



The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief (Race and American Culture)

By Anne Anlin Cheng

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In this groundbreaking, interdisciplinary study Anne Anlin Cheng argues that we have to understand racial grief not only as the result of racism but also as a foundation for racial identity. *The Melancholy of Race* proposes that racial identification is itself already a melancholic act--a social category that is imaginatively supported through a dynamic of loss and compensation, by which the racial other is at once rejected and retained. Using psychoanalytic theories on mourning and melancholia as inroads into her subject, Cheng offers a closely observed and carefully reasoned account of the minority experience as expressed in works of art by, and about, Asian-Americans and African-Americans. She argues that the racial minority and dominant American culture both suffer from racial melancholia and that this insight is crucial to a productive reimagining of progressive politics. Her discussion ranges from "Flower Drum Song" to "M. Butterfly," *Brown v. Board of Education* to Anna Deavere Smith's "Twilight," and *Invisible Man* to *The Woman Warrior*, in the process demonstrating that racial melancholia permeates our fantasies of citizenship, assimilation, and social health. Her investigations reveal the common interests that social, legal, and literary histories of race have always shared with psychoanalysis, and situates Asian-American and African-American identities in relation to one another within the larger process of American racialization. A provocative look at a timely subject, this study is essential reading for anyone interested in race studies, critical theory, or psychoanalysis.

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Editorial Review

Review

"One measure of a healthy and thriving literature is the health of its critics and theorists. If measured against the work of Anne Anlin Cheng, Asian-American literature is not only alive and thriving, but in the midst of a renaissance. Her discussion of race theory goes far beyond the often muddled binary discussion of racialized difference, historical chronology, or sociological case study, offering a new view of race and ethnicity in literature and psychoanalysis."--Shawn Wong, University of Washington

"Anne Anlin Cheng has written a provocative and important book about race as a melancholic construction that imprisons both dominant and marginal subjects in haunted relations of identification and loss. Deftly using psychoanalytic theory to expose the roots of racial identity, Cheng also demonstrates, through her compelling readings, the inextricability of politics and desire. Cheng's investigation of the social and psychological injuries of racism is imaginative and uncompromising. It is also sufficiently complex to credit the productive possibilities of melancholic consciousness."--Helene Moglen, University of California, Santa Cruz

"Courageous in its refusal to perpetuate the 'ethnic' or racialized subject's too often reassuring identification with traumatic wounding, Anne Anlin Cheng's *The Melancholy of Race* forcefully reimagines the politics of the subject by focusing on the logic of fantasy through which the subject is always imagined. That she does so in a volume that offers her readers the genuine jolt of intellectual surprise testifies at once to the originality of her insights and to our need for the vital and revitalizing intelligence with which she makes possible new ways of questioning the terms through which we pose, and thereby reimpose, the so-called question of race."--Lee Edelman, Tufts University

"'We are a nation at ease with grievance but not with grief,' writes Anne Cheng in this probing and complex analysis of the processes by which we are all socialized into race. Through a wonderfully chosen series of literary and cultural phenomena, she captures both the hidden melancholy of those who, in order to conform to the American dream, learn to discriminate against themselves, and the even more hidden melancholy of a nation thus deprived of some of the most vital energies of its citizens."--Barbara Johnson, Harvard University

About the Author

Anne Anlin Cheng is Professor of English and American Literature at Princeton University.

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