

Asian stereotypes



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Nick Jump Ms. Pringle 1310 1: 00 17 October 2005 Stereotypes play a significant role in the lives of many individuals. Stereotypes can be hurtful and they can be helpful. Eric Liu combats Asian stereotypes and his own thoughts of inferiority with a conscious strategy of assimilation that leads to further the spread of Asian American stereotypes and the loss of his own individuality. When someone finds him or herself in an unfamiliar place, they tries to adapt to the surroundings by blending in. Liu believes that the way to " make it" in America is to " achieve whiteness" (148). Liu believes to be successful one must "[bleach] out the marks of a darker, dirtier past" and assimilate (148). When Eric Liu assimilated he was considered by whites to be an " honorary white." He was called an honorary white because by all standards besides his skin; he was considered white and with that consideration came privileges that may not have been extended to him otherwise. Liu was called a banana (yellow on the outside white on the inside) by other Asians, and was portrayed as a traitor by his own culture and family for embracing the power that comes from white people and their tendencies. Liu was looked down upon and was not completely by either race. Many people hate being considered part of a stereotype and sometimes act irrationally just to be set apart from the stereotype. The strategy that Liu used to get away from the Asian American stereotype was by acting completely being to total opposite of what Asians are known for. Asians are stereotypically know for being very good at math and science, so Liu decided that he would study history. He lifted weights and went to the Marine officer candidate school to prove that he was not lacking any physical or metal strength. However, Liu states that by " working so to defy stereotypes, I became a slave to it. For to act self-consciously against Asian '

tendencies' is not to break loose from the cage of myth and legend; it is to turn the very key that locks you inside" (151). By defying Asian American stereotypes Liu was feeding the stereotype of the typical Asian, waspy Yale student. In collage Liu used what he had absorbed and learned growing up about the white culture to survive and thrive. Additionally, Liu speaks of a Korean boy at the Asian American Student Association booth who merely offered an introduction. Liu put his name on a mailing list so not to look impolite, but Liu had already decided not to be active in any Asian-only associations. His actions were fueled by a fear imbedded in and shared by many immigrants that they may be primarily known for their culture and thus written off. Liu reacts by not going out of his way to make Asian friends or get involved in Asian groups. The reason Liu gave himself for not getting involved in any Asian groups was that he " didn't want to be a part of a clique, that [he] didn't want to get absorbed and lose [his] individuality" (150). The problem is that by not embracing his own culture he is actually destroying and hurting his individuality. Liu wanted to change himself so that he would have no aspects of the typical Asian but by doing so he is losing what makes him different and unique. By changing looks, acts, and what he even studies, Liu is just proving that judging someone by their race alright and acceptable. Liu is hindering the expansion of accepting someone for who he or she is not what they look like, talk like or where they come from. One of the great civil rights activist Rosa Parks decided to show people through a non-violent demonstration that the discrimination of African Americans based on the color of their black skin was wrong. One day she sat in the front of the bus designated for white people, and refused to give up her seat in the front of the bus to a white man and was sent to jail. Rosa Parks could have

moved to the back of the bus and further prolonging black persecution, but she decided to stay and sit. She wanted people to know that judging people on the color of their skin is wrong. Furthermore, if someone believes that he or she is at a disadvantage, he or she will try to find other aspects that will gain back lost ground. If a football player is trying out for a team and he knows he is not very good at catching the ball, the player will work extra hard to have a speed advantage over the other players so that he can still draw the attention of the coaches. Liu not only believed that he was inferior to whites but that he deficient to every race: " I believed that I lacked the connections, the wealth, the experience, the sophistication that so many of my classmates seemed to have"(151). Liu saw the power that whites have in this country, and as Liu began to blend into white, middle-class America, he saw that "[he] was actually beginning to ' make it'." Liu's acceptance to Yale led to many other privileged experiences. " Extracurriculars opened the door to an alumni internship, which brought [him] to Capital Hill, which led to a job and a life in Washington after commencement" (151). By almost any standards of American society, Liu would be considered elite and one of the privileged. There is never one way to get something done or get somewhere. To think there is one way and one way only is a very squid and narrow-minded way of thinking. Once one has achieved one's goal, he or she may think of many things that one could have done differently and recognize things you did that were not smart. Liu realizes that the " straightening path [he] took was not the only or even the best path" he could have taken to achieve his goals (151). When dealing with race one does not accept or reject everything about one's race. Finding a happy medium and looking at everything objectively is the key. Liu states that "[he] could have spared

[himself] a great deal of heartache had [he] understood this earlier" (151). Liu realizes that the way to success is to blend in to the whites race. He sees the power that white people hold and tries to adapt. Liu tries to change himself so that he will not give off any aspects of the typical Asian American. After Liu assimilates he starts to reap the benefits of a " honorary white". Liu gets into a good school and gets a good job but all at the price of his individuality.