

A Stranger's Journey: Race, Identity, and Narrative Craft in Writing

David Mura

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David Mura's *A Stranger's Journey* is a thoughtful, nuanced, necessary look at how the subject of race is handled in fiction, memoir, and the creative writing classroom.

Mura's book has two main goals: to explore questions of race and identity in writing and to present tools for effective storytelling. It is an instruction manual for writers and a call for more careful thinking, especially on the part of white readers and writers, about how racial identity is portrayed and discussed. It is also, in part, a memoir of Mura's journey as a writer.

Mura's arguments about race are powerful and convincing. Students of color who write fiction that addresses racism and injustice often get marginalized and dismissed as "too political." Mura argues, instead, that all writing is political; assuming whiteness as a norm is itself a political statement. He backs up his points with illuminating close readings of texts by writers whose handling of race disappoints and by those who more successfully capture the complexity of their characters. His ideas about how authors write toward particular audiences are especially compelling.

The sections on story structure are similarly useful for writers struggling with their material. Mura's suggestions are practical and are illustrated with compelling examples, including ZZ Packer, Mary Karr, and Maxine Hong Kingston. An appendix includes writing assignments to help solve common problems.

Mura's account of exploring his identity as a Japanese American and struggling with story in his two memoirs adds a personal touch. His main audience is writers and writing teachers, but any reader interested in thinking deeply about how identity and race manifest themselves on the page will find the book valuable.

A Stranger's Journey is an essential work of literary criticism and memoir, challenging readers and writers alike to think about writing, race, and identity in new ways.

REBECCA HUSSEY (University Press 2018)

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