

Paper 3: Debating Asian American Panethnicity

A. Write a 5 page presentation of your case.

Overview

Step 1 – lay out a brief exposition of Espiritu's and Liu's arguments.

Step 2 – use historical and statistical evidence to support your own stance.

We want to see a thesis in the first paragraph.

Detailed Explanations of Step 1 and Step 2: Required Elements of the Paper

For Step 1:

- Use the excerpts I have given you.
- You may draw on other material from their books, but you must analyze these passages thoroughly. Otherwise, I take off points.
- You will need to explain the difference between the primordialist theory of ethnicity and the instrumentalist theory, (two sentences only!) before you get into Espiritu and Liu.
 - Espiritu is clearly an instrumentalist: she sees "Asian American identity" as a product of institution building.
 - Is Liu a primordialist?
 - Which side of the debate do you support?
- Address the difference between "ethnicity" and "race," and show how these concepts are tangled together.
 - Generally – "Asian American" = ethnicity
 - "Asian," "Yellow" "Brown" = race
- What does "Asian American," or "Asian" mean to Eric Liu? Espiritu? To you?

This leads you to Step 2:

- Use evidence from the class to show cases of unity and disunity in the Asian American community[ies] historically.
- Show how "Asians/Orientals" have been lumped together, and show how they have been distinguished from one another.
- Use census statistics to show common points and diversity.
- Discuss benefits and drawbacks of "unity/lumping"
- Weigh external and internal factors.
- Should Asian Americans "assimilate" or maintain a distinct identity? Can they ever "assimilate"?

*Some things to think about (not required as part of the written paper, as long as you have thought these issues through):

- What does Eric Liu mean by the term "accidental Asian"?
- How does he feel about "assimilation"?
- Liu often defines "Asian" in opposition to "white". Which group[s] does Espiritu use as her reference point?
- How do they deal with the question of ethnicity (sometimes called "Asian American subethnicity") v. panethnicity? Are you born with your ethnic identity? Or do you learn it?

- How do they treat the question of "cultural entrepreneurs"?
- Liu protests that you cannot hear a unitary voice from "Asian Americans." Espiritu acknowledges that there is no unitary voice (for example, Asian Americans are nearly equally divided between Republican and Democrat), but does not see that as a problem. What do you think?

THIS IS A LOT TO DO IN 5 PAGES!!!! BE CONCISE. YOU WILL NEED TO REVISE.

B. 2 pages

Personal statement. Your own personal thoughts and experiences. Free form. This is a good time to reflect back on paper #1.

Passages for analysis in Paper #3

Not responsible for typos! Please check original passages in your books.

Espiritu, Yen Le. "Constructing and Sustaining Asian Panethnicity." In *Asian American Panethnicity*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993, p. 164. ISBN: 1566390966.

The primordialist-instrumentalist debate in the ethnicity literature is primarily a debate over the relative importance of internal, cultural factors as opposed to external, structural factors in explaining the development and maintenance of ethnic groups. The present study indicates that, at least in its origin, pan-Asian ethnicity was the product of material, political, and social pressures rather than cultural bonds. Asian Americans came together because they recognized that pan-Asian alliance was important, even essential, for the protection and advancement of their interests. But this is not to say that pan-Asian ethnicity is devoid of culture and sentiment. On the contrary, while panethnic groups may be circumstantially created, they are not circumstantially sustained (see Cornell 1988b). Once established, the panethnic group - through its institutions, leaders, and networks - produces and transforms panethnic culture and consciousness. In the process, the panethnic idea becomes autonomous, capable of replenishing itself. Over time, it may even outlive the circumstances and interests that produced it, created conditions that sustain and revivify it.

Liu, Eric. "The Accidental Asian." In *The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker*. New York, NY: Vintage, 1999, pp. 73-74. ISBN: 0375704868.

Asian Americans belong not to a race so much as to a confederation, a big yellow-and-brown tent that covers a panoply of interests. And while those interests converge usefully on some points - antidiscrimination, open immigration - they diverge on many others. This is a "community," after all, that consists of ten million people of a few dozen ethnicities, who have roots all across America and around the globe, whose families have been here anywhere from less than a week to more than a century, whose political beliefs run the ideological gamut, who are welfare mothers and multimillionaires, soldiers and doctors, believers and pagans. It would take an act of selective deafness to hear, in this cacophony, a unitary voice.