



When Half Is Whole: Multiethnic Asian American Identities

Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu

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"I listen and gather people's stories. Then I write them down in a way that I hope will communicate something to others, so that seeing these stories will give readers something of value. I tell myself that this isn't going to be done unless I do it, just because of who I am. It's a way of making my mark, leaving something behind . . . not that I'm planning on going anywhere right now."

So explains Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu in this touching, introspective, and insightful examination of mixed race Asian American experiences. The son of an Irish American father and Japanese mother, Murphy-Shigematsu uses his personal journey of identity exploration and discovery of his diverse roots to illuminate the journeys of others. Throughout the book, his reflections are interspersed among portraits of persons of biracial and mixed ethnicity and accounts of their efforts to answer a seemingly simple question: Who am I?

Here we meet Norma, raised in postwar Japan, the daughter of a Japanese woman and an American serviceman, who struggled to make sense of her ethnic heritage and national belonging. Wei Ming, born in Australia and raised in the San Francisco of the 1970s and 1980s, grapples as well with issues of identity, in her case both ethnic and sexual. We also encounter Rudy, a "Mexipino"; Marshall, a "Jewish, adopted Korean"; Mitzi, a "Blackinawan"; and other extraordinary people who find how connecting to all parts of themselves also connects them to others.

With its attention on people who have been regarded as "half" this or "half" that throughout their lives, these stories make vivid the process of becoming whole.

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