



# Face Value: The Entwined Histories of Money and Race in America

*Michael O'Malley*

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From colonial history to the present, Americans have passionately, even violently, debated the nature and the character of money. They have painted it and sung songs about it, organized political parties around it, and imprinted it with the name of God—all the while wondering: is money a symbol of the value of human work and creativity, or a symbol of some natural, intrinsic value?

In *Face Value*, Michael O'Malley provides a deep history and a penetrating analysis of American thinking about money and the ways that this ambivalence unexpectedly intertwines with race. Like race, money is bound up in questions of identity and worth, each a kind of shorthand for the different values of two similar things. O'Malley illuminates how these two socially constructed hierarchies are deeply rooted in American anxieties about authenticity and difference.

In this compelling work of cultural history, O'Malley interprets a stunning array of historical sources to evaluate the comingling of ideas about monetary value and social distinctions. More than just a history, *Face Value* offers us a new way of thinking about the present culture of coded racism, gold fetishism, and economic uncertainty.

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