

Introduction

Beginning in the late 1960s studies were conducted of white families who adopted American black, Korean, Native American, and other children whose racial and ethnic backgrounds were different from those of their adoptive parents. Part 1 briefly describes those studies and reports their major findings. It also summarizes the ongoing debate between those who support and those who oppose transracial adoption (TRA). The latter claim that black children who are reared in white homes grow up confused about their racial identity and uncomfortable with or alienated from the black community. The supporters of transracial adoption claim that black children reared in white homes grow up aware of and comfortable with their black racial identity and committed to their white adoptive families.

In Their Own Voices does not take an ideological stand on transracial adoption. Rather, its major thrust is to provide a forum for black and mixed-race adults who were transracially adopted and who lived all their childhood and adolescence in white homes to tell their stories in their own words. What was it like to have white parents and siblings, to be the only black person in extended family gatherings, to have their white parents show up at their schools, their sporting events, their social gatherings? What was their relationship with their white siblings during childhood and adolescence-and now, when they are adults? Who were their close friends in primary and high school, whom did they date, how did their black classmates relate to them? As adults who no longer live with their white families, what kinds of relations do they have with their adoptive families? Who are their closest friends today? If they are married, did they choose a black spouse? Do they have a clear sense of their racial identity, or are they confused? These are some of the questions the transracial adoptees answer in part 2 of this book. But in the course of the two-to-four-hour interviews conducted with each of the respondents, they tell us a lot more about their

experiences and emotions as they were growing up and about how they perceive themselves today. Most of them talk at length about their ties to the black community after they moved out of their parental homes. Many of them also offer advice to white families who are considering adopting a child of a different race, and they state their position on the transracial adoption debate.

All the interviews, save one, were conducted by coauthor Rhonda Roorda, who is a transracial adoptee, and she was interviewed by Rita Simon. Respondents became involved in this project in several ways: Some were referred by friends, or friends of friends; some answered an ad the authors placed in *Interrace* magazine; others were contacted via the Internet; still others contacted Rita Simon, wanting to talk about their experiences; and, finally, in a few instances respondents were well-known personalities the authors sought out for interviews. Eighteen interviews were conducted over the phone and six were done in person. Each interview lasted at least two hours. The interviews were taped, transcribed, and then sent to the respondent for his or her approval. Participants were asked how they wanted to be identified, and the wishes of each respondent were honored. Some preferred to be identified by a pseudonym, others requested that only their first name be given, and still others wanted their real first and last names to be used.

Part 3 compares the respondents' experiences, examining their similarities and differences during various periods of their lives. This final part also compares the respondents' experiences to the major research findings described in part 1 of the book in an effort to see whether the essence of the respondents' feelings and experiences are indeed captured by the surveys and whether their stories match the portraits that emerge based on the survey data.

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