and the world is changing. Let me just put this out there, I do not fit in a box, I do not want to be in a box for that matter, so really fuck that. I do not fit the norm or stereotype and that's what I like. I am not your average stereotype or believe in labels. I believe labels should be on soup cans, not on people. I am Me! I am not light skinned, quiet or shy as people think all Asians seem to be. I also am Mexican and may not look like it all the way and I am also Spanish but may not seem to be. So when those damn questions comes up and there are folks who want to play the guessing game. First either buy me a glass of wine, preferably white (I'm classy like that) or second buy me coffee and lunch, get to know more from what my background is. Most likely if you push further in demand, you will get one of the many responses, tones or actions- I am also a developing member of the National Sarcasm Society from childhood to present. If those questions of where you are from? And I say CA or Los Angeles, and the person goes on further to state, "no, where are you really from?" I am going to tell you really sarcastic response—and I am going to say, "Downtown" and smile.

Did I know who I really was? Rejections from both sides of my identity, I never saw myself different from anyone else until someone had pointed it out to me in school. I'm a bit confused? When I was asked to check a box, the joke is that I have to check of "other." Either I am forced to check one, or for some reasons there are not enough choices that give me an accurate representation of how I choose to say who I was. So I would sometimes ended up being "other." Was this normal? The last thing you wanted to do in school going through K-12 is to really stand out and be so different.

Race abroad is something that is really unique and interesting. Sometimes people would find beauty in "normal," traditional/original/authentic" origins, and others would

say being ‘hapa’ is not normal or outside what they think is normal. Either way, perceptions and being an “American” abroad has its own looks in South America, that I obviously don’t have besides my dominate language I use to communicate with my some of my professors and some of my peers, English. I would really urge and open your eyes man, to the world of full of possibilities. What they thought an “American” was someone blonde, wealthy, upper SES, family is educated and has green eyes? *So you’re like Japanese, but also half-American?* But I felt like I was back in my American Cultures/American Ethnic Studies (which allowed me to feel empowered and learn more about myself and others in our shared global community). When I was abroad I was able to fully discover myself, be myself, and also understand who I was further. I also discovered some other identities from what I was already carrying and how that lead to some scary and empowering times. In addition, to how and why I really enjoyed what I was studying. How I know understand by what I was feeling, of needing to get away, get off the Bluff and leave CA for a bit. It was in a time where there were many things happening and how I was able to grow and thrive in many ways. In addition, how taking risks is something that has helped me grow and leave my comfort zone. Understanding the difference between, social justice, service, and accompaniment. To be able to experience privilege abroad and also learn and reevaluate my desires and dreams in my life. Thinking about the deep relationships and opportunities I had. To be really honest, I would never really imagine this to become a reality and the barriers I faced along the way. Studying Abroad in South America I was able to grow emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually once again. Since I understand that we also live in a society or go to school that can consume, pay a lot and waste a lot of food or sources. I want to make a difference in this world. I want to leave my mark in this world and help out and serve my community, nation and community. I promise you, I will make a difference and will be going places. I don’t give up easily and surely do not quit or accept failure as an option. I am a runner, and I move forward, hustle, and push through.

Both of my parents never have been able to attend nor graduate from a university/college. Both of my parents and their family come in with low socio-economic backgrounds yet valued hard work, sacrifice and education. My parents both worked and sacrificed a lot for my little brother and I to attend school. They would give us the world they say, but in way they essentially did this already. The gift they gave us was to have the opportunity to have the best of both worlds and cultures. They have supported me in allowing me to study abroad and travel. These eyes I use to see the adventures abroad, are not my eyes, they are the eyes of my parents, the community and my mentors- who allowed me to be where I am to be. Throughout my entire life, my family emphasized the value and importance of education. My parents finished high school, but neither graduated a four-year university. Discovering this early, I was motivated to be the first in my family to graduate from a four-year university, just like my pediatrician. My teachers mentored and inspired me to follow my dreams. I wanted to continue this passion for serving others throughout my education. If you look at my family, we are pretty much very diverse in many ways. We are all different, yes, we have some similarities, but for the most part we are all different. Which I find beautiful and great!

“*Hola, ¿Cómo estás?*”, they said “*Konnichiwa (こんにちは)*”

Hollywood would say I am “ethnically ambiguous.” This can be a blessing and a curse. Growing up bilingual also does too have its perks. I receive this interesting stare/look and then greeted with constant and predictable question: “So, what are you?” *What am I?* This is what they're really asking here: What is the particular racial mix that created you? *Because YOU don't fit into a single box in my mind, and that confuses me.*

Today, I further appreciate, enjoy and celebrate my identity! I embraced and learned that I am not half; rather I am 100% *hapa*. Coming to celebrate “other” is unique and brings more experiences, stories, and colors. While some other people should think you should fit in. I am who I am. If you don't really see it, learn it. Or, if you don't like it, step to the side and get out of my way, cause I am moving forward and I am leaving you behind in dust and you will be on the other side of history. I learned that I do not need to fit a mold; there is no such thing as a “true American.” How can we define that? The U.S. is so diverse ethnically, socially, politically, economically, and religiously, and that is the *belleza!* “*Konnichiwa (こんにちは)*” I'm half and half and it's usually easier to just leave it there (well sometimes). If I were to tell my identity though a couple years ago, it would be different from what I would tell you today, I would tell you I'm 100 % ‘*hapa*’! What I begin to slowly notice was FUSION! The *Ishii's* were very different from the *Cruzes*, yet similar in the theme of food, family, and stories all, which is bringing EVERYONE together. To eating foods I really enjoyed, rice and various kinds of Mexican food. To be able to dance *Suavamente* from Elvis Crespo hit album. In addition, to loving Cuban music, Celia Cruz and Shakira to loving R&B/Hip-Hop I am mixed and love this FUSION! I am a colorful, bright vibrant Fusion of Life! Think of it as a rainbow that is ready to be smiling, laughing, and having full of memories- fusion of religion, spirituality, color, race, backgrounds, and experiences. To all those who are also hapas you're not alone. You are special and unique, do not feel ashamed or feel you are not complete, because some might say your half, but really you are complete. Just like the artist say, *Miguel* when society notice there's something different about you, they voice it. That's when you become self-aware or really different from the norm. That's a pivotal point, when some can feel excluded, rather we should all be inclusive. No should ever have to feel like an outsider. Though at times or events, some people can make us feel like we do not belong or fit in, but in this world- all are welcome! You shouldn't change for other people because you'll never be who everyone wants you to be. Always be who you are; don't let anyone change you.