On Thursday, 02/04, we had a class discussion about what we call ourselves and what others may call us if we were born or raised in the United States. We spoke about how some people prefers the hyphenated form of their group and prefer to be called Mexican-American, African-American, Japanese-American, Indian-American and so on. We also spoke about how some people in Central or South America refer to themselves as Americans as may some Canadians (they may also call themselves North Americans). We also spoke about the terms “Avowal” (what we call ourselves) and “Ascription” (the label others give us), and how sometimes these are the same or sometimes these may be in conflict.

Two weeks ago I had the good fortune to visit the beautiful country of Australia. I visited my Australian friend Milry in the city of Sydney. One day we went together with her good friend to a local bar. In the bar Milry’s friend turned to me and asked, “What are you?” and then “Where are you from?” I answered her, “I’m American” (as I’ve been a naturalized citizen for over half my life). She looked at me in disbelief and stated, “You’re not American. You’re some kind of Asian.” In her mind she probably perceived me as an Asian who was living in America because I believe her immediate image when thinking of the term American is of an American who is a tall, blonde-haired, blue-eyed Caucasian. I was very insulted, but then again I thought about it and thought about the media I
had seen on Australian TV and in the cinemas in Australia and about how Americans are portrayed there and the I remembered that the majority of actresses and actors quite possibly were Euro-Americans who were blue-eyed, with blonde hair. Australians, as well as everyone else in the world should understand however that Americans are not a race. When we speak about America we are speaking about a culture or a nationality, but not a race, so Americans come in all skin tones, sizes and shapes. Anyone born in this country or who becomes a naturalized citizen is a U.S. American, REGARDLESS of his/her race, ethnic background or religious beliefs! We are all different and unique in some way and that’s what makes us and this country beautiful. This is the “true definition” of a U.S. American to me. Many people here would “ascribe” me as a Japanese-American because of my first and last name and my looks, but even though I can speak some Japanese I also have Korean, Filipino, and English blood running through my veins. My “avowal” is that of a unique, colorful and wonderful mixture of a number of cultures rolled into one. Therefore I label myself a unique, Asian-American of mixed ethnic backgrounds and I wish people wouldn’t label each other until they really got to know one another!