

Topics for Essay #2

We have deliberately included some topics you have thought about in class or in your short response essays.

1. Situate How the García Girls Lost Their Accents, “Mississippi Masala” and our visit to the Asian food court in relation to Chanda’s statement: “the direction of population movement was reversed...” (168) and argue that the reversal was more or less harmful to the subjects of imperialism than the initial conquest. Think about autonomy, language, education, culture.
2. Acceptance in a culture that is not one’s own—New York City for the García Girls, Mississippi for Mina’s family or the Creole-speaking blacks in Martinique—requires acquisition of a new language. Choose any two main characters from two of the texts/film we have studied and contrast ways that power, economy and cultural displacement shape each of the protagonist’s lives. Argue a point of view: for example—a number of factors made assimilation easier for X than Y including ABC. Or, resistance to adaptation of the new dominant language was more difficult for S than for T because ABC. Analyze the emotional valence of language acquisition: what is lost, what is gained?
3. Explain the phrase “white man’s burden” in terms of its effect on the little boy in School Days, and the minority communities in “Mississippi Masala.” Argue that this phrase—generally used to characterize attitudes in European empire building—also fits white attitudes towards blacks/Indians in Mississippi, Dr. Fanning’s (and his wife’s) treatment of the García family.
4. Gender and family dynamics are challenging areas for immigrant families. Choose two of the characters that we have studied from Alvarez and from “Mississippi Masala” and develop a case for or against the liberating aspects of immigration. What do the characters gain? What is lost?
5. Contemporary authors often use style to convey cultural dislocation. Contrast Alvarez’ and Chamoiseau’s unique styles. Are their techniques effective? Look at imagery, character, language and narrative style and build an argument for or against the innovations each author develops to tell his/her story. Think of a key idea that encompasses both—even if you are going to argue that one is effective and the other is not.

6. Compare/contrast the impact of cultural displacement on the parents in “Mississippi Masala,” and How the García Girls Lost Their Accents. Argue that the experience in the country of origin made it easier or harder to assimilate to the USA.

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