



Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption

Jane Jeong Trenka (Editor) , Julia Chinyere Oparah (Editor)

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Given Madonna's recent decision to adopt a child from Malawi, news and entertainment are abuzz with what you've observed yourself—in your own family, or the family next door, or passing the neighborhood playground—there's a boom in transracial adoption. Most coverage focuses on the struggles of good white parents wishing to adopt "unfortunate" children of color. Some touches on the irony of Black babies in the United States being exported to Canada and Europe because of their "unwanted" status here. Some even addresses the trafficking of children (of course, it would—that's sensational). But few look at

- o why babies are available for adoption in the first place
- o what happens when they grow up and
- o how we come up with solutions that are humane and just

Healthy white infants have become hard to locate and expensive to adopt. So people from around the world turn to interracial and intercountry adoption, often, like Madonna, with the idea that while growing their families, they're saving children from destitution. But as *Outsiders Within* reveals, while transracial adoption is a practice traditionally considered benevolent, it often exacts a heavy emotional, cultural, and even economic toll.

Through compelling essays, fiction, poetry, and art, the contributors to this landmark publication carefully explore this most intimate aspect of globalization. Finally, in the unmediated voices of the adults who have matured within it, we find a rarely-considered view of adoption, an institution that pulls apart old families and identities and grafts new ones.

Moving beyond personal narrative, these transracially adopted writers from around the world tackle difficult questions about how to survive the racist and ethnocentric worlds they inhabit, what connects the countries relinquishing their children to the countries importing them, why poor families of color have their children removed rather than supported—about who, ultimately, they are. In their inquiry, they unseat conventional understandings of adoption politics, ultimately reframing the controversy as a debate that encompasses human rights, peace, and reproductive justice.

Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption Details

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From Reader Review Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption for online ebook

Bex* says

i would recommend this book to: people who are transracially/transnationally adopted, people who are considering transracial/transnational adoption, and people who are critical of/interested in TRA as it pertains to social justice movements.

as for my review, i'll letcha know when i finish it...i'm not gonna lie, i don't know how often i'll use this website. i'll probably go on a big spree and enter all my books and then never come back.

but one thought/disappointment i have is that, just like the rest of my life, there's no one like me. everyone in this book has information on their background. no mystery children here.

Martha says

I finally finished this book after reading pieces of it for a year or more. I was impressed by the breadth of opinion Jane Trenka included in the book, as well as the range of styles and approaches to the subject matter. Some of the accounts were very emotional and others were very straightforward. I found it an extremely helpful look at the range of opinions among adult adoptees. I would recommend it to anyone interested in learning about the larger community of adult adoptees.

Jamie says

This book contains a group of uneven writings by transracial adoptees. The writings are diverse in that some describe issues and historical events while others are personal essays and poems. They are similar in that they all paint transracial adoption, and especially international adoption, in a very bleak light. Most of the authors have had very negative experiences within their adopted families or communities. Their writings read like therapeutic exercises more than thoughtful discussion pieces. Their shared message is an important one but it gets a little lost amidst the anger. That being said, some of the writings are worth reading, and I learned some things I didn't already know about the history of international adoption, and adoption from Korea, which is the focus of many of the pieces.

Shannongibney says

<http://www.mnartists.org/article.do?r...>

December 5, 2006

Juliana Hu Pegues

Juliana Hu Pegues reviews "Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption," a book of diverse genres of writing by transracial adoptees that transmits the ambiguous and manyfold consequences of such lifechanging events.

Racism, poverty, colonialism, the "War on Drugs," slavery, Indian boarding schools, economic globalization and import commodities. Sound like a book on adoption? These very issues engage our understanding in the compelling new anthology *Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption* (South End Press, 2006). Editors Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinyere Oparah, and Sun Yung Shin conceived this collection as a corrective to the "experts," a challenge to the existing work on adoption largely written by white adoptive parents and those within the industry of adoption. Through this lens, transracial adoptees and their allies take in old landscapes and produce new essays, poems, and artwork.

Artists and communities often debate the relationship between art and politics; the desire to create meaningful expression is haunted by fears of didacticism. But this anthology offers us a dialogue rather than a screed. The poetry, fiction, and visual art are not an additive to the political essays; they ground the facts and footnotes in a visceral and collective experience. The works of these authors are meant to be read in conversation with each other.

Genae Matthews says

Here I am again adding books that I'm reading for academic purposes (mostly to keep track of them). Some of the writings in this book were a little repetitive -- the anthology would have been stronger if there had been more variation on the topics on which the essays were written. Also, someone of these essays are really dire -- transracial adoption practices are not always as dire as represented here! Lastly, the works cited on some of the essays were really confusing (some people didn't list years when they were citing?!) All-things-considered though, this was something I would have enjoyed reading independently of my academic pursuits.

Hayley says

I've been mulling over what my place is as a white foster mother to a Black foster baby when it comes to reviewing this book. So here's what I'm going to say: I bought this to educate myself, and it accomplished that. I'm not here to review adoptees' lived experiences; you live what you live, and the conclusions individuals come to regarding transracial adoption are going to be as varied and nuanced as their lived experiences.

That said, I do have critiques of the collection taken as a whole. I felt that the content was a bit jumbled. There were poetry pieces (one of which was particularly powerful to me) alongside dry academic essays, art pieces that didn't always make sense even within the context of transracial adoption (screencaps of documentaries/TV stills?) and some essays that were so personal they were jolting when read alongside the academic texts. I also felt that the collection would have been better served had it limited its focus solely to Korean-American adoptees/KADs, as those were the predominant voices, and their experiences of racism in the US are different in many ways from the experiences of, say, African-American adoptees. Since the collection was so heavily weighted towards Korean-American adoptees, it felt like the collection as a whole would have been more focused if that had been the solo point of view.

Finally, there were a few instances where I felt the editorial aspect of the collection suffered; I remember reading one essay and realizing halfway down the page that I was reading a repeat of the same paragraph, word-for-word, as though it had been copied and moved elsewhere during editing, but hadn't been removed from its original spot.

The emotional and academic impact of this collection has a lot of merit, and while I don't subscribe to the viewpoints of all the writers (this is of course impacted by my own experience as a foster parent parenting a child whose history I know deeply and whose unique case is, like all cases, unique and complicated AND also part of the larger picture of transracial fostering) I think the things to take away and think on are really important regardless of my own views. Putting aside the weaknesses of the collection as a collection, I would still encourage readers with knowledge of adoption or fostering to read it in order to add to the greater picture of what they know.

The best way I can end this review is with a quote that ends the final essay by Sandra White Hawk:

"When you take children from a family, you are taking them from their grandparents." (Chris Lieth, Dakota Elder) Right now as you read this, a grandmother is praying for the return of her grandchild. The time has come to take back what was taken from us. Let us take it back in love and compassion. Generation after generation are coming home.

Erika says

A blogger friend sent this book to me in 2010, shortly after our two black daughters were placed with us. It remained on my "to read" pile for eight years because I knew it would be an emotional wringer and I wanted to be ready to absorb it as a call to action. The essays are diverse, from poetry and photography to history and anthropology. There are many disturbing truths behind the curtain of transracial adoption and my heart breaks for all the kids of color whose white parents shortchanged them. I will work hard not to be one of those parents.

Diana says

This is a collection of essays on transracial adoption written by transracial adoptees. Most of the authors describe international adoptions by white families, but a few focus on domestic adoptions of black children by white families. The essays range from dry academic papers to intensely personal memoirs. There is some fascinating information on the history of adoption; the re-telling of which from the adoptees point of view is quite eye-opening.

I was aware that the editors collected these works as a "corrective action." While transracial adoption is commonly thought of as a giving act, the editors want to reframe the debate to include the emotional, societal, and personal toll adoption takes on the children and their birthparents. The editors wanted to talk about why these children are up for adoption in the first place, what happens when these children grow up and how can we make the process more humane. It's on this last point the editors failed.

Personally, I found these works as a whole relentlessly bleak. There were no solutions or suggested steps to make this situation better. As a singular book, it felt very unbalanced. But perhaps that was the idea. A strongly worded piece against the "it-all-works-out-in-the-end" adoption industry.

I still wish they had found a reason for hope.

Layne says

I really enjoyed this book and learned a lot from it, although it was sometimes difficult to read about all the problems with trans-racial and international adoption, ideas that I used to see as mostly positive. My favorites were the personal stories of adoptees, although I also learned a lot from the piece by Dorothy Roberts, one of my favorite writers on reproductive issues.

Jessica says

One of the main reasons I really liked this book is because it is one of a kind. I haven't found others that give such awe-inspiring, hurtful, emotional, raw accounts of adoption from adoptees, in general telling their stories, all collected into one volume. It's rare, which is a shame, because I believe that everyone has a lot to learn from the adoptee perspective.

This book is long. It took me months to get through it. But each chapter is a different essay, or story written in a completely different way by all kinds of different people with different life histories, identities and perspectives. The common theme is obviously the title of the book, "Outsiders Within". I think all the contributors to this volume would probably say that at some point they have felt like outsiders within, like they don't belong. Some of the chapters are incredibly difficult to read. Stories of adoptees being sexually abused by their adoptive parents are pretty painful and only bring home the necessity for homestudies, background checks and postplacement support of families including adoptees.

Many authors told painful stories of longing for their birth family/culture/etc. They also talked about feelings of needing to feel gratitude towards their adoptive parents because either their AP told them to feel this way, or society at large expects them to feel lucky. There were many sentiments of anger over adoption as a business, about needing to assimilate, losing one's name, the religious overtones of many adoptions and adoption agencies. Jae Ran Kim (who used to write a fantastic blog, Harlow's Monkey) wrote in this book about Harry Holt, the founder of Holt International and how he was a business man and saw adoption both as a way of "saving" children and making a buck, both aspects of which adoptees often cringe at the thought of.

There were many sad stories of Native Americans being taken from their families and other wonderful stories of birth family meetings. One author wrote about meeting his alcoholic birth mother, himself a recovering alcoholic and how much it meant to him to know this was truly a genetic factor in his life. Other sad stories about the children of women that are incarcerated.

I got a lot of good things from this book as a PAP. Inclusive identities are better than exclusive ones. Accepting all aspects whether they be racial, gender, or adoption based makes for healthier people. Being around other adoptees that in some ways can understand how it feels to be an adoptee is also a good thing. Some adoptees talked about the myth of adoption that the adopted life is better than what their non-adopted life would have, many feel is truly a myth. We'll never be able to test that experiment, and weighing the various aspects on each side of the balance is too difficult, so for me, it seems best to trust what those that have lived both aspects (maybe people that were adopted at an older age) have to say about the subject.

There were definitely things I didn't agree with in this book too. Some seemed to suggest that people who haven't experienced racism, can't teach their children how to deal with racist comments because it's too

complicated. Really? I feel like this is something that can be learned. Another theme through several essays was that infertile couples desire to have a family because Western culture dictates their wants as a status symbol. In part that may be true, but what about EVOLUTION? I think it is inherent in many people to want to produce offspring. That's just biology, not sociology.

Overall a very difficult book to read, but well worth it.

Sarah says

Overall an excellent book challenging the notion that removing a child of color from their family, race, language, and culture is all hugs and puppies. I was a little disappointed however because many of the offerings in this anthology are academic or talking about political/community organizing with adoptees and I was more interested in personal individual stories. A must-read for any parent thinking about adopting transracially.

Tracy says

Far stretched from the norm of lovey-dovey style books written by happy & hopeful hearted adoptive families. This book offers up the negativity harboured within the depths of shaded skinned adoptees into predominately white families. The depressive recognition that Love is not colour blind; nor are all communities and hearts equally open to seeing past exterior shells of an individual.

I certainly hope that these broken hearted, cynical & thankless voices are not the norm when it comes to intercountry adoptions. And agree that in places where it would be viable to structure community supports to allow families to remain connected instead of needing to use adoption as a fall back method - similar to bankruptcy - in locales it is a struggle.

Linda says

This book presents a view of adoption that steps outside the usual feel-good, inspirational perspectives of most other adoptions texts. "Outsider's Within" is not afraid to look at the drawbacks of adoption such as the stripping of adoptee's identities or the political implications of adoption as a form of oppression. For an adoptive parent of a black youngster this was a hard book for me to read but also an important perspective for me to understand.

AJ says

Outsiders Within is a really interesting anthology that covers a lot of issues surrounding transracial and transnational adoption. It is very thorough and covers not only the problems that many adoptees have faced over the years, but why transnational adoption has occurred in such great numbers and asks the important questions such as why have the underlying reasons behind transnational adoption not been addressed?

It was interesting to see one of the side-effects of the women's movement in the 1970s. With fewer young women being coerced into carrying unplanned pregnancies to term and giving the babies up for adoption, upper and middle class white couples experienced a dearth of white babies to adopt, hence they turned to other countries for adoption.

Phoebe says

2-24

“Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption” has altered my view on the adopting across the color line. What used to look like an impressive act of love and connection (parents in one place connecting to a child from another), through the eyes of the assorted essayists in this book appears to be culture crushing, often racist, thoughtless, and smothering. In one word: colonialist. My guess is the truth is somewhere between the two realities. When I first starting reading the book, I wanted to reject those harsh opinions, but now I find the arguments valid. I’ve not been converted, but I am informed.

I find this book to be rather dark, so I put it down for a while. Now I'm diving back in . . .
