



The Accidental Asian

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The unifying motif connecting all of Eric Liu's essays collected in *THE ACCIDENTAL ASIAN: NOTES OF A NATIVE SPEAKER* is the author's painstaking search for his cultural, as well as personal, identity. A successful young American, who once wrote speeches for President Bill Clinton after graduating from Yale University, Liu nevertheless wonders to what degree his Chinese heritage has shaped his status and personality in contemporary American society.

A few years after the death of his beloved father, Liu still muses over the degree of assimilation shown by this successful mathematician. While his father moved at ease in the workplace and shared his social life with caucasian friends and colleagues, he nevertheless hid his lingering kidney disease from all of them. To what degree, Liu asks himself, is this a reflection of the values of a different culture, traces of which he is discovering in himself?

Taking issue with contemporary American policies and beliefs on race and ethnicity, Liu challenges the very term of Asian American, which he perceives as a typical American invention. Confronted with the fact that he married a white woman and will have children of mixed heritages, Eric Liu encourages the reader to move beyond a narrow understanding of race in America.

Yet for all the passion *THE ACCIDENTAL ASIAN* invests in the dream that race should become obsolete as a means for categorizing people, Liu also feels nostalgic for that part of a person's identity that would be lost if all ties to one's ancestors should be severed. To find a balance between these conflicting goals appears to be the great aspiration of this author.

Sources for Further Study

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