

# ASUNCION

BY JESSE EISENBERG



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ASUNCION  
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Originally produced by Rattlestick Playwrights Theater.

ASUNCION received its Off-Broadway premiere at the Cherry Lane Theater on October 27, 2011. It was presented by Rattlestick Playwrights Theater (David van Asselt, Artistic Director; Brian Long, Managing Director). It was directed by Kip Fagan; the set design was by John McDermott; the costume design was by Jessica Pabst; the lighting design was by Ben Stanton; the sound design was by Bart Fasbender; the production stage manager was Melissa Mae Gregus; the production manager was Eugenia Furneaux; the fight director was Thomas Schall; and the technical director was Katie Takacs. The cast was as follows:

STUART ..... Remy Auberjonois  
VINNY ..... Justin Bartha  
EDGAR ..... Jesse Eisenberg  
ASUNCION ..... Camille Mana

## **CHARACTERS**

STUART

VINNY

EDGAR

ASUNCION

# ASUNCION

## ACT ONE

### Scene 1

*A claustrophobic attic apartment, off-campus in Binghamton, New York. The ceiling sinks inward. In the main room, a Pan-African flag covers a ratty couch. A small kitchen is off to the left, the sink full.*

*A large window is upstage center but is covered by a map of the world with the colorful heading, "Where Are We?"*

*Off stage left is a bedroom, off stage right, a bathroom and upstage, the entrance to the house.*

*Vinny plays the blues on a Casio keyboard. A small, lit joint sits on the keyboard. Vinny takes a hit and continues playing.*

*Edgar enters, shouldering a bicycle. His face is dripping with blood. Vinny does not look up, still playing the blues.*

VINNY. You got some African shit right here. Some African shit right here. You got Africa, a bit of Bamako and the Niger Delta, then straight around the horn and up the crack of the Mississippi Delta. You got ragtime, call and response, Memphis, St. Louis, and then up the crack of the queen, Bessie Smith. That's what the fucking blues is. *(Sings with the music.)* "Let it be known ... Let it be told ... " You got some African shit, right here.

EDGAR. Yeah? I didn't know that. I didn't know that about the blues.

VINNY. “Sure as fire ... ”

EDGAR. I thought it was more of a domestic — a domestic tradition.

VINNY. Fuck, man. The blues originated in West Africa.

EDGAR. Huh. I didn’t realize. You have, like, such specific knowledge, which is so great.

VINNY. “Quick as the sun ... ”

EDGAR. Do you teach the blues in your class? To your other students?

VINNY. I teach it in *life*, man.

EDGAR. Oh. Okay.

VINNY. The blues are a feeling. The actual music is just paper. “Tellin’ the doctor not to visit ... ”

EDGAR. Right, that’s a good point. Do you know where in West Africa?

VINNY. “Pleasin’ to the eye ... ”

EDGAR. ’Cause I was thinking of traveling to The Gambia, which is actually a tiny country completely tucked inside Senegal.

VINNY. They’re just holding hands, man.

EDGAR. And there’s a food shortage there. So I thought I could be of use.

VINNY. (*Playing.*) They got everything they need right here.

EDGAR. Did you want some more water? I sometimes feel thirsty even when I’m totally hydrated. They say if you feel thirsty, you’re already dehydrated. I’m gonna get a glass. Do you want one?

VINNY. “And equal to the ladies ... ”

EDGAR. I’ll refill yours.

VINNY. Thanks, man.

EDGAR. Of course. Keep playing. It’s good. I’m entertained. (*Edgar enters the kitchen and turns on the faucet.*) I’m letting it run so it’s cold. I know you like it cold. (*Brings water to Vinny.*) Your water, *monsieur*.

VINNY. All right, settle down. (*Vinny notices Edgar’s bloody face.*) Edgar.

EDGAR. Yes?

VINNY. You’re bleeding.

EDGAR. Am I?

VINNY. Your whole face, your whole face is bleeding completely.

EDGAR. Yeah? Am I, is it still bleeding? (*Touching his face.*) Huh. I wasn’t sure.

VINNY. What the hell happened to you?  
EDGAR. It was strange, actually. I had a strange night.  
VINNY. Jesus Christ, Edgar!  
EDGAR. I'm sorry — I should've cleaned it.  
VINNY. How are you gonna clean it? I'll clean it. Shit, sit down.  
(*Edgar sits, Vinny fetches a towel.*) Jesus, what am I gonna do with you?  
EDGAR. I don't know.  
VINNY. Can you tell me what happened?  
EDGAR. Yeah, it's really nothing. I got attacked a little bit. Can you say it again?  
VINNY. What?  
EDGAR. You know — "What am I gonna...?"  
VINNY. What am I gonna do with you?  
EDGAR. (*Delighted.*) I don't know, I don't know!  
VINNY. Okay, put your head back.  
EDGAR. Sure, thanks. You don't have to do this, I could clean it. I could do it myself later.  
VINNY. Put your head back. (*Cleans the wound.*) Does it hurt?  
EDGAR. No, you have a gentle touch.  
VINNY. So what happened?  
EDGAR. I was biking down by Frank's to get your sandwich and some kids — they were just playing around really, it wasn't malicious — but they kind of pushed me off the bike and slammed me into a concrete pillar. And my face slammed into the wall and I think I passed out or something. I don't remember.  
VINNY. Did you see who they were?  
EDGAR. No, they struck me right in my eyes. But they seemed harmless. I'm really fine. And — the good news. (*Pulls out his wallet.*) Still got my wallet!  
VINNY. (*Sarcastic.*) That is good news!  
EDGAR. The money is missing, but I still have my license, my Social Security card — that stuff is a pain to get back, if you lose it.  
VINNY. So it's a win-win, really.  
EDGAR. But I seem to have lost my cell phone.  
VINNY. You lost it?  
EDGAR. Yeah, I can't seem to find it — you didn't see it anywhere around here, did you?  
VINNY. (*Like he's an idiot.*) Edgar, maybe while you were unconscious, after you were attacked and while your money was being

stolen from you, the kids took your cell phone. Maybe you didn't just leave it home.

EDGAR. I don't want to jump to conclusions.

VINNY. You were attacked, Edgar, and robbed. I think it's okay to assume they took your phone.

EDGAR. That's ... Vinny, that's a little racist.

VINNY. How is it racist?

EDGAR. To assume that they just took the phone because they're black.

VINNY. You never told me that they were black.

EDGAR. (*Beat.*) Even so.

VINNY. I have a fucking masters in Black Studies!

EDGAR. So that absolves you of being racist?

VINNY. Fuck you.

EDGAR. Sorry.

VINNY. Fuck you, Edgar!

EDGAR. Okay. I'm sorry, I'm a little shaken up, understandably. I'm a little anxious, Vinny. Understandably. I'm just — I feel like an idiot.

VINNY. (*Gently touching Edgar's wound.*) It'll be character-building.

EDGAR. You've been up to the First Ward, you see how they live. They're oppressed by everything. Every food stamp banner and pothole and broken window, you know? Every missing tooth and every amputee and the pregnant teenage girls still wearing the short skirts trying to be sexy seven months in, like, as soon as this one comes out, I'm ready for another. And ... it's embarrassing and ... and I would punch me too! I would punch me, Vinny. I would do something to me, I would.

VINNY. No, you wouldn't.

EDGAR. I would — I feel like an idiot. I'm like a walking white idiot or something.

VINNY. You're just young.

EDGAR. I know.

VINNY. And naive.

EDGAR. I know.

VINNY. And also ignorant. (*Vinny pushes Edgar's head, slamming it forward.*)

EDGAR. Jesus, Vinny!

VINNY. You're naïve, Edgar. And it's offensive.

EDGAR. I know. I know I am.



VINNY. You gotta learn to fight back a little bit.  
EDGAR. You think so?  
VINNY. “Nonviolence is fine as long as it works.”  
EDGAR. Muhammad Ali?  
VINNY. (*Shakes his head.*) Malcolm X. Intended sarcastically.  
EDGAR. I think you’re a genius. (*Vinny stands abruptly.*)  
VINNY. I gotta grade papers.  
EDGAR. I can grade them for you.  
VINNY. I don’t need you to grade them —  
EDGAR. But you love my comments and I still have the red pen!  
VINNY. You should do something of your own.  
EDGAR. Okay.  
VINNY. I’m becoming impatient. Just do something normal.  
Turn the radio on for a minute. Jerk off into a sock or something.  
EDGAR. (*Blushing.*) Come on, don’t say that. It’s inappropriate.  
You’re my teacher.  
VINNY. I was your T.A., one semester, three years ago; we move  
on. Why don’t you work on something?  
EDGAR. I can’t ... I’m bored ... please, I know.  
VINNY. You know? Okay. ’Cause I would like some rent eventually.  
EDGAR. Is it the first of the month already?  
VINNY. It’s May 17th.  
EDGAR. Oh. Well, I would like to pay it, believe you me. I’ll get  
back on it, I promise. I’m looking for a story. I’m on the prowl!  
VINNY. Why don’t you write about the kids that hurt you? It’s a  
good story. All the economic disparity bullshit. I’ll submit it to the  
school paper if you want.  
EDGAR. Yeah, maybe. Maybe, I don’t know. I’m too close to it, I  
think. I’m too close to it.  
VINNY. Right.  
EDGAR. And the pay is shit.  
VINNY. Right.  
EDGAR. But it’s a good suggestion. I appreciate it.  
VINNY. (*Didactic.*) Don’t be glib, Edgar. Good night. (*Vinny  
begins to exit as a cell phone rings, playing “Für Elise.”*)  
EDGAR. Vinny. Do you hear that?  
VINNY. Yes, it’s Beethoven’s “Für Elise.”  
EDGAR. No, I mean my phone — (*Edgar reaches under the couch  
and pulls out his cell phone.*) You see? I left it home.  
VINNY. Huh.

# ASUNCION

by Jesse Eisenberg

3M, 1W

Edgar and Vinny are not racist. In fact, Edgar maintains a blog condemning American imperialism and Vinny is three-quarters into a Ph.D. in Black Studies. When a young Filipina woman named Asuncion becomes their new roommate, the boys have a perfect opportunity to demonstrate how open-minded they truly are. Jesse Eisenberg's hilarious and heartbreaking play explores the complicated ways we exploit culture and politics for our own needs.

*"An almost ridiculously enjoyable portrait of slacker trauma among would-be intellectuals in a tiny grungy off-campus apartment near a small-town New York university. Entire seasons have been known to fly by without a new playwright to celebrate. Now we have Jesse Eisenberg."*  
—**Newsday**

*"Eisenberg draws his minutely observed characters with precision, honesty and grudging empathy, and he sets them into motion in hilarious effect with an undertone of sadness."*  
—**Vogue**

*"On the surface, it plays like a farce, and in truth, Eisenberg's dialogue gets a lot of laughs. But there is also an underlying current of unease, of just-out-of-view maliciousness, that runs throughout the show's two acts. Brutal and brutally funny."*  
—**Entertainment Weekly**

*"Mr. Eisenberg writes lively dialogue that strikes plenty of comic sparks."*  
—**The New York Times**

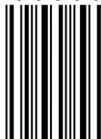
*"As he takes aim at know-it-alls who don't do anything, he proves himself a keen marksman when it comes to pot shots and punch lines."*  
—**New York Daily News**

*"Eisenberg's tumbling, barbed dialogue and ability to keep his characters on the humane side of caricature are so economical and assured."*  
—**Time Out New York**

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