
Frank Wu's Perspective in *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White*

The treatment of Asian Americans in the United States has been brought to attention through literature and popular culture, as well as through the self-representation technique by which Asian Americans discuss their own treatment. Frank Wu, author of *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White*, reveals his own experience as an Asian American child who had to bear the cost of being an Asian. This essay will therefore analyze how racism operates to perpetuate negative stereotypes regarding Asian Americans and the impact that racism has on victims of racial stereotyping through the individual life experience of Frank Wu.

Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White aims to address the implications of racism in creating the “model minority myth” and the “perpetual foreigner syndrome” that are usually felt by the Asian Americans. These ‘myths’ serve a “purpose in reinforcing racial hierarchies”. Asian Americans have been stereotyped as being an unassimilable entity in mainstream culture. They are perceived as “alien” enemy and became a racialized subject.

Readers are therefore able to understand how social discourse within day-to-day interaction plays an important role in the construction of the Asian American identity. Wu tends to portray how difficult it becomes for an Asian American to cope with the negative stereotypes they are faced to because race still remains an important marker of identity. Eventually, these stereotypes unfortunately contribute in shaping the life of people who become victims of racism.

Besides, racial stereotypes are perpetuated through agencies of socialization such as the school and the media. The sad truth about it is the fact that a child is exposed to such negative attitudes at an early age. They internalize discriminations, they internalize that people are different and judged according to the racial group to which they belong. This made Wu realize that the world is a “kaleidoscope of cultural fragments, arranged and re-arranged without plan or order”.

Wu further extends this issue when he relates how, as a child, had to pay the price of being an ‘Asian American’, a term which he was not aware was differentiating him from his classmates. He was faced with bullying when he was still a child only because he was Chinese. His classmates made racist remarks such as “How can you see with eyes like that?” Wu eventually ends up seeking answers and explanations from his parents and asks:

“Why are we Chinese?”

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The above question which came out from Wu already gives an indication that Asian Americans were made to be felt that being an Asian American was a bad thing. In fact, the racialization issue does not end at school. If children are able to differentiate people according to their racial background, needless to say that the situation might be worse among adults. At work, his colleagues end up making racist statements despite claiming not being racist. It often happened that his colleagues thought of him if they were watching a movie on the Chinese subject. Wu magnifies the problematic perception of Asian Americans when he is asked the question:

“Where are you ‘really’ from?”

The word ‘really’ stresses on their hybrid identity of being an Asian American and underlines the “perpetual foreigner syndrome” formed by racism. He feels that he is not accepted and he realizes how coping with these issues was very difficult for him with the “many masks he is given to wear”. Wu’s writing is able to make readers connect to what he felt. Being a child and realizing that an hybrid identity could define and shape an identity irrespective of how good at heart or how good a person can be is not easy at all. This makes the child move away from the world of Johnny Sokko, his favorite cartoon character, and makes him enter the real world where racism divides.

The way he seeks answers for being Chinese reflects that at a certain point he internalized the idea that he was ‘othered’ and marginalized. But he understood that he had to “kill off the model minority myth because the stereotype obscures many realities”. Racism has made him loss the freedom of identity and the readers are able to understand this when Wu argues that “I am who others perceive me to be rather than how I perceive myself to be.”

Finally, from Frank Wu’s analysis of how racism operates through popular culture and through social discourse to perpetuate the “model minority myth” and “the perpetual foreigner syndrome”, readers have been able to understand how race becomes important to achieve respect in society. It is unfortunate that a child is robbed of his naivety and his innocence and has to face racial stereotypes. The feeling of being ‘different’ is always hard to digest but the feeling of being ‘different’ on basis of race is always harder.

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