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### Black Children with White Parents

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BLACK CHILDREN WITH WHITE PARENTS

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A Study Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Practical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Divinity

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by

Dennis Conrad

November 1971

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Reader

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Research Paper



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## PREFACE

On March 31, 1971 my wife and I adopted our son, Peter Joel, a child of biracial descent. He has tremendously influenced our lives and has caused us to study what it means to be a white parent with a black child. The results of that study are here in this paper. I suppose that much of what I have written might have come out differently if I were not myself the parent to a black child. However, if I had not adopted, I would not have chosen this topic for a paper.

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## Introduction

Because of the recent ecology emphasis and concern for the population problem, a small, but growing, number of people who can have children of their own are having only one or two and adopting others.<sup>1</sup> Couples are planning the entire make-up of their families ahead of time, and adoption is often an important factor in that planning.<sup>2</sup> There are also many white couples throughout North America who cannot have children of their own and who are waiting at least two years on an adoption agency list for a normal white infant. In fact, at this time many agencies are not even accepting their applications because of the deluge already on hand. In the black market couples are paying as high as \$10,000 for independent adoptions while they and the surrendering parents receive no guidance in this crucial area.<sup>3</sup> There are also a number of families who fall into the "room for one more" category. They have a complete and happy family of their own, but if someone would tell them about a child without a home, they would, and do, jump at the opportunity to take him into their family.<sup>4</sup> The picture is that of a tremendous number of couples and families who are actively seeking, very interested in, or willing and able to adopt children. However, they are not able to adopt because white babies are vanishing from the market. The shortage of babies is due to legal abortion, the pill, and an increasing number of unwed mothers keeping their babies.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, the Child Welfare League of America estimates that there are 190,000 children, most of whom are not Caucasian or are only part Caucasian, who are waiting for homes. Many are in legal limbo, retarded, or too old to be wanted.<sup>6</sup> There are a few agencies and people doing something about this paradox, and some feel that placing black children with white couples is the newest and greatest potential for an answer to the problem. But adopting across racial lines is fraught with a high degree of ambivalence on the part of surrendering parents (biological parents), the adoptive parents, the agency, the professional worker, and virtually everyone concerned.<sup>7</sup>

A very large number of white families are interested in transracial adoption, but are unsure of the consequences and of their capabilities. Many have thoughts and questions concerning this new concept for their own family, but outside of agencies and parents who have already adopted transracially, virtually no one is capable of counseling effectively concerning these questions. Because of the adoption agencies' reputation for "red tape," evaluation, and looking through an applicant's "dirty linens" (most of which has been true in the past),<sup>8</sup> many people shy away from the agency to answer their questions. Another possible counselor, the pastor, priest, or rabbi, who is called on to give advice concerning a wide range of problems, is approached by couples concerning adoption of children of their own race, but very rarely by parents interested in transracial adoption.<sup>9</sup> Is

this because they know so little about the subject?

This paper is intended for people who are interested in finding out what the situation is in the field of transracial adoption. It may be useful to pastor, layman, or anyone unfamiliar with the field. There are thousands of children in this country who do not have permanent homes. This study will examine in some detail one possible answer to solve this dilemma, and also take a look at a few of the other alternatives besides transracial adoption.

### Defining the Concepts

There is one race, the human race. However, whites deal with themselves as "men," and blacks deal with themselves as "black men."<sup>10</sup> Scientifically biologists have had a great deal of trouble clearly deliniating biological classifications of races because there are no clear cut boundaries. Therefore, scientific attempts to classify mankind by races invariably fail.<sup>11</sup> But socially, people have no trouble at all classifying by races. Since this paper deals with people and their attitudes, it is not possible to use the scientific or biological definition of race, but rather the social definition. In America the Negro or black is socially defined as "anyone displaying any Negroid



characteristics or anyone having any known Negro ancestry."<sup>12</sup> In other words, in this country a black person who is not pure black is Caucasian.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, when this paper refers to transracial adoption, it means adoption by a white family of a child with any black characteristics or heritage. He may be all black, half black, or one-tenth black.

Adoption in its present form is a relatively new concept in America, but there has always been a kind of adoption in some parts of the world without agencies and courtrooms. For example, in some parts of Africa and Black America with its extended family concept, families took in children wherever they found them, kept them in their families as long as they needed homes, and allowed them to leave when they were ready. There was no sense of legal procedure, but just a sense of love and the concept of "so go you, so go me."<sup>14</sup> Adoption laws and procedures began to change all of that. Like the United States' Constitution, much of our adoption laws have been taken from other cultures. And many of the policies which did grow up in America were relevant when they came into being, but no longer apply in today's situations. Certain policies came into being when there were many families asking for the small number of children available. The blonde haired, blue eyed baby was in a sellers' market, and agencies formulated policies to find the best parents for these "wanted children." Ways were found to "weed out" and discourage the worst parents, while bringing forth the ones with the most advantages. And so the home study, the sterility

report, the right religion, and a need for impeccable character were born. But these policies do not apply to the thousands of black children looking for homes with black parents who cannot pass these acid test requirements.<sup>15</sup>

Adoption in this country was never really considered valid in itself. It was finally allowed as a method to obtain children for couples who could not have any of their own.

In our culture we have had the deep-rooted beliefs that we reproduce ourselves through the family with corresponding emphasis on hereditary and physical resemblance. Our customs about inheritance, family names, clan or larger family and, to some extent, morality, have been based on the beliefs that the true child is one that is born to his parent. Until relatively recently in our history, adoption was based on these same cultural attitudes. The couples who adopted were those that could not produce their own children and adoption agencies also attempted to match a child with the parents in terms of physical resemblance, social background, nationality, etc. There were, of course, exceptions but the general cultural attitude towards parenthood and adoption seemed to be an emphasis on physical reproduction or having a child which was like the parents.<sup>16</sup>

Culture has attempted to maintain these traditions, but has often punished and confused people, thus, making it impossible for them to follow its demands. On the one hand, it has prevented one woman from giving up her baby because it is her own flesh and blood, and it has prevented another woman from being a mother to it because it is not her flesh and blood. On the other hand, culture sometimes demands that a woman give up her child because it does not have a father, and at times it very definitely expects

that a married couple have children.<sup>17</sup>

Jack Kirkland, associate professor of sociology and black studies at Washington University, has defined adoption in this country as assimilation. However, Kirkland goes on to add that according to that definition white parents cannot adopt black children, but can only have them in their home.<sup>18</sup> White parents can provide for a black child's needs; can love him and can even teach him values, but they cannot make him like themselves. But assimilation does not have to remain our model for adoption. Cultural change can occur, but only by individuals who have left the culturally defined roles, the prejudices, biases, and confusion of tradition.<sup>19</sup>

And so it is that the concept of adoption is beginning to change, and there is a new definition of it by some in our culture. For a long time people have known that parenthood is more than just giving birth to a child. They have been ahead of culture in this respect, but have allowed culture to keep defining the true parents as the biological ones.<sup>20</sup> But the new definition changes all that. Kenneth Watson of the Chicago Child Care Society defines "...a family as a 'nurture base' which is able to meet the needs of the developing child while at the same time continuing to meet the needs of other members, to the satisfaction of all."<sup>21</sup> Parenthood, by these standards, is the "raising up of another human being," and it is a separate experience from producing a child.<sup>22</sup> It also involves nurturing him, and as important

as anything else, letting him go. This applies to parenthood universally, both biological and transracial.<sup>23</sup>

A parent's function is to help a child develop a concept of his "self" as a worthwhile person. According to this concept a person can be a parent to a child who was not born to him, who does not look like him, or who is even of another race than himself. The main consideration according to this concept is whether or not he can help this person feel he has value. If a child has a strong self image it is probable that he will be able to handle the many problems ahead of him which his parents will be unable to help him with.<sup>24</sup> Many doubt that a white person can give a black child a feeling of self worth. This whole question will be taken up under the section dealing with identity.

#### History of Transracial Adoption

As mentioned in the previous section, adoption itself is a relatively recent phenomenon in the United States. It was not recognized in our English Common Law.<sup>25</sup> Adoption across black-white racial lines is only about ten years old. However, since the early 1950's Oriental and Indian children have been placed transracially,<sup>26</sup> and of course in Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands interracial

adoptions have been going on for so long, are so extensive, and apparently so well accepted, that there are no special reports in the literature on interracial adoptions there. Over one-half of all placements in Alaska are non-Caucasian.<sup>27</sup> Possibly this might be a clue to the future if this trend continues.

Faced by the ever increasing number of black (that includes mixed racial) children waiting for homes, in 1961 Minnesota adoption agencies launched a two-year publicity campaign called "Parents to Adopt Minority Youngsters" or PAMY. Like many other previous programs, its purpose was to find Negro homes for Negro children. However, what made this program different was that when white couples applied for black children, they were not turned away. The initiative for transracial adoption did not come from the agencies as an answer to their problem, but from white families. When PAMY found many white families and few black families responding to their publicity,<sup>28</sup> the planners shifted their focus accordingly. As it began to encourage white families to adopt mixed racial children (this was a first), many more white couples applied for black youngsters, including those from other states.<sup>29</sup> Minnesota was not alone in this activity. Almost the identical sequence took place in New England and other areas.<sup>30</sup> Open adoption without regard to race began being practiced by individual agencies throughout the country.<sup>31</sup>

The main thrust in transracial adoption then, and still today, was for the biracial child. Most of these children have black fathers and white mothers who cannot keep them, not only because they are born out of wedlock, but also because they are black. Prior to transracial adoption these black-white or mulatto children had to wait for several years while agencies attempted to locate a Negro family or one of mixed background.<sup>32</sup> But now these are the children especially being "grabbed up" by white families. Because they are half white, many white families feel they can identify more closely with them and feel rather uncomfortable when they are called black. Many of these parents feel that such children are not black, but are interracial, and they are inclined toward stressing their white heritage as much as their black heritage.

However, by the very social definition used in this paper, these children are black and are considered to be black by people of both races with whom they come in contact. What is more, a majority of people in the black community fall into the same category as do biracial children. A pure Negroid is almost non-existent in the United States. Ever since the days of slavery there have been children of mixed heritage. They have always been considered to be Negroes and have stayed in that community. To think that biracial children or adults will be put in a special class today or treated any differently is artificial.<sup>33</sup> But these

children are still the first to be adopted. Michigan's Child and Family Services is beginning to have trouble locating enough biracial infants and pre-schoolers for families that want them, and in some areas there is even a shortage of all black infants and pre-schoolers.<sup>34</sup>

Just in the past year or two, more and more families who cross racial lines in adoption are disregarding what percentage white the children are.

Much of the progress being made in this field is due to groups of parents organized throughout the continent to do something about the number of children without permanent homes and to discuss the common problems in being parents to black children. Possibly the first group of this kind was organized in 1962 in Montreal, Canada under the name of the Open Door Society. Its stated aims are:

To encourage the general acceptance throughout the community of children of minority races or mixed background, to promote the legal adoption of such children by parents of any race, and in this connection to work as closely<sup>35</sup> as possible with official adoption agencies.

The Open Door Society has expanded into many cities in both Canada and the United States with a very active group existing here in St. Louis.

During recent years other similar groups have sprung up in various parts of the country; for example: The National Council of Adoptive Parents at Teaneck, New Jersey; The Council on Adoptable Children at Ann Arbor, Michigan; and Transracial Adoptive Parents of Chicago,

Illinois. Several of these groups publish newsletters and other material dealing with current trends in adoption. Some provide speakers for other groups, arrange television appearances, and furnish material to the news media.<sup>36</sup> The Families for Interracial Adoption in New England claims that the phenomenal growth of its membership, as well as that of other groups, was due in part to new concern for homeless children going beyond the professional agency to the community and its concerned citizens.<sup>37</sup> Many agencies began to use parents who had already adopted transracially for their recruitment, speaking to civic and religious groups of all types. These parents were able to allay the fears of couples who were considering the idea but were uncertain about following through.<sup>38</sup>

The media have also been responsible in part for the growing interest in transracial adoption. They have shown the tremendous need to the nation. Newspapers in most of the major cities run adoption columns and "Adoptable-Baby-of-the-Week" photographs. Television stations sponsor adoption shows which virtually market babies over the air waves. "The Ben Hunter Show" on KTTV in Los Angeles has placed some six hundred "special needs children" since the program began in 1967.<sup>39</sup> These television commercials and the billboards, which tell people how easy it is to adopt a black child these days do not tell about the "red tape" and frustration of many who respond and are constantly put off. They do not openly say that much of the publicity



is aimed only at black families and that is is not quite that easy for interested white parents.<sup>40</sup> Yet the media have succeeded not only in educating the people to the needs, but also in changing some values in the area of adoption and race.<sup>41</sup> This paper was mostly made possible by the many articles put out by various magazines and publishers concerning the changing trends.

In this country it is often the courts and the laws which are holding back transracial adoption. It is true that state legislatures are gradually becoming aware of the antiquity of most of the adoption laws and are also changing their trends. But the southern portion of the United States with their laws has consistantly, through the years, blocked the adoption of blacks by whites. Some states' statutes expressly prohibit interracial adoption, but in most states the decisions concerning adoption are left up to the court. Generally judges follow agency recommendations,<sup>43</sup> although there are judges whose main criteria is what the community thinks. In 1968 a trans-racial adoption was turned down because, as the judge stated, "I get around the county, or I wouldn't have been elected three times, and I know of no white family...that has a colored child outside of this one."<sup>44</sup>

However, there are judges whose interest is in doing what is best for the parties concerned. Judge William T. Downs says that although the laws of his state remind

the judge in confirming an adoption to "take into account the racial, religious, and cultural background," that does not mean the matching of the same. The interpretation of the words is discretionary with the judge. He concludes:

I see nothing in the statute or any case decisions which would require any judge to insist on the placement of a child being made only with parents of the same or similar race, religion, or culture.<sup>45</sup>

While many parents are still at the mercy of their judge and pray to get "the right one" as they go into court, other states, like Michigan, have recently established liberal adoption laws stating that,

Judges may no longer consider race, culture, or other environmental factors in deciding a child's adoption, and may consider religion only if the child is more than seven years old.<sup>46</sup>

Michigan adoption statistics, unlike most states, are also liberal, showing an upswing in all of their adoption figures.<sup>47</sup>

Fifteen years ago, when a couple went into an agency interested in a child of another race, the agency was always suspicious thinking that the couple must be neurotic. But times have changed.<sup>48</sup> Surveys indicate that white adoptions of blacks doubled from 1968 to 1969, redoubled from 1969 to 1970, and are expected to do the same this year.<sup>49</sup>

## Characteristics of Transracial Adoptive Parents

What kinds of people adopt transracially? What are they like? The Children's Division of Cook County Department of Public Aid in Chicago has established criteria for evaluating prospective parents for multiracial adoption. This is what they look for in such parents: (Characteristics do not necessarily appear in order of importance.) compatible motivation, deep interest in family activity, intelligence, meaningful experiences with various racial groups, education and awareness, ability to withstand community pressure, high level of tolerance for frustration, ability to think and act independently, lack of financial strain, relatives who accept, non-radical politics, ability to allow a child to accept his racial identity, acceptance that the situation is "different," positive attitudes, adoption is not the sole means of achieving parenthood.<sup>50</sup>

What adopting parents do and why they do it differs from family to family. If there is a common thread among white parents with black children, it is a healthy self assurance.<sup>51</sup> One completed study says that transracial parents were usually independent in their thinking and willing to do what they think is right, regardless of what their neighbors say.<sup>52</sup> But they were

...not bohemian or unconventional in the bizarre sense. They were not isolated from the community, as one study found...Most of them demonstrated

that they possessed inner resources to cope with unusual stresses. They appeared to have the courage to accept community criticism, and still to allow others to differ with them.<sup>53</sup>

In order to help his child with his identity, giving him a strong self concept, a parent himself needs to have a strong sense of "self identity." The person who gets his identity from what others think of him, from his groups--family, community, or race, will probably have a great deal of difficulty being a parent to a child of another race. However, the person who is able to make decisions by what he thinks is right and not determined by what others say; who sees himself primarily as a individual apart from his particular groups;<sup>54</sup> who is non-ethnocentric (attributing superior qualities to people of ones own race or religion and inferior ones to members of other groups);<sup>55</sup> will probably find himself applying for a hard to place or multi-racial child.

Another important characteristic, as mentioned in the earlier listing, is the acknowledgement of differences inherent in the situation. The people fulfilling their criteria do not regard it as just another adoption, but are constantly coping with the responsibility of being a white parent to a black child.<sup>56</sup> Usually these families have had experience with other racial groups and are aware of the seriousness of adopting a racially mixed child.<sup>57</sup> They are also concerned with helping their child to find his identity and know who he is. Whether or not they are

radicals depends upon the definition used, and upon the person doing the describing. Most people associate radicals with long hair, demonstrations, and attempts to make extreme changes in existing views. Most transracial parents are not activists in that sense, and most are not participants in the civil rights movement.<sup>58</sup> Kirkland's definition of a radical, however, is a "person who does what he says he believes." Therefore, the very act of transracial adoption is radical. If these people really fulfill what they say they believe, they will be adopting the whole black race and not just their child. They may not be carrying a sign in front of a public building, but they are trying to get at the racism in this nation.<sup>59</sup> To that end most of these families are interested in groups that attempt to improve race relations, and several even have considerable experience in working or living with other racial groups.<sup>60</sup> However, another survey came up with the opposite conclusions. It says of transracial parents, "...the majority turned out to be persons who had had little close contact with Negroes."<sup>61</sup> Although friendships with black families prior to adoption differs from case to case, many transracial adoptive parents are beginning to seek relationships with other blacks.

Couples who have adopted transracially are sometimes preconceived to be functioning marginally, and therefore, because they have violated a taboo of society, are considered unacceptable by an agency for placement of a normal white

infant. These preconceptions are incorrect. Such parents are above average in education, income, and occupation. Sixty-five percent, according to one survey, have post-graduate degrees, and all have responsible jobs.<sup>62</sup> Lack of financial strain is important to give transracial families; who face many pressures, the flexibility to change their environment if necessary.<sup>63</sup> It is also an advantage which most black families cannot give, and which usually keeps them from adopting.

Such families are usually more distant geographically and socially from their friends and relatives than are families who have adopted children of their own race. They usually live farther away from their parents and relatives, and are more independent from them. They also receive less approval of their adoption, not only from these distant relatives, but also from friends and neighbors.<sup>64</sup> Although agencies stress close relationship with parents, etc., transracial couples are often detached from their parents and neighborhoods.<sup>65</sup> They tend to be mobile, but not transient.<sup>66</sup> Although they move more frequently, their marriages are more stable, and they have an energetic, devoted family life.<sup>67</sup>

Another important characteristic of parents adopting across racial lines is their fertility. According to one study, only twenty-seven percent did not already have children in their homes, compared to seventy-five percent

sterility among adoptive parents of white children.<sup>68</sup> Many who were not previously biological parents had adopted prior to the transracial adoption. Most transracial parents do not "need a child" in the sense that most adoptive couples do. They are not looking for a child to substitute for the one they were unable to have. Therefore, they do not have to be humble with the agency, but can take the more aggressive attitude of, "The agency needs us. We don't need the agency."<sup>69</sup> They are often called "room-for-one-more" parents. Those having produced a biological child have satisfied a deep-seated urge to reproduce themselves. They have an offspring in whom their own coloring, facial features, and even personality traits can be seen reflected. Now they can more easily adopt a child who does not resemble them.<sup>70</sup>

Transracial adoptive parents seem to be less frequent church attenders than their counterparts, although there is no difference between the number of church offices they hold. Transracial parents are more active than in-racial parents in community voluntary organizations.<sup>71</sup> They also more frequently attempt to empathize with their black children than do the other white parents with their white children. Because of the differences involved, transracial parents seem to be more attuned to the feelings of their children.<sup>72</sup>

Of course the characteristics described depend a great deal upon the describer. Some common, but different classifications from those already given for the transracial adoptive parent are: nice person, stupid, weird, idiot, "nigger

lover," mental problem, etc.<sup>73</sup> But many white parents with black youngsters claim to be no different from any other adoptive parent. As one of Minnesota's Open Door Society members states, "Don't expect interracial parents to be anything special. Most of us are ordinary people just trying to be good parents."<sup>74</sup> It is true. Both kinds of adoptive parents are similar in many ways. The typical 1971 transracial couple, like the in-racial couple, want a child, but cannot have one biologically, or do not want to add to the population. When they investigate adoption, they learn that white babies are scarce and that thousands of black babies need homes.<sup>75</sup> The difference lies in that one type chooses to take the black child, while the other chooses to wait several years for a white child.

#### Motivations of Transracial Adoptive Parents

Why do some white parents choose a black child? Some just cannot wait that long, and feel there is really no difference. Much of the transracial adoption has been done out of a guilt complex, much out of altruism, much out of sincerity of conviction.<sup>76</sup> There is a percentage who want to prove how liberal they are,<sup>77</sup> while still others have "white man's burden" complexes or rescue fantasies. But most of



these people drop out before they get in too deep. As one father put it, "It's one thing to love humanity at a meeting, but it's something else walking the floor at two in the morning."<sup>78</sup>

Billingsley and Mitchell both state that the same motivations are present in "matching" and "interracial" adoptions. They are a deep love for children, a desire to enlarge the family, and sometimes infertility. But the significant difference is the strong expression of religious and humanitarian motivation.<sup>79</sup> Few come from a fundamentalist background.<sup>80</sup> Very many of these couples act more out of ethical and moral values than faith in God principles. They are basically humanistic, putting people ahead of institutions.<sup>81</sup>

However, it is almost impossible to completely separate guilt from humanism. "There is a need. I will fulfill that need." Fred Smith, assistant professor of sociology at Washington University, claims that the whole transracial adoption boom which hit in the early 1960's was a result of a huge guilt complex in parts of white America. He also claims that this boom lessened the white lines on adoption lists.<sup>82</sup> Guilt is far away from true humanism or Christian love.

If a man who is white responds to a man who is black because of guilt for what the white race has done to the black race, his purpose is to relieve his<sub>3</sub> guilt, not necessarily to help black people.<sup>83</sup>

The results of such guilt feelings are: inner frustration,

self-centeredness, denial, and a quest for peace of conscience.<sup>84</sup> Transracial parents need to look at themselves and examine their motivation. Most important of all, they must understand themselves and their actions. Was it guilt or altruism, or the desire to set a good example, or proving a point that caused me to adopt this child?

There is also the danger of getting "hung up" on motivation. When confronted by a young black who was questioning the motives of transracial parents, one such parent reacted,

It's something you do because you think it's right. My wife and I could waste all our time agonizing over our motives. Deep down, did we want to make this child white? Or something? But it's what we do now that matters.<sup>85</sup>

Clayton Hagen, Minnesota's leader in the transracial adoption campaign, would agree. He tells the agencies that when couples indicate that they are interested in a minority race child, they need to accept them at their word and work with them from there. "The question then is not why does one want to adopt a child of another race; but how does a potential parent see his parenthood, and is adoption of a child of another race consistent with this."<sup>86</sup>

The answer to the motivation question lies somewhere in the middle between Hagen's idealistic approach and the constant probing of ones self. The answer lies in understanding ones self, not only ones motivation, but also his potential. A person cannot say, "I'm doing what I think is

right, and that's all that matters." Rather he needs to look also at the ramifications of what he is doing. There must be an understanding of what went into the decision and the possibilities of what will come out of it. Although motivation is not unimportant, finally the trans-racial parent must leave that behind him and decide, as the man confronted by the young black, "It's what we do now that matters." People who get involved in the "what I do now after adoption" quest, often find that they gain much more from the whole adventure than do the children they set out to help. As the parents become engrossed in another culture, and as their family faces up to the new challenges of an integrated family, they grow tremendously.<sup>87</sup> Many couples go into the adoption hoping that it will enhance their other children's understanding of racial issues.<sup>88</sup> Once again, this motivation is not always the best, but if the concern is centered more around "what I do now," the desired outcome may be much more far reaching than anticipated.

### The Agency and Its View of Transracial Adoption

The next three sections will deal with three particular views of white parents for black children; the agency,

the white community, and the black community. Each of these categories is extremely general, and it is impossible to isolate a single view for an entire community or category. What will be done is to give the trends of each community or institution, showing the changes that have occurred, and offering a prospectus for the future. This paper has already mentioned many of the agencies' policies and will only attempt here to give a succinct description of the outlook.

As mentioned earlier, transracial adoption came at the request of the parents involved, not from the agencies. Agencies were not only suspicious of such requests, but did not even consider them valid. Therefore, they discouraged people from thinking along such lines.<sup>89</sup> The bureaucracy, professionalism, and racism of the agencies are some of the major forces that prevent dependent black children from finding the homes they need.<sup>90</sup> When speaking of institutional racism, it is usually the educational systems, the industrial complexes, the government, and the church which are mentioned; but what about the institution of the agency? A very clear demonstration of such racism is found in E. R. Braithwaite's Paid Servant, a classic picture of social welfare and adoption. The book tells of Braithwaite's experiences as a "Negro" welfare officer, or social worker, in London in 1958. At one point Braithwaite is studying his files and notices the labels given by previous social

to all children who are not pure white: "Coloured, Black, Negroid, Half-African, Half-Indian, Anglo-Indian, Half-West Indian, Half-Negro, Half-Asian. Odd how the emphasis was always on the child's blackness."<sup>91</sup> Braithwaite claims that these children are not placed in homes because the social workers are too obsessed by color. The labeling sets up a kind of blockage in the minds of social workers which subconsciously inhibits their efforts for the children.<sup>92</sup> The labeling and the blockage have been common in the adoption practice of our own country.<sup>93</sup> The children have been held back, or discriminated against, not only by the antiquated adoption laws and policies of our agencies, but also by the unconscious racism of social workers.

A definition of the term white racism is needed here. Rev. William Griffen, one of the few black pastors of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, has edited a brief paper which succinctly defines the concept.

White racism is fundamentally the assumption that being white is superior to being non-white. While few whites today would argue for biological superiority most whites assume a cultural, social, and personal superiority. White racism is woven into the total complex fabric of American society and is used to justify the privilege of whites and the disadvantages of non-whites.<sup>94</sup>

Throughout the 1950's social workers placed black children only with the few black or mixed couples they could find, while thousands were dumped into understaffed institutions where no one ever came to cuddle them, etc. As a result, many died from the lack of love and attention, many became

institutional vegetables, many were placed in one foster home after another, and most were not well adjusted. Our nation's prisons eventually claimed many.<sup>95</sup>

In the early 1960's many agencies moved into the area of transracial adoption, and today it is a common practice, though only with certain agencies. Most social workers, however, still have grave misgivings, such as "how do such placements work out," "what about teenagers and dating," "who does the child identify with," etc.<sup>96</sup> These are extremely valid concerns. But because of the tremendous need for homes, many have either rationalized them with humanism,<sup>97</sup> or have glossed over them to fulfill the need.

Unfortunately, transracial adoption does not solve the problem of white racism in our agencies. Griffen's paper opens up the further ramifications of the term which applies here.

Cultural white supremacy exists within all of white society including "men of good will." Out of a sense of superiority, many whites wish to "help" Negroes become cultural copies of themselves. Such superiority lies behind many "educational" programs run by whites for Negroes in the city. Efforts toward integration have also been based upon the same sense of superiority, mainly, that moving into a white community is a move from an inferior culture to a superior culture. It has to be white to be good. A Negro child has to go to a white school to get a good education or a Negro family has to move to a white neighborhood to have a good house. Again, the opportunity for a Negro family to move into a white community is viewed as a favor granted by whites rather than a constitutional right. White superiority pervades American cultural heritage and cultural perceptions.<sup>98</sup>

Transracial adoption can be a racist act. When someone helps a person of another race, primarily because he is of another or lower race, he depreciates the person's worth as an individual and dehumanizes him.<sup>99</sup> This is always a danger in adopting across racial lines.

The expanded definition demonstrates the inculcation of racism, even into the subconscious of a person and a society.

The cultural heritage and perceptions support individual and institutional racism. The understanding of individual whites is grounded in the assumption of white supremacy. Although few individual whites today participate directly in acts of violence and hostility against non-whites, nearly all whites accept the psychological "benefits" of having a designated caste of inferiors. No matter how low or unsuccessful a white becomes, he can reassure himself that he is better than a Negro. In this respect racism is the foundation of white identity in America.

Most white individuals would claim that they do not discriminate against blacks and other racial minorities. The fact is that they do not need to discriminate directly against non-whites, the institutions in American society discriminate for them. Institutional racism operates in a variety of ways to perpetuate a differential between whites and non-whites.<sup>100</sup>

The innovation of transracial adoption, like so much of adoption practice, is essentially a white practice designed by white people for other white people. If adoption practice, and indeed the whole child welfare system, is to be relevant to the needs and strengths of black children, black families, and black communities, it is in need of major reform.<sup>101</sup> First and foremost, there is a need for agencies to employ many more black social workers.

Most will reply that none are available; but, if they are truly committed to the task, there are ways to secure their services while they are seeking advanced degrees.<sup>102</sup> There is also a tremendous need to change the power structure of agencies, giving blacks representation in policy making areas.<sup>103</sup> At the core of racism is the need to keep whites in leadership roles, whereas essential to the breakup of institutional racism is blacks being in power, taking a part in the decision making functions which affect their destiny.<sup>104</sup>

Some reform has already begun. Many agencies seem to have a new view. "Their 'enabling approach' concentrates on enabling families to adopt by giving them help and information about adoption, not screening them to see if they're fit." It does away with most of the inspections and evaluations, and rather seeks to develop a relationship based on mutual goals and respect. No longer is the applicant cast in the role of the child, while the agency plays the omnipotent father.<sup>105</sup> This enabling approach also emphasizes serving the family after the child has been placed. This is not done now just to determine whether or not the child will stay there, but to give post-placement information and help to the parents at the time questions and problems are the most meaningful.<sup>106</sup>

If transracial adoptions are to succeed, the administration and professional staff of the agencies involved must be convinced that there are families that can accept



the challenges, and still be able to provide warmth and security for the child.<sup>107</sup> In other words, they must consider such fathers and mothers "first best parents," not just second best. The agencies need to recognize the integrity of the parents who decided upon this venture.<sup>108</sup> Each worker has to look at his own innermost feelings concerning the general physical attributes of people, and in particular, racial attitudes. Does the worker conduct his studies more with an eye to physical matching or to the assessment of a child's potential needs for intellectual stimulation and a healthy emotional climate?<sup>109</sup> The agencies' and social workers' views are gradually changing. What attitude a prospective adoptive parent encounters depends a great deal upon which agency he first contacts.

#### The White Community and Its View of Transracial Adoption

The earliest concerns of white parents adopting black children have always been about how parents and communities will accept their new child. Although there are virtually no such children over ten years of age in the communities from whom we can get a true picture, the apprehensiveness seems to have been unwarranted. There are instances of individual problems, and community acceptance is not

complete, but there does not seem to be an overwhelming disapproval in the white community. When interracial adoption began, most people had not even considered the possibility. Today it is much better known and has increased as people have told others about their experiences. The most common response on the part of whites is neither strong approval or disapproval. There is a mild interest or curiosity and a feeling that "it's their business."<sup>110</sup> So reports Clayton Hagen. Some other reports confirm his diagnosis of good health. Parents Magazine observes: "So far serious problems with whites have not arisen...Reactions from the white community have ranged from silent disapproval, thru curiosity, to whole hearted acceptance."<sup>111</sup> In the true spirit of altruism, many whites praise the actions of their brothers as a fine charitable act. But most assume that these white parents will raise their children in a typical fashion, rearing them, as much as possible, with white values. However, these whites become disgruntled when they hear of some transracial parents who encourage "black attitudes" and who try to secure a "black mentality" themselves.<sup>112</sup>

It is definitely too soon to tell what the final reaction will be. Although relatively few families have encountered community problems over these little children, there is no reason to believe that white-black adoption is viewed with general approval. In 1966 a California minister gave up his adopted black son because the family

suffered so much harassment that it made newspaper headlines.<sup>113</sup> Sometimes the pressure is placed upon the older children at school rather than openly with the parents.<sup>114</sup> Sometimes the hostility takes the form of hate calls, such as: "Whatcha gonna do when he gets a white girl pregnant?" Others call such families "nigger lovers."<sup>115</sup> In 1971 a small Chicago suburb, Berwyn, Illinois, put such pressure on a white family with a new black child, that they had to go to the city council and appeal to the Open Door Society for letters of support. They received threatening phone calls and a bomb was exploded in their garage.<sup>116</sup> The incident did pass, and the child is now warmly received in the neighborhood. Often times the disapproval of the community takes the form of a look or a stare. These stares are often the result of the novelty of transracial adoption, but more often than not, convey the attitude of the starrer.

In considering the white community's attitude, a person cannot gloss over the white racism (as explained in the last section) which permeates every part of our society. Whites react on a "color-plus" basis--black plus laziness, black plus immorality, black plus militancy, etc. This response makes it very difficult for whites to recognize and admit their own racism, but rather they are seduced by rationalization and usually miss the racist signal.<sup>117</sup> Most white people operate with false assumptions concerning blacks. They do not understand the black

way of life. Sociologists have classified the black family structure as a matriarchial society, but there is very little understanding of it. If whites are going to judge the quality of family life, they need to throw away the conventional ideas of the mythical Anglo Saxon family of two parents named Prince Charming and Cinderella.<sup>118</sup> There is also a lack of understanding on the part of whites concerning black identity. For example, vaseline was found hidden in the lockers of a black home for boys. The white staff took it away, presuming that it might be used for homo-sexual activities. Later the psychiatrist learned that the boys were using the vaseline to treat their "ashy skin," a blemish experienced by some blacks during winter.<sup>119</sup>

The reaction of whites to the adoption of black children by other whites usually depends on what form of racism they practice and what their understanding is of black people. The key to true acceptance has been knowing the individual and letting him become a person. But the key to integration (a much higher goal than acceptance) is unknown. We have many mixed communities, but according to Kirkland, no truly integrated ones. For integration is a social structure which allows an individual to pursue his individuality and cultural uniqueness with no detriment to anyone. Even if there are families which work on this basis, and appear to be truly integrated and not just

mixed, they are not; the members also exist in a larger society which will not allow such standards and which treats them differently whenever they leave the confines of the family.<sup>120</sup>

So far the white community has only been examined as a whole; what about the white grandparents of these black youngsters? Most reports indicate that they are hard to win over. Sometimes the adoption results in a complete break, with a reaction such as, "Don't ever bring that child here again." But that is unusual. A permanent coolness is more common. Grandparents can be polite and proper and still treat the black child as if he is a little lame.<sup>121</sup> Subtle discrimination is also present. One grandfather wants his biological grandson to call him "Grampa," but his adopted black granddaughter to call him by his first name.<sup>122</sup> Some grandparental resistance is based upon what people will think. This usually lessens as anxiety fades, and they find reactions to be different than they had anticipated. Much opposition is based on apprehension for the adoptive couples and fear that they will be hurt. Grandparents with genuine concern do worry and usually advise against such adoptions. One mother points out, "My folks were worried, sick before I had my biological children, too."<sup>123</sup> As mentioned earlier, the key to true acceptance by whites has been knowing the individual and letting him become a person. Most of the children have themselves "won over" the grandparents, who

then have as firm of a committment to them as to any child.

Racism is also present in relationships of friends to transracial families. They are often as difficult as strangers. Parents and children alike are bothered by well-intentioned statements such as, "It's wonderful that you could take this child," or reference to biological children as "your own children."<sup>124</sup> These remarks ascribe an inferior status to the adopted child. Some claim that the problem is not race, but adoption. "It's really that we don't have a language for talking about adoption," one mother says. "We're stuck with words that aren't appropriate and they can really threaten the kids."<sup>125</sup>

One thing is clear. There is no clear cut attitude on the part of the white community as a whole concerning transracial adoption. But as it becomes more common, many people are accepting of the practice, and many communities take these individual children under their wings. Most of those whites who are accepting do not view these children as black, but merely as the children of Mr. and Mrs. "So-and-so." They also assume that they will be brought up with white attitudes. But the time may come when these children will not only leave their secure family, but also the community which has accepted them. Then the institutional racism built into the society by the white community will take hold of them, and all the prior acceptance which they received may "vanish into thin air."

## The Black Community and Its View of Transracial Adoption

If the white community's view seemed diverse, there is even a greater diversity of opinion among the blacks concerning adoption of black children by white parents. Originally the goal of blacks was for whites to give them integration. Although they were so thoroughly linked to the slave concept of themselves that they could not seriously imagine participating in society on the same level with whites, the majority of black people dreamed of the day when this would come to pass. They also straightened their hair, bleached their skin, and put clothes pins on their noses to make themselves more like whites and allow the transition to be somewhat easier.<sup>126</sup> In 1958 E. R. Braithwaite, a black social worker in London referred to previously, became a pioneer in transracial adoption. His attitude was:

Seems to me that if any white person showed a wish to foster or adopt a coloured child, our first step should be to encourage instead of frightening them off with talk of problems and adolescence...I would help them to understand that all children pass through difficult periods during growth and development, and that a coloured child's problems need be no greater.<sup>127</sup>

That was 1958, but most black people today are still integrationists and would support transracial adoption even with the assimilation concept attached.<sup>128</sup> Therefore, "Parents Magazine" was able to say that inspite of some skepticism, the reaction of Negroes to transracial adoption

seems to be mainly positive. The reason for this reaction, it claims, is that black social workers like Braithwaite were the original supporters of this venture, and also that agencies are careful in screening prospective parents.<sup>129</sup> The real reason is that the view represented is the black middle class, the black professionals, and the black lower class who are still seeking integration by the same methods. Frequently black unwed mothers fall into this category and are not opposed to having their child placed with a white family.<sup>130</sup>

But this accepting view is not the only one found in the black community. There are some blacks who are violently opposed to the whole idea of whites being parents to blacks. There are also many who are quite realistic and concerned with what kind of parents they are going to be to these black children. However, to understand any of these feelings, it is extremely important that a person understand black power and "the movement."

This paper has already dealt with the meaning of racism in America. We live in a society where almost anything white is good and anything black is evil. If that has been fully grasped, then black power can be seen as a necessary step to move out of that built in inferiority. For three hundred years, whites and blacks have both been socialized to assume that a black is a "nobody." When a black child goes to school and asks, "Who am I?", he is taught who he is not. "You're not Snow White; you're not



Little Red Riding Hood; you're not Bo Peep."<sup>131</sup> Our culture teaches the child who he should want to be, not who he is. It teaches him the history of civilization, but does not mention the highly established cultures, such as Ghana, in existence before Columbus "invaded America." Society has chosen to deal with the black man only in terms of his history after it had made him a slave, and then it has not really treated him at all.<sup>132</sup>

In order for any individual or group to have full participation in a society, there must be a recognition of one's own worth. Black people needed an identity. They had to lose their self-perceived inferiority and be a "somebody," belonging to "something." That is precisely what black power is all about.<sup>133</sup> When black became beautiful, blacks discovered that they need not have apologized, they need not have deprecated their ways, and they need not have wanted to be white. What they did need was to have pride in their black selves and in their black heritage. The moment that blackness was regarded with pride it became a basis for unity, solidarity, and success.<sup>134</sup>

But black power threatens white people. They do not understand it and feel that it must be anti-white. Black unity and even separation are not the ultimate goals of most black power advocates. Blacks need to become a united people before they can truly participate as equals and pursue as individuals the uniqueness which each person

has.<sup>135</sup> The method to achieve this is

...a new form of segregation which will hopefully, in time, bring a new demand for integration--the integration of whites into the re-created culture that the Black minority has begun to achieve.<sup>136</sup>

Instead of being threatened by it, white parents with black children should support such black power thinking because it means that their black children can be "somebodies," not because they were adopted by whites, but because they are themselves.<sup>137</sup>

Not every black power advocate has these goals. In the black community there is also a group of complete separationists whose ultimate goal is still separation. They are sometimes referred to as black militants or revolutionaries, (Not all militants are complete separationists; a few who seek this new kind of integration as the final goal are still considered militant by others.) and they are the only segment of the black community which can truly be said to have black racist attitudes. They have over-emphasized the worth of blacks with many of them feeling that the only basis for the success of blacks is to have a separate society in Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina. However, many in the movement consider this faction to be the fringe and only temporary.<sup>138</sup> Whether or not this group remains the fringe will depend on the results achieved by the movement. If true, integration cannot even be negotiated with a base of black power, the fringe will grow

until it becomes the movement.

What is going on in the black community does violence to the idealistic notion that there are not really any fundamental differences among men; that differences of color and appearance are trivial and superficial.<sup>139</sup> Some trans-racial parents have said that the differences between their child with brown skin and the one with white skin is no greater than the differences between their child with blonde hair and red hair. That could have been true, but society has removed the validity of such a statement by determining that it is a difference of much greater magnitude.<sup>140</sup> Reality has made the ideal almost impossible to live in. There is no reason, however, why color blindness cannot be replaced in the transracial parent by color richness. The multi-racial family and its individual members may be richer than a family of all one color. But the richness will come from recognizing the racial differences, rather than ignoring them.<sup>141</sup>

It was recommended earlier that the transracial parent support the black power movement. However, the reverse of this is not true. Most black power advocates are not able to support adoption of black children by whites. One black social worker put it this way:

For whites to be ripping off black children at this time in history is a very bad thing... black people are trying to do this identity thing

now and we've never been more serious about it. We've got to get on the stick and adopt our own children to stop this trend.<sup>142</sup>

The movement is trying<sup>?</sup> to unify blacks around their blackness, to give them identity as a separate group, and thus to make them a strong base for power. Transracial adoption can break blacks away and give them white attitudes. Such adoption is considered by many to be just another racist act. The greater concern of the black community is for the black children involved. "It's a cruel trick to play on a child," says one spokesman. Alvin Poussaint, a black psychiatrist, thinks that black social workers are essential to screen conscious and unconscious attitudes in white applicants, many of whom want to tell the child that color does not matter.<sup>143</sup> A black social worker states: "Unless the parents have exceptional understanding and maturity, transracial adoption in this society can create a host of identity problems and conflicts for the child."<sup>144</sup>

There seem to be at least three divergent views in the black community about transracial adoption. The black integrationists can support it. The black realists are in favor of black children in black homes. Nevertheless, because of the tremendous number of homes for black youngsters which cannot yet be found by the black community, they can support limited adoption by whites who make every effort to give this child his black heritage and black identity. The third view is that transracial adoption is wrong and that all blacks should live together, separated from white

racist influences.<sup>145</sup> White parents, of black children are at first surprised by black opposition. Racial polarization makes them uneasy, but most assign black hostility no more weight than white hostility. However, it has spotlighted a problem which few of the transracial advocates foresaw ten years ago--identity.<sup>146</sup>

### Identity Crisis

Every person faces the question, "who am I," sometime in his life. Usually it is most significant in the late adolescent years, yet it is always crucial. How he faces and answers that probing question will determine his outlook and future. It tends to be even more difficult for a black person because, as stated earlier, culture teaches him that he is a "nobody." For the person who is adopted, the identity problem can become gnawing. The question is not only who am I, but how did I come into being and why. Was I born out of love? If my features and part of my personality were determined by my biological parents of whom I know nothing about, I have no mirrors to show me where I came from. Two sets of parents shaped me, but each had different values, morals, and goals. So who really am I? These questions in themselves are hard enough to answer, but the transracially adopted child must also

cope simultaneously with being a black person immersed with white values.<sup>147</sup> The sets of parents which shaped me came from different cultures, different mind sets, different statuses. One of my four parents was considered inferior, another may have been considered superior; what does that make me? To whom do I owe my allegiance? Whom do I follow and try to emulate? Who am I?

Many transracial parents try to acquaint their children with the black culture, heritage, and mind set. However, Mrs. Audrey Russell, a leader in the Alliance of Black Social Workers, breaks the illusion: "No matter how broad-minded and tuned-in the family, there's so much unconscious white bias in minute-by-minute family living that the child can't escape it." Although the transracial child has built a strong self image and is accepted by his family, and possibly even his community, there will come a time when he will have to come in contact with our racist society. He will not be able to reconcile his self image and the status prescribed for him by society.<sup>148</sup> One case in point which is outside the realm of adoption is about a boy who moved from an integrated community into the black ghetto of Los Angeles. "In facing a solid block of black faces he could see himself--yet he felt no identity with them," and he began to suffer precisely this kind of identity trauma.<sup>149</sup> A clearer demonstration of the problem is a certain black youth, raised among whites with the philosophy that "color makes no difference." When he became a college freshman

at a mid-western school, and his campus began to polarize between whites and blacks, he broke down. He told friends, "I'm black on the outside and white on the inside. I don't know who I am." The result was a need for psychiatric care.<sup>150</sup> In ten to fifteen years there will be a couple of thousand people facing the same crisis.

The identity question is important long before a person enters college. Children begin to notice skin color differences by about two and one-half years of age.<sup>151</sup> The black child will become aware that his appearance differs from his parents and from his white siblings, and other children will recognize his color too. For example, one mother noticed that her three-year-old black daughter kept washing her hands when they were not dirty, trying to get them as clean as those of her white sister.<sup>152</sup> In another case a somewhat older boy actually drew blood in trying to scrub his hands clean.<sup>153</sup> When children watch the Saturday morning cartoons and later try to role play the show, Buc Wheat, who would be the logical choice to play Buc?<sup>154</sup> In one incident of children watching a jungle picture on television, when the natives were preparing for battle, the white children watching taunted their part-Negro brother with shouts of "there's your grandfather."<sup>155</sup>

The child will bring endless questions about himself to his parents. The answers he receives need to "jive" with what he hears from other children, but they also need to help him cope with the situation. Some transracial

parents feel that their question answering is easier than that of other adoptive parents. It is quite obvious that their children are adopted. The facts of racial difference, like the facts of sex, can be presented gradually at levels appropriate to their child's understanding.<sup>156</sup> But other parents are not so optimistic. They know that in a few years the questions may sound more like accusations. "Why am I here?" "Why wasn't I adopted by black people?" "What about the problems I keep hearing about of the people who look just like me?" "What are we doing?"<sup>157</sup> And the cycle still goes farther. One couple who have a black teenager has already faced the situation when, in fits of anger, their son has called them "whitey" or "honkey." They were wise, and refused to take that kind of bait. Gradually the boy abandoned it. Some parents rationalize that their children's adolescent "black anger," though discomfoting, may be less destructive than drugs.<sup>158</sup>

The issue for parents is extremely practical. They know that when their black child is on his own, he will be treated differently than their white youngster. They know they have to prepare him differently, but how?<sup>159</sup>

The answers to this question vary according to the attitudes of the person presenting them. Since few trans-racial children have hit the teenage years, there is little empirical data to support any hypothesis. One of the few people who have written a great deal about the identity



question of transracial children is Clayton Hagen, supervisor of the adoption unit of Lutheran Social Service at Minnesota. To Hagen, identity means that in order to function, each person needs a positive self-concept. The parents' main role is to help a child develop a positive concept of self and others. Self-concept is formed by how a person perceives that others regard him. Since parents are the most significant people in a child's life during his formative years, if he feels that his parents regard him as their child and he has value to them, he will begin to develop a concept of himself not only as their child, but also as a worthwhile person. This means that the parents' self-concepts are also important. In order for them to communicate these feelings of value to a child, they must feel like his parents and get satisfaction from being parents. He recommends that the agencies use their time with the parents before and after the placement in strengthening their self-concept as people and as parents. That is the main reason for getting rid of the evaluations, judgements, and standards as much as possible, for these tend to weaken their self-concepts as parents.<sup>160</sup>

Hagen stresses that people be viewed as individuals and that their identity needs to come from themselves and not from their race or biological background. When race is not seen in terms of identity, but only as a factor which makes up the person's unique individuality, then a

person's race can be appropriately talked about.

Then, all of the information and knowledge and understanding of racial background adds to the description of the person and his understanding and feelings about himself. However, if a person must find his identity in his race, then his own uniqueness and his own worth must be minimized.<sup>161</sup>

Hagen admits that the concept a person has of himself is also influenced, weakened or strengthened, by peers and the larger community. A white child's identity may be strengthened as he encounters acceptance by the larger world; a black child's may be weakened. But Hagen would argue that this is not necessarily so. He says that a Negro child who has good feelings about himself and others may be well regarded by peers and the significant adults he encounters. He may receive (according to the experience of Hagen's agency) a more positive response than a white child including other children in the family.<sup>162</sup>

Clayton Hagen concludes that a person who can find his identity in his humanness can then consider being parents to another human who may be of another race. One does not need to deal with all the questions and uncertainties involved in a child of another race, but can focus primarily upon whether or not he can help this person feel he has value. If a child has a good feeling of self worth, he can then deal with the many problems he may have to face which the parent cannot help him with.<sup>163</sup>

I believe that if we can convey to a child the values on which we act and live, this will contribute to a more positive identity than which race he belongs to. If we can convey how we deal with our culture, we can also give our children a way to live with theirs. In this way the individual's values are not dependent on what everybody says or does but rather on what he believes about himself and other people.<sup>164</sup>

Many support this answer to the identity question. According to Brooten, most transracial parents stress to their families moral values, religious culture, the family as a value in itself, the beauty of human diversity, and the child's own uniqueness. "He'll figure out black identity later," says one Minnesotan pastor whose black son is eight. "First he's Jeff Akre, one of a kind, and he's going to make his own terms with the world."<sup>165</sup>

Most blacks do not share this view. They see the pitfalls in this humanness approach. The ideal is beautiful, but the identity question hinges around the fact that when the child is on his own, he will face a different world than the one of his accepting family. In the child's world every person is first a human being, and his racial differences follow much later. But on the battleground of life in this society he may be considered ugly because of his thick lips and kinky hair. He may not be treated as an important person. He will be treated differently than his white brothers, and he will not know why.<sup>166</sup> His super strong self concept may prove to be a detriment,

because he cannot coincide his own picture of himself and the way he is treated; and so this child is in danger of going psychotic.

The black child reared in a white home can gain little support from the black community; they see things differently. They were not taught merely that discrimination should not exist because all people are basically the same. They were taught how to live in a world of discrimination, how to fight it, cope with it, and sometimes overcome it.<sup>167</sup>

The transracial child knows he is beautiful because he learned that he was. But when he is shown again and again that he is ugly, he has to doubt his beauty at least a little. He also has to doubt the people who told him he was beautiful. In fact he may begin to see their support not as a strength, but a hindrance. For now he lives in a world where his only support comes from them, and they will be dead some day. However, the person from the black community knows he is beautiful because his community tells him so. Although the media, his job, and his education give him another picture, he is supported every day by the entire black populace.

Black people are different. They live in a different culture.<sup>168</sup> The transracially adopted child needs to either learn to live in that culture or to be completely accepted in the white culture. If not, he becomes a marginal person.<sup>169</sup> Polarization will also have a deep effect on the black child with white parents. As he faces the problem, he needs

more than the fact that people should not be polarized because they are all really the same. He needs to know how to deal with it. When sides are being taken, he has to be able to decide what he will do.<sup>170</sup>

Fred Smith, referred to before as a black sociology professor, was also a social worker under Clayton Hagen in the early 1960's in Minnesota. He has an extremely strong reaction to this whole approach and asks, "Will you always live in a dream?" Smith reports that several white families with whom he placed children eight or nine years ago, now wish that they had spent those years recognizing their children's blackness and helping them to deal with it.<sup>171</sup>

There is no reason why a multiracial family cannot have the ideals as given by Hagen and still attempt to prepare a child to live in a black culture. These parents try a dual strategy based on professional advice and the experience of the last ten years. They teach each child to be proud of his racial heritage, and they emphasize individual worth and ethical values above race. They try to give black friends, black art, black literature and culture an honored (but not dominating) place in the home. Many discover that black studies begun out of parental duty evolve into a fascinating pursuit.<sup>172</sup>

Burns urges whites to actively create ways for black children to express their own group identity. Chitterling,

blackeyed peas, and collard greens should be given an equal place with roast beef and chile con carne. Afro haircuts are also a wonderful expression of identity. Why are they feared by whites?<sup>173</sup> However, many feel there are pitfalls in emphasizing racial heritage too much. One mother remarks, "If you announce every hour on the hour that black is beautiful, pretty soon that kid's going to wonder." It's very possible that a parent can weaken his relationship with his child and hold him at a distance by harping on his race. That's always a hazard in trying to do "both, and."

The goal is balance, and the ideal is to listen for subtle clues of anxiety and to respond to them in a positive, yet realistic way.<sup>174</sup> "My first father was brown and my first mother was white," a six-year-old remarked thoughtfully. "Don't you think it's lucky to have some of both," her mother responded. The mother's reply, which was both direct and respectful of both races, left the child beaming; she hadn't thought of it that way before.<sup>175</sup> With biracial children it is important to stress both heritages, although having white parents, they will usually automatically receive the one, but it takes more effort to present the other.

Another problem to be faced is what to do when a black child uses his color as a mask to hide behind. It happens both in white families and white society. One mother tells about her son complaining, "The boys pick on

me because I'm a Negro," when she knew that it was not true.<sup>176</sup> Sometimes reverse discrimination takes place. A white father with a nine year old black son and also older white sons explains, "Jerry gets so much attention that he tends to regard himself as special--above the rules." Jerry's teachers had let him get by "until he figured all he had to do was smile and it wouldn't matter if he hadn't done his homework." His father had to be emphatic with school authorities before Jerry began receiving equal treatment.<sup>177</sup> That mask which the children are tempted to wear needs to be exposed. Parents need to be aware of a black child's cultural identity, but they also need to treat black and white children equally. Sometimes it is necessary to forget that these children are black and treat them the same as other children who have similar problems.<sup>178</sup>

A statement of Hagen side by side with one of Smith is a fit conclusion for this section. It will clearly show the differences in approach to the identity problem.

Inter-racial adoption has demonstrated that many people respond to a child of another race. We have learned that people need not have special abilities to be parents to a child of another race. It depends on how they see people. When a person sees the child and his humanness, the response is a natural human response to a child.<sup>179</sup>

Smith gives this illustration. Anyone can love a baby tiger. A person can adopt it and make it a pet. He will be cuddly and loveable; there will be a beautiful relationship. But someday that tiger will grow up and weigh

over four hundred pounds. He'll no longer be cuddly and loveable, but probably ferocious. As a person raises him he needs to be aware of what he will be like when he grows up and realistic in how he makes it a pet. Transracial parents need to envision their black child at fifteen and sixteen years of age. They need to face the problems such as dating and marriage before they arise. Identity is a real problem. It can be overcome, but it needs to be dealt with by realistic thinking, not an ideal of humanness.<sup>180</sup>

#### After Adoption

Suppose that, after taking all of this into consideration, a white person goes ahead and makes the decision to adopt a black child; what does he do now? Does he treat him differently? Are any changes needed in family life? In trying to present a full picture of transracial adoption, much has already been indicated which a family needs to do. This section will try to briefly summarize some possible changes in life style. Most of what will be presented was received at Lutheran Family and Children's Services' Institute on Black Culture for Adoptive Couples on November 13-14, 1971, at which Jack Kirkland presented some considerations



for the life of a transracial family.

The main consideration is to not just adopt a child, but to adopt the whole black race. A child will sense very soon if a person has reached down to save one poor soul, or if he is actively concerned about a problem faced by an entire people. Transracial parents need to be doing something about the racism in all of our institutions-- especially in education. A person does not need to demonstrate on street corners to work for change.<sup>181</sup> McCurdy also strongly urges white parents with black children to participate actively in eliminating the exploitation of blacks.<sup>182</sup>

A person cannot know a black culture while living exclusively in a white world. Some of the ways in which a white parent and his transracial family can become acquainted with the world of the blacks are:

- (1) The family can attend or join a church which has a sizeable black population. They may be stared at in the beginning, but it will help them to understand how a black person feels in a white setting.
- (2) It is important for a multiracial family to send their children to a mixed school and to actively work at making it truly integrated.
- (3) Transracial families need to have social relationships with other blacks. However, the temptation is to associate only with blacks

who have an integrated approach. But that is just as narrow as associating only with whites. If a person is to gain a black mentality, he needs to communicate with black liberationists, people on welfare, and the whole gamut.

- (4) Another way of securing a black mentality is by keeping up with the literature in the field. Reading lists can be obtained offering a spectrum of black thinking. Magazines and newspapers are available for subscription which also display black attitudes.
- (5) Encounter or sensitivity sessions can help a person get at his feelings about race. However it is important to enter one which not only performs surgery, but which also does some suturing.<sup>183</sup> In working across racial barriers, one needs to look at his set prejudices, racial and otherwise. As black militancy has grown, latent prejudices of whites have become activated.<sup>184</sup>
- (6) It is important for a person to be aware of the meaning of his action. Eighty to ninety percent of learning takes place when the teacher does not know he is teaching and the learner does not know he is learning. A person is always communicating, and he needs to be aware of what he is saying.

- (7) Many courses are available in black studies.  
Since most schools do not teach this, the parents have the responsibility of doing it.
- (8) Seminars on black food preparation are offered.  
The food of a culture is a significant part of it.
- (9) A white parent has to make a special effort to learn the language of blacks. Black communication uses many abbreviations, expressions, and mannerisms which are not understood by whites. If a parent tells his child, "Stop using those words; we don't do that here," he is saying, "I don't have any respect for your culture or for you."<sup>185</sup>  
Black children also often use non-verbal communication which the parent needs to participate in if he is to show that this, too, is a very acceptable behavior for his child.<sup>186</sup>
- (10) The greatest influence on a child today is the media. It also is filled with racism, and left alone, can wharp a child's mind. A parent should be an interpreter of the media for his child. He also needs to have a built-in racism detector.
- (11) The music of black people has always been about protest. Spirituals, ragtime, jazz, and blues have all been protest music. Listen to some recordings by blacks. They will tell about black

feeling and "black soul."

- (12) Transracial parents need to get together as a group, not only to share problems, but to learn more about the culture. They can invite young blacks in to speak about changing trends.<sup>187</sup>
- (13) Finally, living in an integrated community may help the child with his identity. If while maturing he can freely interact with other blacks, it will be easier for him to comprehend the expectations and prescriptions for minority persons, besides making the culture truly a part of himself. Thus he may be able to handle successfully the hostility and stereotypes that later challenge his identity.<sup>188</sup>

These are a few ways in which a multiracial family can open itself up to a black mind set, and give itself a black mentality. The family may be enriched while being deeply involved in two cultures.

#### Alternatives to Transracial Adoption

The title of this paper is "Black Children with White Parents." The emphasis has to be upon the children not the parents. With over 100,000 children in need of homes,

transracial adoption is certainly not the sole answer. Billingsley claims that adoption across racial lines has received much more public interest than is warranted by either its place in child welfare practice or its potential for meeting needs of children in need of families. It does reflect social change in intergroup relations in the larger society but it can hardly be hailed as contributing major solutions to current child welfare problems.<sup>189</sup> The recent response by black families to the same needs when confronted by black personnel has not received a fraction of the publicity that this has.<sup>190</sup>

What is needed, however, is a multi-pronged attack to find homes for the vast number of children waiting for permanent homes. Transracial adoption can be one prong, but the main goal must be to find black homes for black children.

There are many black families, available to adopt children. In fact, percentagewise, they are already adopting more than whites.<sup>191</sup> What has kept more black families from doing the same is the old restrictions and having to deal with another white institution and social agency which they feel they cannot trust. However, when a special program was organized in Detroit with black leadership in which a mostly black staff did the recruiting, and it was done in the black community on a personal level; the success was astounding. One hundred and thirty-four black children were placed in black homes in the first

year.<sup>192</sup>

Another alternative in finding more homes is subsidized adoptions. Most black families simply cannot afford to adopt. The first year's cost to the couple, including legal and agency fees, plus medical, food, and clothes expenses, normally runs over \$1,000. By subsidizing the adoption, the state either picks up the tab for the first year's expenses<sup>193</sup> or pays a lower subsidy than it does to foster parents. At any rate, the state saves money with this process compared to twenty years of costly foster care. Although they get less money, the majority of foster parents in Illinois are hoping for the subsidized adoption because of its permanence.<sup>194</sup> In other states the permanent home concept is being practiced. Here the child becomes a permanent part of a family which receives financial payments from the state. The difference is that the state retains legal guardianship since state laws prevent payment for a child to a legal guardian.<sup>195</sup> This is almost the same as the permanent foster care program being pushed by others.<sup>196</sup>

There are some changes being made in laws and policies to allow more permanent black homes to be made available for children. More reform is needed on the agency level. New imaginative ways of recruitment in the black community must be developed.<sup>197</sup> Black families need to be treated as buyers in a sellers market. Drastic reform in the power

structure and the racial make-up of the staff is necessary, or else new black agencies should be created.<sup>198</sup> Trans-racial adoption can be a part of this multi-pronged attack to put children into permanent families. It is the responsibility of transracial parents and all parents to push for this multi-pronged attack and the reforms which are necessary.

#### Where is the Child Best?

After studying all the aspects of transracial adoption, most people (that includes the transracial parent) come back to the same question, "Where is the child better off?" "Should we ever have adopted our black child in the first place?" The question itself is invalid, because it assumes there is an answer. It assumes that there is an ideal parent for every child--almost a black Prince Charming and a black Cinderella. There is no such ideal couple, not for a black child; not for a white child; not for a purple child. The child is best in a home where he ends up pursuing his individuality and his cultural uniqueness with no detriment to anyone (definition of true integration). The child is best where he can find his identity for his entire life; identity as an individual; identity as a black;

identity as being important; identity as having an obligation to people who do not have an identity. This is most likely to occur in a black home, and agencies normally place children under the proper assumption that black children are best off in black homes, and white children are best off in white homes. But it is not an absolute assumption. The same goals can be reached when a black child is in a white home, if that family is involved with more than assimilation and more than giving a strong self-concept, but rather in adopting a mentality and indeed a whole race. The first best parent for that child is the one who enables him to achieve those goals for himself. The second best parent is the one who fills in for the shortage of first best ones.

Many try to look at the results of transracial adoption and prove their point one way or the other. But since the results are almost non-existent, there is little resolution. Yet people search for results to confirm their feelings. Some point to Claudia McNeil, the distinguished black actress who ran away as a child from an intolerable situation at home and was employed by a Jewish family as a mother's helper. A year later they started legal proceedings to adopt her. She explains,

My adopted parents were wonderful, kind people. I shudder to think what would have happened to me if they hadn't adopted me...white parents who are adopting a black child should be told to stop worrying about what's to be and what will



come and just concentrate on the normal business of raising their children in the best way they know how. That's really all that matters anyway.<sup>199</sup>

Most white parents of black children would like to believe Claudia McNeil. They would like to believe the results they have found for themselves. When they adopted, the question of where is the child best had one consideration-- "Was it better for a Negro child to have a white home or no home at all?"<sup>200</sup> That question is still basic to adoption today. (Many foster homes are far more than no home at all. The problem is that they are not necessarily permanent.) People adopt because they answer that a white home is better than no home. "My home is available." The idealism which Hagen so clearly demonstrated is probably the major factor in their adoption. "Why shouldn't this child be our child?" "He has as much of a right to have white parents as black parents." "He is a human being in need, and we can fulfill that need." "Basically he's no different than anyone else, and he deserves a home just like anyone else." "We can love him just like any other parents and give him all that he needs." And so the list is endless. The motivations are real and sincere, and the ideals are good. There should be no real reason why a black child cannot have white parents.

A white person becomes a parent to a black child for some very good reasons. But he also becomes a true parent to that child for some very good reasons. Many such

parents have discovered, after the child has become a part of themselves, that the ideal which motivated them (often the Christian ideal which says that a person's importance comes not from his color, but from the fact that he is a child of God, redeemed by Jesus Christ) is not practiced by people in society. Although there should be no real reason why a black child cannot have white parents, people have made reasons and live according to those reasons. The parent still believes in the ideal and will try to live according to it. But he will not allow that ideal to wreck his child's life. And so he moves into reality and asks, "What can I do to be the kind of parent this child needs?" Discovering a course of action, he pursues it until he discovers an even more effective way of bringing about the goals mentioned earlier.

The question needs to be asked by the realist, a person who has contemplated transracial adoption but decided against it, because as the question itself asks, "What are you doing to a black baby's future when you give him white parents in a race-crazy society?"<sup>201</sup> The question must then be answered by a realistic parent:

I am doing everything at my disposal to enable him to pursue his cultural uniqueness and his individuality. I will do anything possible to enable him to claim his identity as an individual and as a black. I am actively involved in trying to change that race-crazy society, in removing the racism that holds down my child and every black person. I am about the business of creating a society where all people can pursue their cultural uniqueness and individuality.

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<sup>3</sup>Morgenstern, LXXVIII, 66.

<sup>4</sup>Sally Bixby Defty, "Rise Here," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, September 14, 1969. Reprint.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

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<sup>14</sup>Fred Smith, Speech to Lutheran Family And Children's Services Institute On Black Culture For Adoptive Couples, November 13, 1971.

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<sup>16</sup>Clayton H. Hagen, "Placement of the Minority Race Child," Frontiers In Adoption, Report on Institute held in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in October 1967 (March 1969), p. 29.

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- <sup>20</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup>Morgenstern, LXXVIII, 72.
- <sup>22</sup>Hagen, "Placement of the Minority," p. 32.
- <sup>23</sup>Morgenstern, LXXVIII, 72.
- <sup>24</sup>Hagen, "Placement of the Minority," p. 32.
- <sup>25</sup>Billingsley and Giovanni, p. 57.
- <sup>26</sup>Marion M. Mitchell, "Transracial Adoptions Philosophy and Practice," Child Welfare, XLVIII (December 1969), 615.
- <sup>27</sup>Billingsley and Giovanni, p. 57.
- <sup>28</sup>Why black families have not responded to such recruitment in the past will be discussed later in the paper.
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- <sup>30</sup>Barbara Griffin and Marvin Arffa, "Recruiting Adoptive Homes for Minority Children--One Approach," Child Welfare, XLIX (February 1970), 105.
- <sup>31</sup>Shepherd, p. 10.
- <sup>32</sup>Mitchell, XLVIII, 615.
- <sup>33</sup>Fred Robinson, Social Worker for Lutheran Family and Children's Services, interview, October 5, 1971.
- <sup>34</sup>Morgenstern, LXXVIII, 72.
- <sup>35</sup>Mitchell, XLVIII, 619.
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid!
- <sup>37</sup>Griffin and Arffa, XLIX, 106.
- <sup>38</sup>Phyllis Garland, "A Child...Is A Child...Is A Child," Ebony, XXII (April 1967), 48.
- <sup>39</sup>Morgenstern, LXXVIII, 71.

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- <sup>54</sup>Hagen, "Placement of the Minority," pp. 32-33.
- <sup>55</sup>Feinstein, p. 82.
- <sup>56</sup>Billingsley and Giovanni, p. 64.
- <sup>57</sup>Mitchell, XLVIII, 616.
- <sup>58</sup>Shepherd, p. 11.
- <sup>59</sup>Kirkland, Speech to O. D. S., September 20, 1971.
- <sup>60</sup>Mitchell, XLVIII, 615.
- <sup>61</sup>Garland, XXII, 49.
- <sup>62</sup>Mitchell, XLVIII, 615.
- <sup>63</sup>Ibid., 616.

- <sup>64</sup>Falk, p. 66.
- <sup>65</sup>Isaac, p. 129.
- <sup>66</sup>Mitchell, XLVIII, 616.
- <sup>67</sup>Isaac, p. 129.
- <sup>68</sup>Mitchell, XLVIII, 615.
- <sup>69</sup>Shepherd, p. 11.
- <sup>70</sup>Defty, reprint.
- <sup>71</sup>Falk, p. 66.
- <sup>72</sup>Ibid., pp. 58-59.
- <sup>73</sup>Jack Kirkland, Speech to Lutheran Family and Children's Services Institute on Black Culture For Adoptive Couples, November 13, 1971.
- <sup>74</sup>Feinstein, p. 48.
- <sup>75</sup>Brooten, p. 78.
- <sup>76</sup>Smith, November 13, 1971.
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- <sup>78</sup>Brooten, p. 78.
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- <sup>81</sup>Kirkland, Speech to Institute on Black Culture, November 13, 1971.
- <sup>82</sup>Smith, November 13, 1971.
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- <sup>108</sup>Adoptive Couples, Comment during general discussion at Lutheran Family and Children's Services Institute on Black Culture For Adoptive Couples, November 14, 1971.

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