My thesis project focuses on typography and the power it holds to communicate culture. Typography provides visual meaning to the written language we see displayed on items such as advertisements and business signs. The attributes of typography are what give us particular expectations; these qualities consist of cap height, serifs, baseline, x-height, ascenders, and many more. My interest is in how the font/typographic treatment of a word gives the viewer subconscious connotations of that product, business, or community. Although typography is thought of in term of modernity it dates far before the creation of computers and graphic design. The Roman era implemented different typefaces around the empire, these typefaces created diverse implications such as notions of imperial celebration or writings from civilians. Before the viewer comprehends the content, the typeface’s visual appearance offers an image-based implication that affects how we read and understand the environment. Fonts, through the use of repetition, have created culturally bias and racially insensitive connotations. These expectations are what enable us to identify an Asian restaurant before we comprehend the name of the business, simply by the cliché brushstroke-like typeface used. However, you cannot tell a Vietnamese restaurant from Japanese or Japanese from Chinese because the aesthetic of the typeface has lumped them into a single category, Asian. The problem I am exploring is: how the use of culturally bias typefaces effects the overall expectations of a business/area along with how a typeface needs to empower a culture rather than categorize and segregate. Generally, the design field has been predominately middle-aged Caucasian males, therefore designs speak heavily to this demographic. The emergence of a more culturally diverse
country has created a disconnect between the designer and the community/culture. Designs end up on two ends of the spectrum: full of stereotypes or generic and voiceless. My solution for this problem will be to bring awareness to my discipline the importance typography has on its environment.

“Ethnic type” needs to be critically examined so designers are able to give the appropriate voices to the growing cultures of our country. I am going to focus particularly on roads and areas within Charlotte such as: Central Avenue, Tryon, Sugar Creek and others, to formulate and understand the typographic voice of each area. My honors thesis consists of two interrelated parts. First, a research thesis on the cultural history of typography that focuses on the racial and ethnic biases inherent in typefaces. Second, I will present this original research at the UNC Charlotte AIGA student group conference. The goal of the thesis is to bring awareness to the design community of the ethical typographic issues we face and to critically examine why the selection of particular typefaces needs to change as Charlotte becomes more and more of a diverse city. I hope to inform emerging designers with knowledge of culturally inauthentic type through the use of type specimens, photographic evidence and local examples.