

## Richard J. Payne's Transracial Adoption: Building Bridges that Transcend Race

**Main Point**

In this chapter Payne challenges us to consider the controversial and sensitive topic of transracial adoption. Payne suggests that transracial adoptions have increased significantly in consequence of social change, but many still question the idea of a white family raising an adopted minority child. Payne examines the relationship between attitudes regarding transracial adoptions and racial relations in the United States. Analyzing these attitudes reflects the extent to which we have moved beyond the importance of race. While the opponent side believes that the child's race should match the adopting parents' race, those in favor of transracial adoption believe that in fact it is advantageous when minority children, more specifically black children, are adopted by a white family as they can easily socialize into mainstream America and are exposed to more opportunities. Furthermore, these families are only genuinely looking to welcome the adopted child into their families and provide them with care and family love that they would not receive otherwise. He alludes to the fact that it is often seen that "traditional" whites and blacks are the ones opposed to the idea of transracial adoption. More specifically, Payne reflects on the idea that those against transracial adoptions see an impact in the black culture and on 'blackness,' but challenges the reader to consider the definition of the so-called black culture. Furthermore, opponents argue that transracial adoptions effect children's pathways in finding their racial identity and socialization as they grow up. Although this topic remains very controversial, Payne introduces the notion that many black children are waiting to get adopted, suggesting moving beyond the importance of race allowing for these children to have a family of their own.

**Central Issues and Concepts:**

- There approximately half a million children in America's foster care system with more than half of them being racial minorities waiting get adopted
- Changing racial attitudes allowed and made it more socially acceptable for white families to adopt black, minority, or foreign children
- Some states indirectly or directly allow for race to be taken in consideration
- *Transracial Adoptions*- integration of racially different parents and children into one family unit
- *Concept of Matching*- assumes that adoptions are more successful when the child's skin color, religion, and emotional and cultural characteristics aligns with the adopted family's
- *The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW)*- strongly opposes transracial adoptions as it is equivalent to cultural genocide
- *Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994*- makes it illegal to delay potential transracial adoptions while social workers search for an adoptive family matching the child's race, culture or ethnicity; and to require caseworkers to justify interracial adoptions, as paraphrased by Payne
- *Hard-to-place children*- usually older, African American, or handicapped

Arguments for Racial Matching	Arguments Against Racial Matching
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preserves the black culture</li> <li>• Enhancement of black political power</li> <li>• Prevents identity problems</li> <li>• Difficulty accepting the fact that</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Severe shortage of black homes for black children</li> <li>• Racial matching when applied to blacks is as racially biased as when applied to whites</li> </ul>

<p>one should pay for a child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary emphasis remains finding black homes for black children</li> <li>• Matching is designed to prevent the child from feeling uncomfortable in disapproving surrounding communities</li> <li>• A white family cannot provide adequate resources for a black child to develop his/her black identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assumptions about a black family's ability to raise a black child correctly and better are not supported by substantial evidence</li> <li>• Black children must eventually face a racially integrated world</li> <li>• Many of the adoptive white parents tend to be racially liberal, well educated, and middle class</li> <li>• Whites are often in better position to maneuver in the white worlds of power and privilege</li> <li>• A source of power that would help race relations between black and whites</li> <li>• Adoption of these children by caring and responsible families, regardless of color, must outweigh ideological considerations</li> </ul>
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**Key Quotes:**

"Embracing multiple identities enables many transracially adopted children to cope successfully with racial problems. Whereas advocates of racial identity believe that a strong black identity is essential for survival and success in a hostile racial environment, their preoccupation with race is often counterproductive"(185).

"One cannot be sure that white parents are not equally capable of preparing a black child to deal with racism. In fact, because most whites are ordinarily treated decently, their experience with the prejudice they face themselves as part of an interracial family is likely to motivate them to teach their children strategies to effectively counter racism"(184).

**Questions:**

1. Is the prevalence of transracial adoptions evidence that we are making progress towards moving beyond race here in America? Doesn't the idea of having a monolithic black culture reflect the fact that while blacks continue to be victims of racial mistreatment, they are also victimizing by rejecting the integration of both the white and black culture through transracial adoption?
2. When it comes to the well-being of a black child waiting to get adopted, is it more beneficial for the child to wait around for black adoptive parents for the preservation of the so-called black culture, or to seek immediate help from a white family interested in adoption a better option? Although the idea of racial matching appears ideal, is it really rational? Isn't it just another act of prejudice towards white families kindly waiting to adopt a child in need of a caring family?