

The following passage is excerpted from an essay published by an Asian-American writer in 2013.

When I meet people, I always get some astonishment when they ask me where I am from. “Wyoming,” I answer. And more often than not, the response is, “No, where are you from, really?” or “Hmm, you don’t look like a typical Wyoming person.” Over the years, I am not sure of the response I am supposed to give, and usually, I just reply with, “Well, there are some brown people there.”

But what is a typical Wyoming person? When I think of Wyoming’s political identity, I know it is easy to make some quick judgments about its identity in general. Wyoming is 90 percent white. Wyoming is 0.8 percent Asian American. Wyoming is largely Republican. And conservative. I think we’ve all heard the drill before. And yet, Wyoming was the first state to have a woman governor, and in the case of my mother, they were the first state to elect someone to serve in a state legislature who was born in India.

In 1994, when my mom was elected, again, she had no Indians in her district. When she first ran, even I was a little doubtful that she’d win. She wore saris often. She has an accent. But she went door to door and talked to almost every house in her district. She campaigned on issues that were important to Wyoming people—and to her. And she won. After that, my feelings about Wyoming changed—as before I thought of the state as a little backward when it came to matters of diversity. I was only 19, and had just left Wyoming to go to college. I realized then that while your physical identity is something that people can’t help but take in, Wyoming people vote for people that have something to offer. Wyoming acknowledges ability and competence.

Wyoming has always been a state that has drawn immigrants to its open spaces. From pioneers from back East to Europeans, Latin Americans, and Asians. And Wyoming has always had an Asian population. As my friend who is a Wyoming historian told me, there were Chinese rail and mine workers, Japanese rail workers and beet farmers, and of course Heart Mountain brought in an influx of Japanese people. Today, many motels across the state are run by Indians from India.

Here in Laramie, walking across the University of Wyoming campus, you can hear bits of other languages being spoken, the Indian students play cricket in Prexy’s pasture, and the students who I teach, while largely from Wyoming, have a curiosity about other cultures and peoples that is genuine and true.

Since that day in 1994, I have always voted in Wyoming, and feel strongly about positions from school board to our senators. But that said, when I look at the Wyoming legislature, it’s hard to see much diversity representing the state. Out of the 90 legislators in the Senate and House, only five are of color. I know that number probably makes sense in a state where again, the population is more than 90 percent white.

People always talk about how so many young people leave the state once they graduate from high school. Many look to cities for more excitement, for a different experience. I think the same can be said of many minorities and people of color. Why live here when you can be somewhere with more diversity and with those cultural connections? I get that. But if Wyoming is going to be a more diverse place, people have to choose to live here. And I know I fall into that camp. I choose to live here because I can’t imagine anywhere else. I love the mountains. I love the posture of a lodgepole pine. I love the way the sun looks in the bright blue sky on a day that is minus 30 degrees. I love the quiet of the snow. I love the space.

The following passage is excerpted from a lecture delivered to art students by an Irish poet and dramatist in the 1880s.

The subject of my lecture to-night is what makes an artist and what does the artist make; what are the relations of the artist to his surroundings, what is the education the artist should get, and what is the quality of a good work of art.

Now, as regards the relations of the artist to his surroundings, by which I mean the age and country in which he is born. All good art, as I said before, has nothing to do with any particular century; but this universality is the quality of the work of art; the conditions that produce that quality are different. And what, I think, you should do is to realise completely your age in order completely to abstract yourself from it; remembering that if you are an artist at all, you will be not the mouthpiece of a century, but the master of eternity, that all art rests on a principle, and that mere temporal considerations are no principle at all; and that those who advise you to make your art representative of the nineteenth century are advising you to produce an art which your children, when you have them, will think old-fashioned. But you will tell me this is an inartistic age, and we are an inartistic people, and the artist suffers much in this nineteenth century of ours.

Of course he does. I, of all men, am not going to deny that. But remember that there never has been an artistic age, or an artistic people, since the beginning of the world. The artist has always been, and will always be, an exquisite exception. There is no golden age of art; only artists who have produced what is more golden than gold.

WHAT, you will say to me, the Greeks? were not they an artistic people?

Well, the Greeks certainly not, but, perhaps, you mean the Athenians, the citizens of one out of a thousand cities.

Do you think that they were an artistic people? Take them even at the time of their highest artistic development, the latter part of the fifth century before Christ, when they had the greatest poets and the greatest artists of the antique world, when the Parthenon rose in loveliness at the bidding of a Phidias¹, and the philosopher spake of wisdom in the shadow of the painted portico, and tragedy swept in the perfection of pageant and pathos across the marble of the stage. Were they an artistic people then? Not a bit of it. What is an artistic people but a people who love their artists and understand their art? The Athenians could do neither.

How did they treat Phidias? To Phidias we owe the great era, not merely in Greek, but in all art - I mean of the introduction of the use of the living model.

And what would you say if all the English bishops, backed by the English people, came down from Exeter Hall to the Royal Academy one day and took off Sir Frederick Leighton² in a prison van to Newgate on the charge of having allowed you to make use of the living model in your designs for sacred pictures?

Would you not cry out against the barbarism and the Puritanism of such an idea? Would you not explain to them that the worst way to honour God is to dishonour man who is made in His image, and is the work of His hands; and, that if one wants to paint Christ one must take the most Christlike person one can find, and if one wants to paint the Madonna, the purest girl one knows?

Would you not rush off and burn down Newgate, if necessary, and say that such a thing was without parallel in history?

Without parallel? Well, that is exactly what the Athenians did.

¹ Phidias, an ancient Greek sculptor believed to have been imprisoned by political enemies

² Frederic Leighton, a 19th century British painter and sculptor