Liu-“Notes of A Native Speaker”

Study Questions

1. What is the purpose of the list that opens Liu’s essay? Is it humorous? Is it meant to be? How does it engage the reader?
2. How would you describe Liu’s attitude toward being “white, by acclamation” in paragraph 2?
3. What is his definition of “assimilation” as it develops in the next few paragraphs?
4. In paragraphs 7-10, Liu describes himself as being at a particular crisis point, or at least a time of transition. How has he arrived at that point?
5. In paragraphs, 14-19, why does Liu describe and explain his dissatisfaction with his hair?
6. What is overall organization pattern of the second section of this essay? How is this similar or different from the second?
7. What does Liu’s assertion that “color and class were all twisted together in a double helix of felt inadequacy” (paragraph 30) mean?
8. Explain the paradox expressed in paragraph 42.
9. Note the persons whom Liu quotes or refers to. In what ways are they “authorizes”? Do they establish an appeal to ethos or logos?
10. Toward the end of the essay, Liu states that he “could never claim to be Chinese at the core” (paragraph 50), yet he asserts, “I do not want to be white” (paragraph 51). Are these assertions contradictory?
11. How would you describe Liu’s attitude toward his younger self? Consider his stages during middle school, high school, and Yale.
12. What is the main claim Liu is making in this essay? Try to state it in no more than two or three sentences.