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The Political Psychology of Transracial Adoption

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Abstract. This article describes how political and psychological phenomena interact often to the detriment of transracial adoptees--even as transracial adoption is increasing in an era of globalization. These phenomena have noxious consequences for avoiding and resolving political conflict.

We are the world. We are the children. Right? With love and compassion, the children will grow to inherit a better world. A world in which there is mutual respect. Mutual caring. A world without hatred, without conflict. With seraphim and cherubim singing praises of the new world. All they are saying is give peace a chance. With the very heavens opening up, divulging God's own golden playgrounds as a rainbow staircase slowly extends to all amidst ambrosia and the perfumed fragrance of harp playing choirs. Hosanna!

Yet political ideologues who contest the very option of transracial adoption and others who place heavy qualifications on its advisability, administration, and frequency are not supporting the stairway to heaven beckoning to children needing a loving home. Moreover, the various opponents and less than whole-hearted supporters of transracial adoption explicitly and implicitly allege that its supporters are ignorant, racist, or merely misinformed. If we use the example of a black child--i.e., African-American, Negro, Afro-American (these terms being social constructs having varying correlations with some amorphous notions of race and political correctness)--being adopted by white adults-- i.e., Caucasian, Aryan, Eurocentric (these terms also being social constructs with a similar relationship to some notion of race and politics)--what follows are the common arguments of those who less than completely support transracial adoption.

Argument #1. Blacks (children) belong with blacks (adults.) Normal psychological development for black children will not occur otherwise. Significant psychological pain is ensured if the otherwise occurs. Also, to place black children with non-black parents demeans the black race (whatever black race means), the black child, and is commensurate with the slavery relationship of blacks to whites that permeates United States history. In fact, transracial adoption is in many ways worse than slavery for there is much more opportunity to engage in moment-by-moment, day-by-day moral and spiritual enslavement and to "deblack" the black, resulting in the phenomenological experience of being--if not black on the outside and white on the inside--underground or invisible.

According to this argument, then, transracial adoption is truly insidious. What, perhaps, is more insidious is the congruence of so-called black nationalists and white nationalists--albeit for some different reasons--around the argument.

Argument #2. The love-is-not-enough argument, pace Aaron Beck and Bruno Bettelheim. White parents may truly love their adopted black child, and the child actually believes this as well--which may be dependent on how much propaganda the child is fed about white devils, the "ice people," and so on. However, without living in a racially and ethnically integrated environment, the child will sooner or later go through searing psychological anguish that their loving parents will be hard-pressed to even identify--

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let alone do something about. The child will be unable to establish a stable identity, to feel like somebody, anybody. The child will be alienated from body and soul. I am somebody? They'll be nobody.

Of course, alienation of children from themselves, their parents, other people, and "society" seems to be the norm in varying degrees throughout psychological and social development. Following this argument to its logical extension would lead to necessitating that every child everywhere be immersed outside the home and inside, if possible, in an environment of people of similar color, beliefs, cultural practices, and so on. No one has ever lived in such an environment--not even Hitler youth, Hale-Bop cult members, and Vestal Virgins--and--given the imperatives of nature-nurture interaction--it would not in any case extinguish alienation. To advocate for such a narcissistic, solipsistic womb as the be-all and end-all for healthy development is more a reflection of our so-called postmodern world than of Platonic forms or Wittgensteinian facts of truth.

Albeit Arguments #1 and #2, in an era of increasing globalization transracial adoption is becoming--at least theoretically--a more frequent option. And the plain fact of the matter is that children lucky enough to have the opportunity for adoption by loving parents anywhere, anyplace, and anytime should be allowed that opportunity without a court of racial and ethnocentric inquisition masquerading as a progressive, liberal, compassionate lovefest. That even a good adoptive experience carries with it some pain is undoubtable. And that is true for love itself. Authorities from social service agencies--often more consciously and unconsciously concerned with their own power, turf, and sadomasochistic needs--should have much less say in this matter than they do now. Unfortunately, many political leaders engaged in interethnic and international conflict are similarly concerned with these aspects of malignant narcissism. And they don't seem to be forsaking their bases of power willingly. (See Alexander, R., Jr., & Curtis, C. M. (1996.) *Journal of Black Psychology*, 22, 223-235; Greer, S. (1997.) *Nietzsche and social construction: Directions for a postmodern historiography. Theory and Psychology*, 7, 83-100; Griffith, E. E. H. (1995.) *Forensic and policy implications of the transracial adoption debate. Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 23, 501-512; *Strategies for placement and adoption concerning children of color. (May 28, 1997.) Second Annual Conference, Department of Social Services, Statewide Council for People of Color. Worcester, Massachusetts.*) (Keywords: Race, Transracial Adoption.)