



The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker

By Eric Liu

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Beyond black and white, native and alien, lies a vast and fertile field of human experience. It is here that Eric Liu, former speechwriter for President Clinton and noted political commentator, invites us to explore.

In these compellingly candid essays, Liu reflects on his life as a second-generation Chinese American and reveals the shifting frames of ethnic identity. Finding himself unable to read a Chinese memorial book about his father's life, he looks critically at the cost of his own assimilation. But he casts an equally questioning eye on the effort to sustain vast racial categories like "Asian American." And as he surveys the rising anxiety about China's influence, Liu illuminates the space that Asians have always occupied in the American imagination. Reminiscent of the work of James Baldwin and its unwavering honesty, *The Accidental Asian* introduces a powerful and elegant voice into the discussion of what it means to be an American.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

As a second-generation Chinese-American, Eric Liu has grown up with an awkward relationship to race and ethnic identity. He can follow a conversation in Chinese, although he would have problems if he tried to take part in it; as for the written language, he is functionally illiterate. He would be the first person to question which of his personality traits are "Chinese" or "American," "Asian" or "white," or none of the above, and *The Accidental Asian* is, in fact, a rigorous self-examination--not merely about the costs and benefits of assimilation, but about whether assimilation should even be viewed in those terms.

Whether he's recalling his adolescent frustration with "Chinese hair" that just wouldn't permit itself to be styled, examining the history of Chinatown, or pondering the mixture of fear and fascination with which China is viewed by Americans, Liu writes with admirable personal intensity. It doesn't matter whether you consider *The Accidental Asian* to be a memoir or a batch of interconnected essays; once you've read it, you will be forced to consider for yourself what place, if any, race has in America today (but even more so tomorrow).

From Publishers Weekly

In this candid, well-crafted memoir, Liu, a former speechwriter for President Clinton, explores his identity as a second-generation Chinese American. Although he was raised to assimilate, Liu recalls that his discomfort as an adolescent when trying to fit in was problematical because his hair and skin tone marked him as different from those around him. He also shares haunting memories of traveling to China and visiting his grandmother in Manhattan's Chinatown, events that engendered ambivalent emotions both of alienation from and attraction to his heritage. Liu's concerns about the concept of "Asian American," which he regards as based on physical characteristics rather than shared ethnicity, are rendered thoughtfully, as are his positive feelings about intermarriage. (His wife is a white Southerner with a Jewish grandmother.) He is impassioned, however, about the fallout from a scandal surrounding the activities of democratic fund-raiser John Huang. When Liu calls New York Times columnist William Safire "a Jew and defender of Jews" for unfairly stereotyping Asian Americans because of Huang's questionable actions, this strikes a discordant note. Author tour.

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From Library Journal

Part memoir, part treatise, this slim book will sound familiar at first to any Chinese: being called banana, nerd, yellow, slant-eyed, buck-toothed. And Liu describes typical clashes between Chinese parents and their Americanized offspring. But Liu, a political commentator and speechwriter for Clinton, at present attending Harvard Law School, cogently discusses such topics as Chinese being called the "New Jews," the meaning of Chinatown, fear of the "yellow planet," and problems of assimilation. In particular, Liu offers insightful and original comments about being Asian American, a construct that is totally false but one he has learned to use because of the many positive consequences. Liu has researched his topic well, citing Peter Kwong's and Ronald Takaki's works, among others. This well-written and poignant book is especially recommended for non-Asian readers. ?Kitty Chen Dean, Nassau Coll., Garden City, NY

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Donald Kelley:

Book is usually written, printed, or descriptive for everything. You can understand everything you want by a book. Book has a different type. As it is known to us that book is important matter to bring us around the world. Adjacent to that you can your reading talent was fluently. A book *The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker* will make you to become smarter. You can feel much more confidence if you can know about every thing. But some of you think which open or reading a book make you bored. It isn't make you fun. Why they may be thought like that? Have you seeking best book or ideal book with you?

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Ronald Sadowski:

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