Slackers, Stoners, and Screw-Ups: APIA Writers on the Margins of the Margins
Event outline

Event Description:
Most first- or second-gen APIA stories are tales of perseverance. The American Dream fulfilled. But what about everyone else: the slackers, stoners, and screw-ups? This panel is five creators, working in a variety of prose genres, who will discuss the personal and artistic choices that led them to writing about APIA people in the margins. The discussion will delve into conversations around the consideration of audience, upending of the model minority myth, and writing complicated characters.

Event Category:
Multiple Literary Genres Craft

Event Organizer:
Gene Kwak is the author of Go Home, Ricky!, which received a starred review in Publisher's Weekly and was a Rumpus Book Club selection. He is also the winner of the 2022 Poets and Writers Maureen Egen Writers Exchange Award. He is an Assistant Professor at Oklahoma State University.

Event Moderator:
Mark Galarrita is a graduate of the 2017 Clarion West Writers Workshop and the University of Alabama MFA program. His writing can be found in McSweeney’s, Electric Literature, Nightmare magazine, Split Lip, and elsewhere. Currently, he works at Scribner.

Event Participants:
Jean Kyoung Frazier is a writer living in Los Angeles. Pizza Girl is her debut novel. She also writes for television for shows such as A24's Beef.

Jenn Alandy Trahan is a Jones Lecturer at Stanford University, where she teaches fiction, creative nonfiction, creative expression, and contemporary American short stories. Her work (featuring APIA slackers and screw-ups) has been published in Harper's, One Story, and the Best American Short Stories.

Gina Chung is a Korean American writer from New Jersey currently living in New York City. She is the author of the novel Sea Change, which was longlisted for the Center for Fiction First Novel Prize, a 2023 B&N Discover Pick, and a New York Times Most Anticipated Book, and the short story collection Green Frog (out March 12, 2024 from Vintage in the U.S. and June 6, 2024 from Picador in the U.K.). A recipient of the Pushcart Prize, she is a 2021-2022 Center for Fiction/Susan Kamil Emerging Writer Fellow and holds an MFA in fiction from The New School. Her work appears or is forthcoming in One Story, BOMB, The Kenyon Review, Literary Hub, Catapult, Electric Literature, and Gulf Coast, among others.
Opening Remarks:

Most first- or second-gen APIA stories are tales of perseverance. The American Dream fulfilled. But what about everyone else: the slackers, stoners, and screw-ups? This panel is five creators, working in a variety of prose genres, who will discuss the personal and artistic choices that led them to writing about APIA people in the margins. The discussion will delve into conversations around the consideration of audience, upending of the model minority myth, and writing complicated characters.

We’ll open up with a discussion on East Asian and South Asian storytelling in prose today. A 15-minute Q&A will conclude the session.

Potential Questions:

1. Each of the four panelists here have published or written works that interrogate the stereotype of the American ‘model minority’—a racist stereotype that pigeonholes Asians as the shining example against other Black and Brown peoples, viewing them as folks who are capitalistic, compliant, non-threatening, and can assimilate better in white America. Over the past five years, we’re seeing more Asian and Asian-American authors publishing works that confront this ‘us versus them’ and the ‘good Asian’ narrative—showcasing the nuances of the diaspora. For example, Jenn Alandy Trahan’s Harpers short story “They Told Us Not To Say This” confronts toxic cultural dynamics and sexism in the California Filipino-American community, and Jean Kyoung Frazier’s novel Pizza Girl is told from the perspective of a pregnant Korean American teenager who attempts to woo an older white mother from her family. Writers, when and why did you create these character driven stories that challenge the system of what it means to be Asian-American today? Did you initially set out to do this or did it come about another way?

2. A cliché for many children of immigrants and marginalized groups is the idea that one day they’ll have enough money to get their parents out of debt or support them for the rest of their lives. This may be true for some, but for others it’s about as real as the American Dream: you have to be asleep to believe it. In Gene Kwak’s Go Home Ricky! and upcoming works on the Korean American diaspora, characters long for a family they can identify with in order to fully come into their own lives. Sea Change, Gina Chung’s debut novel, features the lost protagonist Ro—stressed with the many uphill struggles in her life from finding her beloved but troubled father, healing the relationship with her mother and cousin, trying to find stability in her life, and saving her best friend and octopus Dolores (amongst other problems). Writers, do you see the trauma and weight of immigrant parent dreams and expectations as a primary catalyst for the characters in your writing? Do you also see this in other contemporary works by Asian-American authors?

Additional questions TK