

# Where to Draw the Line Between Transracial Adoptions

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Critical Response by Ciera Burnett, English 101

It has become common today to dismiss racial controversy on many topics from relationships to positions in the workforce. This is because these images of racial equality have recently become more common. The question remains whether children should be adopted by parents outside their race. Most people know this occurs, yet no one questions it. I believe that transracial adoption should not be accepted because it shows racial and structural inequality in the system. It also undermines tradition and cultural uniqueness, and it creates disparities within families and among potential families. Demographic studies illustrate that black Americans make less money than whites, making it impossible for blacks to adopt children of their same ethnicity because of the agencies' outrageous prices. Transracial adoption promotes many different prejudices, including those dealing with a parental candidate's demographic and economic position. Before transracial adoption becomes fully acceptable among everyone, some of its negative aspects should be brought to the forefront. In addition to the structural economic inequalities and disparities that complicate interracial adoptions for African-American adoptees, these negative aspects include loss of the adoptees' heritage, identity, and potential families because of adoption by white parents.

Adoption agencies do not take into consideration how hard it is for certain applicants to meet qualification guidelines because of economic situation, which may minimize potential families of the same ethnicity as the adoptee. Although author Leslie Hollingsworth does not say so directly, she assumes that the adoption process is merely another form of structural oppression and exploitation. In Leslie Hollingsworth's article, "Promoting Same-Race Adoption for Children of Color," she evaluates the welfare system behind adoption. She deals with the controversy and belief systems of many spectators and participants who were involved in the out-of-home care system, such as foster homes. The report analyzes disparities in child welfare services related to ethnicity and addresses poverty among minorities as the underlying cause of most transracial adoptions. The article states how welfare services limit blacks' parental rights because of their eligibility policies and their inability to take into consideration many people's cultures and lifestyles.

Why would blacks want to adopt if they are being discriminated against in the process? Some critics argue that "reducing fees for African-Americans to recruit more black children would be like a literal devaluing of black children" (Clemetson and Nixon). But how is it different from welfare services going through with transracial adoptions that "charge" a high price for black children? They are devaluing a child by making it a financial issue in the first place, because they are not putting the adoptee's personal feelings and beliefs in the forefront. Hollingsworth argues that because of these policies, poor, usually minority children, are at risk of permanent removal from their families because of their economic position in society. Instead of public policies helping or correcting the problem that causes children to be in out-of-home care, they move the children to homes believed to be financially comfortable. Needless to say, it is mostly whites who meet their high-cost guidelines. This leads to an increase in transracial adoption. The thesis of the article is that "efforts should be made to ensure that adoptive parents of the same race as the child are available and systematic barriers should not interfere" (Hollingsworth 113).

Hollingsworth complicates matters further when she quotes Ruth McRoy, who states "human beings are products of their environment and develop their sense of values, attitudes, and self within

their own family structures” (qtd. in Hollingsworth 105). Her point is that adoptees do not know themselves and tend to try to find out who they are when they are adopted. She is trying to point out that transracial adoptions make children confused because what they think they are is actually who they are trying to be, which is not their true “self.” In other words, Hollingsworth argues that black children, or any other minority children in white homes or in homes of other races, are cut off from the healthy development of themselves as people of their own race.

Many minority children occupy adoption agencies in the US today, but it seems as if they are the last option for the racially diverse parental candidates that qualify. The article “Breaking through Adoption’s Racial Barriers” explores this issue and analyzes how many white parents are adopting black children. The reasons presented are because of the long wait for white children and the high cost of international adoption for children of non-African ethnicities. One white couple in the article explains how they felt they had open arms and an open mind to be matched with a black child from Africa. The question is why was this option their first option? If whites are doing it to help black children have stable homes, why not adopt here in America as their first option rather than as their back-up plan? Why do Caucasian couples prefer to adopt children internationally—especially from Africa? In today’s society, Americans tend to believe that if one really wants to influence any type of cause, especially to support minority groups, one must look overseas to demonstrate one’s level of contribution. This has become especially common among interracial adoption, with celebrities like Angelina Jolie—who adopted her African daughter Zahara from Ethiopia, and Madonna who adopted her daughter from Malawi. Many other wealthy white people have also decided to join in the exploit—when a hurricane hit Haiti there were plenty who adopted black children from that area.

These families and celebrities claim to uphold colorblindness, but Lynette Clemetson and Ron Nixon argue that “color aware families should be created, not colorblind [families].” The difference between color aware families and colorblind families is not just the awareness in one’s ethnicity, but also awareness in one’s culture. Colorblind families take into consideration the adoptees’ ethnicity and may have some sensitivity towards it; however, they forget about the child’s past upbringing. Color aware families recognize that an adoptees’ ethnicity comes with a culture. Color conscious families may try to incorporate the child’s culture in the way they raise the child taking into consideration how to make the child feel more included because of differences between both theirs and the adoptees values. You can then argue that many white people who adopt foreign African children are color blind, because they do not take the children’s culture into consideration. This is due in part because these couples are bringing Africans and Haitians to America, where their culture does not exist. Clemetson and Nixon’s point is that if parents adopt transracially, they owe it to the child to incorporate some of the child’s heritage into their upbringing. In making this comment, the author urges transracial adoption parents to make an effort to incorporate the customs of the adoptive child’s heritage in family traditions. By doing this, the family allows the child to grow up incorporating these customs into their future family and not treating the traditions with indifference.

Given all of these complications, the government needs to start putting the emotional needs of the child first, not just worrying about placing the child in a home. Numbers should not matter in adoption agencies just the satisfaction of the child. What may make the children truly content is to be around their own race. “Race Matters in Adoption” argues how the main focus of adoption should be centered on the child, and how transracial adoption is centered on continuous racial hostilities. According to McRoy, “only a black family can transmit the emotional and sensitive subtleties of perceptions and reactions essential for a black child’s survival in a racist society” (qtd. in Hollingsworth 105). Like McRoy and Hollingworth, Ruth-Arlene Howe’s belief is entirely against transracial adoption. She mentions children as being “legally freed to be adopted” (468). She considers transracial adoption a system of slavery. The welfare system involves exchange of minorities for money from the majority who are rich white people—which tends to foster a racist society. Howe suggests that if the focus

centers on the child, it should emphasize the best interest of the child's well being. The article states how the government should "provide support for adoption by relatives, when that is not the best option for a particular child, provide federal funding for subsidized guardianship" (Howe 475).

Although guardianship may seem trivial, it is in fact crucial in terms of today's concern over children's developmental state. In the newspaper article "Should Race Be a Factor in Adoptions?" Jenine Lee St. John argues that race should be a factor in adoption. The purpose of this article is to influence the audience that transracial adoptions are at odds with identity. The article suggests that this type of adoption makes minority children lose touch with their racial identity therefore making them lose touch with their sense of self. It suggests that adoption should be an uplifting event for an adoptee, not one full of complex anxieties of self-realization through lost heritage and racism. The report seems to question whether this type of adoption should continue since it tends to benefit only the person who is adopting and leads to future psychological problems for the child. These psychological problems often lead to "transracial adoptees struggling to fit in with their peers, their communities, and even with their own families" (John 26).

The anxiety about one's skin color develops due to historical, social, and political factors. In "Skin Color in Transracial and Inracial Adoptive Placement: Implications for Special Needs Adoption," Ruth McRoy and Helen Grape analyze these factors which seem to be many adoptees foundation in finding their true identity. Their data seems to be consistent with St. John's argument that transracially adopted persons with obvious racial divergence may experience identity dilemmas earlier in life to find out where they fit in. The factors play an important role because children who are in environments where they feel excluded because of their race may find their overall mental health negatively affected. As McRoy and Grape note, "In reality, some transracially adopted children may actually attempt to pass for white in order to identify more closely with their adoptive families" (686). This leads to the conclusion that many transracial adoptees actually try to create an identity that may not be their own, causing psychological problems and problems among peers which can lead to isolation among a child who is supposed to feel needed.

In terms of the minority child feeling accepted, the article "Beliefs and Attitudes about Transracial Adoption Among a Sample of South African Students" focuses on how transracial adoption is acceptable among many South Africans, because they believe it will bring forth racial and culture tolerance. It appears acceptable because "the adoption of a black child by a white person may be seen by black South Africans as the most convincing evidence of change regarding race relations in America" (Moos 1118). The question is how can one group gain racial intolerance if they are forcing it upon another group of people who are economically and politically vulnerable? If racial intolerance has to be forced then transracial adoption should not be. The two should go hand in hand; under racial tolerance when each culture has accepted the other, then there should be transracial adoption. Under these circumstances it would seem as if the adoption was a forced union, and the adoptee's culture would not be respected.

Transracial adoption not only focuses on blacks adopted by whites even though this is the most common type, but by a child of one ethnicity being adopted by another. The truth is black children are the children that occupy most adoption agencies and out-of-home care systems. I support Clemetson and Nixon's view that transracial adoption should be accepted if parents incorporate the adoptees' heritage into their upbringing, but I find Hollingsworth's argument about adoption eligibility for the minorities and Howe's research on transracial adoption as slavery equally persuasive against transracial adoption. While Clemetson and Nixon's claim that there is nothing wrong with adopting children outside their race is debatable, I agree with her stance that "color aware families should be created, not color blind" (Clemetson and Nixon). I still insist that parents should make children feel comfortable with their identity through any means necessary so the child will feel comfortable with themselves and the way they look. I truly believe that transracial adoption should be beneficial towards the parents and the child

and not just towards one party. If one party is unhappy with the other then it should not take place. If both are happy then it should not matter what others may think. The opinion of the public and their views of the adoption as a whole should not matter in terms of overall happiness.

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