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Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu, When Half Is Whole: Multiethnic Asian Americans Identities

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Crawford, Miki Ward

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Review

STEPHEN MURPHY-SHIGEMATSU. *When Half is Whole: Multiethnic Asian Americans Identities.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012. 243 pages. \$21.95 paper. ISBN: 9780804775182. \$75 cloth. ISBN: 9780804775175.

In an era when mixed-race marriages abound and are more accepted, *When Half is Whole* is certainly a timely publication. This book is about finding identity, the transformation through the struggles of labels and notions of our races and of who we are, and a healing process. It is a “transition toward meaning, balance, wholeness, and connectedness within individuals and between individuals and their environments” (3). Based on 30 years of research, Dr. Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu’s personal experiences, education, and affiliations have all contributed to his work and this field of study. This combination has provided the groundwork for a publication that enables us to reframe from terms that label us *half this and half that* to being *whole*.

The chapters provide the stories of eleven people with Asian and American roots and how they negotiate their identities. Through this brilliant approach of blending the narratives from interviews and the personal writings of others with his self-reflections, we are privy to further insights that open a path for our own mental interactions on what it means to be bi-racial. These narratives and reflective assessments are a central part of Critical Mixed-Race Studies and as we learn about others, we learn about ourselves regardless of our own origins.

There is some aspect about each of the people featured in this book that warrants inclusion in this publication. They are the forerunners in validating our mixed heritage and making it visible through their works; they are examining identity and how culture, adoption, sexual preference, and generations affect who we think we are; they are defining themselves with new labels such as “Mexipino,” “Blacknese,” “Blackinawa,” “Jewish Adopted Korean,” and “Happa” instead of “Hapa;” and they are the voices striving to keep Asian Americans from vanishing into the populace by addressing the concerns of this growing population. There are moments of humor, sadness, and enlightening truth within each chapter.

The people in this book are to be commended for disclosing their thoughts and life stories, as is Dr. Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu who has masterfully molded this compelling book through his style of storytelling. Some readers will be captivated by the style, content, and phraseology in these stories and will read the book in one sitting. Others, like myself, may find that savoring a chapter at a time and reflecting on the content could be more rewarding. Either way, it is apparent that this work is truly a “labor of love” through the various interviews and in the careful selection of wording that imparts deep thoughts about a difficult topic—Who am I? This book is a powerful tool in helping us understand mixed-race tensions and negotiations for identity. It is also about humanity and how we find connection with others through our own relatable life stories regardless of race and culture.

Dr. Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu has provided fertile groundwork on mixed-race studies. As the percentage of mixed-race population increases, we are challenged to further cultivate this field through examination of the various mixed-races, cultures, communities, and our identities.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu has been a pioneer in mixed-race research; his 1986 Harvard dissertation, “The Voices of Amerasians: Ethnicity, Identity, and Empowerment in Interracial Japanese Americans,” is a study that mixed-race researchers have either reviewed at some point or have housed on their research bookshelves. He received his degree in psychology from Harvard University and completed an internship at the National Asian American Psychology Training Center at San Francisco General Hospital and a postdoctoral residency at the Center for Multicultural Training in Psychology at Boston University School of Medicine. Currently a professor on the faculty of the School of Medicine at Stanford University, Center for Comparative Studies of Race and Ethnicity, and Fielding Graduate University, he has been a faculty member at Temple University, the University of Ryukyus, and was tenured at the prestigious University of Tokyo. In addition, he was a Fulbright Senior Scholar in Okinawa. As a practitioner, he has counseled individuals and families and provided consultation for Japan’s Ministry of Education, the U.S. Marines, and the U.S. Navy.

Born in Occupied Japan, Stephen’s mother is Japanese and his father is Irish American. He has been immersed in both cultures and is able to articulate tensions that Asian American offspring encounter in societies—both in the United States and Japan.

He has authored: *When Half is Whole: Multiethnic Asian American Identities* (2012); *Multicultural Encounters: Case Narratives from a Counseling Practice* (2002); *Amerasian Children: An Unknown Minority Problem* (2002); *Narratives of Multicultural Counseling* (2002); and *The Voices of Amerasians: Ethnicity, Identity, and Empowerment in Interracial Japanese Americans* (2000).

His co-authored books include: *Synergy, Healing, and Empowerment: Insights From Cultural Diversity* (2012); *Transcultured Japan: At the Borderlands of Race, Gender, and Identity* (2008); *Japan’s Diversity Dilemmas: Ethnicity, Citizenship and Education* (2006); and *Democracy and Diversity: Principles and Concepts for Educating Citizens in a Global Age* (2005).

Learn more about Dr. Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu from his website at <http://www.murphyshigematsu.com/>

Miki Ward Crawford

Ohio University Southern Campus