

Cross-Racial Adoption

**Denice Kelly
Whitman College**

Joey is a 10-year-old boy. He's into video games, loves baseball, goes to school, pretty much what all boys his age are doing. Unlike other boys, though, Joey has no one with whom to share the special moments of his life. For years a Latino couple has tried to adopt Joey, to give him the family he's always dreamed of. They have worked through all the paperwork, have saved up enough money, but because Joey is black, his social worker believes he would need a black family and has heavily fought the adoption. Joey still remains parentless, facing everyday without the warmth and love a parent can provide.

Today, America is ignoring the cries of orphaned children across the country. On July 27, 1999 the Boston Herald suggests that love and care have become secondary priorities in the child welfare system, second to race. To further analyze this problem we must first discuss the fear of multi-racial families in the U.S., and how it is keeping children parentless. Second, we will probe the cause of this fear and how it has permeated the minds of people everywhere. And third, we will discuss some solutions and analyze the amazing impact all of us can have in combating this terrible problem. First, let's examine this unique mindset that is keeping children parentless.

Law and Psychology Review in spring of 1996 documented the case of a Pennsylvania Supreme Court decision that allowed a 10-year-old African American boy, Shane, to be pulled from the white foster family that he had spent the majority of his life with, because he was black. The court even admitted, "Shane had already formed a strong psychological attachment to his foster parents". Yet they dismissed this attachment and yanked him out of this loving home. The Atlanta Journal and Constitution on June 20, 1999 suggests that segregation principles when determining families are becoming commonplace, where minority children are taken against their will from their loving homes because of skin color. The child welfare system has become polluted with discriminatory ideals of what a family should "look" like and, as always it's the children who suffer the most.

This suffering is described in two ways, first, how the child welfare system has become a nightmare for minorities, and second, how social workers and the judicial system have reinforced the belief of same-race homes.

Currently, the child welfare system encompasses over 500,000 children across the nation. According to the Forum on Adoption Issues in April of 1998, there has been a 70% increase in children in foster care since 1984, meaning more children enter the child welfare system than leave every year. Almost 60% or 300,000 are minority children. Since 1972, however, the number of transracial adoptions has dwindled to less than 1,000, according to the National Transracial Adoptive Families Population Survey. This means hundreds of thousands of minority children still wait for a home. In fact, the wait for black

children to be adopted is twice that of Caucasian children, almost five years. As you can see, the simple ideal that children belong in same-race homes has drastically affected the lives of minority children.

Many social workers are so adamant in their belief that race is extremely important in adoptive families that they have battled and have unfortunately won in the courts. The Chicago Sun-Times on March 10, 1999 illustrates the case of Baby T a 3-year old African-American baby who the Burkes, a Caucasian couple wanted to adopt. The reason for denying the adoption and returning the child to his mother, was that he needed a "culture unique to his race". The mother, incidentally, left her son when he was only 8 days old and has only recently kicked her 17-year cocaine habit. The message this court case stated to the public is that transracial adoption should be avoided at all costs. Race then becomes more important than the love and care a stable family can provide for a child.

Currently, there two main causes of this problem, the fears of the National Association of Black Social workers, or NABSW and the past discriminatory census procedures. In 1972, the NABSW issued a position paper against transracial adoption. It reads "Black children belong physically, psychologically, and culturally in Black families." From the beginning to end, the statement enforces the ideal that the color of your skin somehow determines your moral, physical, and psychological growth as a person They also believe that transracial adoption causes black children to lose their cultural background because they won't have sufficient black role models. These fears grew to enormous heights and have become the direct cause of negative attitudes towards transracial adoption.

According to the North American Council on Adoptable Children, the NABSW's position paper prompted state adoption laws for race matching. California was the main leader in adopting these sorts of policies that required state agencies to spend 90 days trying to match children ethnically before allowing transcultural placement. This means that hundreds of thousands of children are denied loving homes. Even Social Work, a highly respected magazine for social workers states that they openly support same-race adoptions based merely on the opinions of the NABSW. This lack of support for transracial families from both social workers and the courts leads to the belief that transracial families don't work because of lack of a homogenous skin color.

We look to the Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law review for another cause of this unfounded fear towards multi racial families, which pinpoints the fact that for years the U.S. has defined itself as white and non-white, through different forms such as the US Census. In the past, the census allowed people to count only one racial background According to the October 10th issue of the Atlanta Journal and Constitution the U.S. Census has repeatedly undercounted minorities because of this and has never acknowledged multiracial backgrounds. This uncontested disregard of multiracial persons supported by the government has merely perpetuated the stigma associated with multi-racial families.

However, the idea that multi-racial families will somehow damage the child's cultural identity is completely unfounded. Numerous studies have proven this concept false, such as the study conducted by Rita Simon of America University and Howard Altstein of the University of Maryland. They composed a longitudinal study that spanned 20 years in which they interviewed the adopted children. They found that even at the young age of 4 the adopted children could correctly identify their race, and were also comfortably aware of their racial identity.

Fear of multi-racial families is a discriminatory emotion that dominates the minds of social workers and now our judicial system. For a solution we look to enforcing legislative laws against race matching and taking a stand in an innovative new census.

According to the April 14th issue of the Christian Science Monitor, groups such as the New York State Citizen's Coalition for Children are currently working on convincing the US department of Health and Human Services to act when state policies clearly violate the Multi Ethnic Placement Act or MEPA. The Department of Health and Human Services must send a clearer signal that there will be a withholding of federal funds from state's that have adopted race-matching policies. By joining these advocacy groups and raising our voices collectively we can convince the US department of Health and Human Services to take a firmer stance against race matching.

Another way to spread the message of diversity is through this year's new Census, according to the Seattle Times August 17th. . With 63 possible combinations of race anyone in America can now claim what they feel is part of their culture, giving multiracial persons the long awaited opportunity to include themselves as unique citizens in America. Many minority advocacy groups such as the NAACP, Black Civil Liberties Union, and the Mexican-American League according to the October 10th issue of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, feel America is not ready to face this kind of diversity, and have launched campaigns urging America to check only one racial category, to yet again limit the ability of multiracial persons to identify themselves in our society.

If we can't even allow multiracial families to acknowledge their existence to America, how are we going convince social workers and the judicial system that race should never be a factor in deciding where a child goes? That is why when we receive the Census on April 1st it is our job to help America face their fear, by checking as many boxes that apply to you. By acknowledging the diversity we can then start to alleviate the racism rampant in the child welfare system.

For more information about transracial adoption go to www.multiracial.com, with links to different organizations such as Adopt-Interracial Families by Adoption, the Transracial-Adoption group, and the North Atlantic Council on Adoptable children that have very useful information about how you can become involved in the fight against discrimination in the child welfare system.

Today we have discussed the terrible problems that have permeated the child welfare system. Beginning with the NABSW's position paper this idea has spread throughout the country, perpetuated by the U.S. census, keeping kids from being adopted. But there is a way for you and I to fight these ludicrous ideas of segregation in families, by learning more about this issue and speaking out against race-matching.

Joey is still black. He still loves baseball, still loves video games, and he still wants to a family. But fear is holding him back and denying him a right all children should have. Let's give these children the chance for a family whether it is black or white.

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