

Washington University in St. Louis

Washington University Open Scholarship

Spring 2017

Washington University
Senior Honors Thesis Abstracts

Spring 2017

Reworking Cohesion: The Uses and Limitations of Panethnic Labels for Asian Americans and African Americans

Jaydee Lee

Washington University in St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wushta_spr2017

Recommended Citation

Lee, Jaydee, "Reworking Cohesion: The Uses and Limitations of Panethnic Labels for Asian Americans and African Americans" (2017). *Spring 2017*. 74.

https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wushta_spr2017/74

This Abstract for College of Arts & Sciences is brought to you for free and open access by the Washington University

Senior Honors Thesis Abstracts at Washington University Open Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spring 2017 by an authorized administrator of Washington University Open Scholarship. For more information, please contact digital@wumail.wustl.edu.

REWORKING COHESION: THE USES AND LIMITATIONS OF PANETHNIC LABELS FOR ASIAN AMERICANS AND AFRICAN AMERICANS

Jaydee Lee

Mentor: Garrett Albert Duncan

This project discusses and examines the uses and limitations of identity politics, specifically the panethnic labels of “Asian American” and “African American” identity, in the United States. “Panethnicity” refers to the political-cultural coalitions that are made up of various groups of distinct national and ethnic origins. These terms have done much to help to mobilize, organize, and advance the racial groups to whom these terms refer in the United States to face oppression and marginalization. U.S. racial minority groups that use these labels, however, have had to position themselves in certain ways to accept essentialized, or oversimplified and unchanging, notions of race that necessitate a kind of self “sameness.” Doing so ignores the diversity within these groups as well as the different needs that various members of these groups might have. When examining the label “Asian American,” there are high tensions over who is included and excluded. This occurs as a result of the manner by which individuals and institutions give priority to East Asians are over other Asian ethnic groups in the U.S. This prioritization excludes many others who have different histories of exclusion, which brings into question the limitations of this term. Especially since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, South Asians find themselves simultaneously defined as a “model minority” and as a “terrorist.” We can also turn to the term “African American” as unable to fully cover the needs and concerns of recent black immigrants to the United States, for instance, who may maintain ties to their Diasporic ethnic heritages. The gaps in where the terms “Asian American” and “African American” fail their respective populations help us examine how socially constructed these racial term is. They further push us to struggle with the systematic structures that benefit from these labels. To examine how and why certain groups are positioned as racially different, we must look into how racial formations occur to draw out where and who employ them.