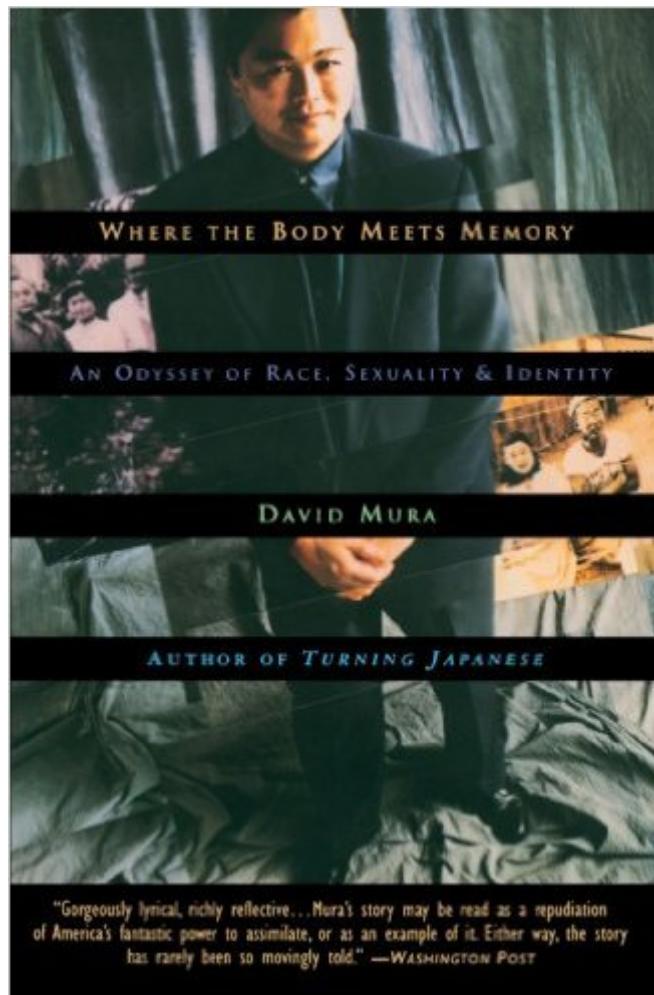


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# Where The Body Meets Memory: An Odyssey Of Race, Sexuality And Identity



## **Synopsis**

In Turning Japanese, poet David Mura chronicled a year in Japan in which his sense of identity as a Japanese American was transformed. In Where the Body Meets Memory, Mura focuses on his experience growing up Japanese American in a country which interned both his parents during World War II, simply because of their race. Interweaving his own experience with that of his family and of other sansei-third generation Japanese Americans-Mura reveals how being a "model minority" has resulted in a loss of heritage and wholeness for generations of Japanese Americans. In vivid and searingly honest prose, Mura goes on to suggest how the shame of internment affected his sense of sexuality, leading him to face troubling questions about desire and race: an interracial marriage, compulsive adultery, and an addiction to pornography which equates beauty with whiteness. Using his own experience as a measure of racial and sexual grief, Mura illustrates how the connections between race and desire are rarely discussed, how certain taboos continue to haunt this country's understanding of itself. Ultimately, Mura faces the most difficult legacy of miscegenation: raising children in a world which refuses to recognize and honor its racial diversity. Intimate and lyrically stunning, Where the Body Meets Memory is a personal journey out of the self and into America's racial and sexual psyche.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

David Mura's book, as the subtitle suggests, spans some fairly heavy issues. For more than a few readers in my Asian American Literature class, this book was a little too explicit, but for anyone in

search of a frank and personal account of the sansei experience, this may be it. Mura discusses the problems he inherits through his inculcation of the model minority myth, and the mantra on which he was raised: "Act like everybody else and you will BE like everybody else." The book charts Mura's dawning consciousness of his racial identity, as well as his deep addiction to promiscuity and pornography--an addiction that Mura identifies as stemming from the standards of white beauty trained in him since boyhood. His discussion of what pornography does to the male psyche are particularly interesting, and his assessment of his addiction in terms of his racial identity is not one that I have heard anywhere else. The book certainly met with criticism from those who would rather emphasize race unity for the fact that by the end, Mura seems to distill every aspect of his life and his identity into a race issue. However, it was equally applauded in my class for the same issues. The explicit nature of the book seemed as much a pro as a con in discussion as well. Whatever the case, this is book that sparked a great deal of controversy at my university, and generated a great deal of conversation. If you are interested in the Asian American experience, this is certainly worth the read. You will have opinions about this book, I can guarantee you that, and no matter what they are, you will find plenty of people willing to argue them with you.

Although the first half of the book is really boring, the second half makes up for the slow and banal start. The first half focuses on Japanese-American tribulations during the Pearl Harbor era, which through composition and writing style, certainly not topic, is a miserable read. The book doesn't begin to redeem itself until the author goes into his own personal struggles of sexual identity, which is great because most books that I've encountered in Asian-American issues usually goes into differences in food, domestic tribulations, or are too scholastic to enjoy on a personal level. On this point I felt it was a great read despite the first half. Though in hind sight, the first half seems integral for the continuity of which the book is based on; how history and experiences leave a residue of meaning that dissolves into reoccurring memories; these memories that keep coming back to shape our lives--these traces of identities. In this aspect it was hard for me to rate this book, which I struggled between a 3 or 4 star rating. I will say however, that it is a definite must read for any one who is familiar with Asian-American issues. Thank you David Mura for having the balls to write this book; it was worth the whole production despite the criticisms.

Which means he opens himself up to be criticized for being a (reformed) porn-meister, internalized racist, disaffected tourist, and all-around vanity plate/jerk. So read this book (or better yet his earlier "A Male Grief") because David Mura is an extremely talented writer and he's gifting us with his

openness. This is what it's like for him and we gain such insight of the Asian-American experience from that.

Sometimes I felt that this book did not have much relevance to me. Then Mura really foed into discussing the struggles of Asian-Americans today. Problems of fitting in, and sexual stereotypes. His description of the Asian male being this country's eunuch really hit home. He put words to very deep, very vague feelings that I have carried and that a lot of asians growing up in this society probably have as well.

If you've ever struggled with identity, race, or sexuality, this book will be among the favorites in your library. If you haven't struggled, you will know people who have, because so many do, and this book still should be in your library.

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