

# Perspectives On Transracial Adoption



## **Adoption is a response to a life crisis.**

It is a turning point, separating everything that comes before from what happens after. A decision that forces us to confront the most basic goals of life, it fosters change and growth for all who are touched by it.

## **Race matters.**

When parents are raising a child of a race different from their own, the parents' lack of experience with the race of the child's birth heritage creates challenges for all members of the family.

## **Adoptive families have the desire and capacity to help themselves.**

Asking for help is not an expression of weakness or defeat, but a show of strength, even though you may not be feeling particularly strong at the moment. The alternative, to become passive and not to reach out to find a useful action, is a response that will not serve your family. Our hope for this book is to support your positive desire to stretch as far as you can for your family.

## **Transracial adoption issues are not easy or comfortable subjects to discuss.**

Support from well-meaning friends and family is often not enough. This book exists to serve the special needs of adoptive parents of children of color by providing tools to explore the issues and consider suggestions toward resolution. Breaking through the isolation and discovering how others handle similar situations can be a great relief.

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# First-Person Experiences



## You Don't Always Get What You Want

"I wanted their hair. Dudes at school hid spit balls in my Afro mop and laughed."

— David French

"Only black folk I knew as a kid were in TV sit-coms."

— Roxie Agur

"When my family went for a drive, we'd lock the doors when we drove through black neighborhoods."

— Jenn Salter-Pierce



## "Family, friends... sometimes even I didn't see what was coming down.

So when a white person says to me, 'it doesn't matter if they're black, white, brown or green...' or 'there's only one race, the human race,' a shudder goes down my spine. Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Marcus Garvey...don't matter. The Montgomery Bus Boycott, Brown v. Board of Education, the March on Washington...don't matter. The Jubilee Singers, the Harlem Renaissance, Motown... don't matter. Black people were not enslaved, did not resist, escape, campaign and lose our lives because we were 'green.' Yet these are the arguments that many 'lay' people use to justify transracial adoption. Those two sentences erase a history of oppression and survival against enormous odds, as well as a legacy of courageous resistance and struggle. They also set us up to fail. As we grow into our teens, adopted children discover that being 'human' is simply not enough."

— Julia Sudbury-Oparah

## "As I was growing up, countless classmates told me, 'You don't act Black.' I am sick to think now that I took it as a compliment.

My parents told me I was Ethiopian, Mexican, black and white. They saw racial divisions as dangerous. If we ignored race, they hoped, we might all live happily as one. But when I was a child, my life wasn't 'colorless.' it was white. And colorblindness is a luxury young black children can't afford. Love does not prepare an African American child for the society we live in. And love does not replace the importance of knowing your own ethnicity and culture. Today, I say I am African American."

— Rachel Nordlinger

# Below The Surface: Transracial Adopter Self-Assessment

## Personality Issues

Each of us is “hard-wired” in particular ways. That means we are comfortable in certain types of circumstances and are likely to make life choices that reflect our particular personality traits. Although personality traits are not usually changeable, understanding who you are can enable you to decide whether your temperament will lend itself comfortably to the issues you and your family will face. Being prepared for and able to cope with your own emotions about the issues transracial adoption raises makes a great difference. Think about whether or not these are challenges for you.

- ❖ **Attracting Attention**
- ❖ **Facing Complexity**
- ❖ **Seeking Help**
- ❖ **Valuing Multiple Points of View**

## Attitude

Acknowledging your own racism and “adoptism” is painful. If you think that racism is lessening, you probably aren’t dealing with it much. If you think that most people feel adoption is a good thing, you probably haven’t yet had the opportunity to experience people’s “special” reactions to special families. If you haven’t had much experience with these issues, your antennae are probably not yet well-developed.

## Lifestyle

Day-to-day living — what we do, who we see, where we go. This is how and where children learn the most important lessons of their lives. More than our words, and regardless of our intentions, children take our actions to heart. If there are many people of color important to your life, you will deliver the message that people of color are important and valued. If your child is the only one, how will you avoid the message that she is an exception to her race, or that there is something wrong with his ethnicity?

## Knowledge

Schools teach us mostly European-based history and knowledge. Society teaches us to view the world from the point of view of white America, a point of view that sometimes includes immigrant- or minority-bashing to justify our history and current actions. Without positive history and a realistic understanding of current race-based realities in society, children will think that white is better and that people of color have accomplished little in their world.



# A Transracially-Adopted Child's Bill of Rights

By Liza Steinberg Triggs (Pact Press, Fall 1996)

Every child is entitled to love and full membership in her family.

Every child is entitled to have his culture embraced and valued.

Every child is entitled to parents who know that this is a race-conscious society.

Every child is entitled to parents who know that she will experience life differently than they do.

Every child is entitled to parents who are not looking to "save" him or to improve the world.

Every child is entitled to parents who know that being in a family doesn't depend on "matching."

Every child is entitled to parents who know that transracial adoption changes the family forever.

Every child is entitled to be accepted by extended family members.

Every child is entitled to parents who know that, if they are white, they benefit from racism.

Every child is entitled to parents who know that they can't transmit the child's birth culture if it is not their own.

Every child is entitled to have items at home that are made for and by people of his race.

Every child is entitled to opportunities to make friends with people of her race or ethnicity.

Every child is entitled to daily opportunities of positive experiences with his birth culture.

Every child is entitled to build racial pride within her own home, school, and neighborhood.

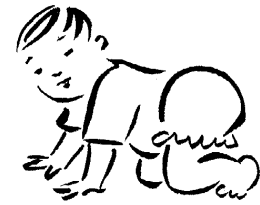
Every child is entitled to have many opportunities to connect with adults of the child's race.

Every child is entitled to parents who accept, understand and empathize with her culture.

Every child is entitled to learn survival, problem-solving, and coping skills in a context of racial pride.

Every child is entitled to take pride in the development of a dual identity and a multicultural/multiracial perspective on life.

**Every child is entitled to find his multiculturalism to be an asset and to conclude, "I've got the best of both worlds."**



# Positive Outcomes

## Transracial family members can...

- \* take apparent contradictions in stride;
- \* accept our shifts in position without getting defensive;
- \* look at situations from more than one point of view;
- \* develop creative solutions to problems;
- \* be more effective in working cooperatively;
- \* put more effort into the construction of self than the presentation of self;
- \* personalize and customize meanings rather than accept somebody else's scripts;
- \* judge ourselves by measuring the overall self, rather than by assessing a particular ability;
- \* value flexibility;
- \* be guided more by self-evaluation than by the opinions of others;
- \* make choices that require negotiation and cooperation.
- \* act effectively within a group setting

