

2-2023

Belonging: The Heart of Our Family Calling

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

BELONGING:
THE HEART OF OUR FAMILY CALLING

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF
PORTLAND SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
JANICE M. BREWER-STEVENSON

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2023



CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Janice M. Brewer-Stevens

has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 17, 2023
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and the Emerging Culture.

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DEDICATED

To Mark—my best friend—who never could have guessed
the adventurers we have become,

And to my sweet hearts—

Katie, Aubrey, Case, JonMarc,
Elijah, Chancellor, Julian and Faythe.

Your days were written in the Book before one of them came to be.

Psalm 139:16 (NIV adaptation)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

George Fox University Portland Seminary

MaryKate Morse, PhD

Loren Kerns, PhD

Clifford Berger, DMin

Jen Macnab, MPA

Karen Claassen, DMin

Leonard Sweet, PhD

Thank you for your enduring support, prayers and expertise.

EPIGRAPH

“I HAVE A DREAM TODAY...
THAT LITTLE BLACK BOYS AND BLACK GIRLS WILL BE ABLE TO
JOIN HANDS WITH LITTLE WHITE BOYS AND GIRLS
AND WALK TOGETHER AS SISTERS AND BROTHERS.”¹

Dr. Martin Luther King

“I Have a Dream”

August 28, 1963

March on Washington

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., “I Have a Dream,” (speech, Washington, D.C., Aug. 28, 1963).

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PREFACE

We stand at the massive, lodge-style door, steadying our nerves and bodies as we step into the host home and our future. The fireplace warmth soaks into my body and I begin to take in the reality of the step we have taken.

I look around at all the hopeful faces. Some hold tears in their eyes. It is a pre-adopt class, the year is the new millennial year 2000; transracial and transcultural adoptions are becoming another option for people seeking to grow their families. The multiple messages I discern convey:

- many children are available,
- infants are as young as three months of age,
- this is a very quick process,
- moms and dads are needed, and
- Vietnam does not have enough in-country prospective parents.

One couple brings their three-year-old Black son and nervously fields questions about their experiences. We see pictures of kids adopted from Vietnam, and several post-adoptive parents tell encouraging stories of joyous adoptions and fulfilled dreams. Thus starts our venture into transracial adoption.

The history of transracial adoption, particularly Black adoption in the United States, is the topic of one class session. Before World War II, racial matching in adoptions was the standard, and anything else was unthinkable in this highly segregated country. After the end of that war, the United States experienced a huge economic boom which, among other aspects, increased the demand for adoptive infants and children. There were not enough white adoptive children to meet the requests of prospective white parents. In the same stratus, a huge need was uncovered. There existed a very large number of Black children who resided in foster care and needed permanent homes.

This began some experimental or trial transracial placements of Black children with white parents. Previous ideals about transracial adoption changed, and between 1960 and 1976 more than 12,000 transracial adoptions were completed in the United States. But in 1972, the National Association of Black Social Workers sent out a statement, condemning the placement of Black children with white parents. This statement had an immediate avalanche effect on adoption policy. Adoption agencies, both private and public, revised their commitments to find permanent homes for children across racial lines. The oldest child welfare organization in the United States, the Child Welfare League of America, dropped its positive transracial adoption stance for support of only same-race adoptions. However, between 1994 and 1996 the Multiethnic Placement Act and the Interethnic Placement Act prohibited all agencies from denying or delaying placement of a child in a permanent home or foster home *based on race or ethnicity*. The only exception to this was the indigenous people of the United States. The 1978 Indian Welfare Act gave oversight and placement criteria completely to the tribal governments. In most of these cases today the prospective parents or caregivers must have tribal connections.

At the beginning of the new millennium year of 2000, transracial adoptions were becoming a legal and enticing avenue for those seeking to become parents.^{2 3}

Our first transracial adoption happened in 2002 and was considered a rather new option where we live. There were not many others like us. Our adoptions were rewarding, yet challenging in ways that same-race parenting is not. There is little “out there” for

² Jennifer S. Jones, “What Is the History of Adoption?” Adoption.com Gladney Center for Adoption, March 29, 2019, accessed Nov. 23, 2022, [Adoption.org/what-is-the-history-of-adoption](https://adoption.org/what-is-the-history-of-adoption).

³ Jennifer S. Jones, *Letters to Jack (blog)*, www.letterstojack.com.

support, encouragement, or insights. Our family, to most, is an oddity and possibly a bit amusing, but, to some, it's an atrocity.

We ventured into transracial adoption expecting genuine curiosity undergirded with acceptance. However, the common responses from others were to look away or flat-out stare, and most comments were, “What a little man. He looks just like Tiger Woods.” Our family was modeling a paradigm shift and the dynamic may have seemed too great for our small-town culture and church community. Our family had been approved under benevolent rationale, but approval is not belonging. *We were and still are on a quest to belong.*

I am interested in starting a conversation to normalize the paradigm—this multilogue goal of transitioning from approval of the paradigm into belonging. This conversation can bring together honesty without judgement, support through shared experiences, and nuances from gathered voices. This conversation can create a tool that diminishes the fears and angst of being a transracial individual or family. The hopeful outcome of this conversation is a feast of sorts which calls differing races and ethnicities to a shared table, savoring both different and common experiences. The artifact presented in this paper is the tool.

Interspersed along the way of this paper is our very personal peregrination to becoming a transracial family of 10. Unfolding over the span of 14 years and six additional children—including five boys—our family has experienced countless miracles demonstrating God's omnipotent power. These are our contributions to the Feast.

ABSTRACT

Transracial families are part of our society whether people like it or not. There are not enough adoptive families of any kind, and children need support, love, and acceptance. Last August the Census Bureau reported that the number of non-Hispanic Americans who identify as multiracial jumped by 127 percent over the last decade, and for people who identified as Hispanic, the increase was even higher.⁴ Also, from 2017 to 2019, half of all U.S. adoptions were of non-white children, and half of these adoptions were transracial. The result? An increase in transracial adoptions in the United States and the subsequent increase in transracial families.^{5 6}

The challenges facing adoptive parents are well documented. The challenges particular to transracial adoption are the focus of this thesis. They are safety and survival, lack of belonging, family vs. ethnicity, denying oneself for the sake of the other along with codes and expectations, hair and skin care, hygiene, connections to birth parents and families, and acceptance in the culture. Interspersed in this dissertation are personal stories and challenges of my own transracial family, established in 2002, and which now includes 10 individuals with ethnicities of Black, white, African-Caribbean, white British, Korean, Cuban, and Cherokee Nation.

⁴ Sabrina Tavernise, Tariro Mzezewa, and Giulia Heyward, “Behind the Surprising Jump in Multiracial Americans: Several Theories,” *New York Times*, August 13, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com>.

⁵ Sharon Kaplan Roszia and Allison Davis Maxon, “Seven Core Issues in Adoption and Permanency,” North American Council on Adoptable Children, accessed November 23, 2022, <http://nacac.org>resource>seven-core-issues-in-adoption>.

⁶ “Preplacement Adoption Casework Practice,” Child Welfare Information Gateway, accessed November 23, 2022, <https://www.childwelfare.gov>adoption>preplacement>.

At the root of all these challenges is the question of possible alternatives besides placing children with parents of a different race/ethnicity. Section Two gives insight into two other possible outcomes for Black and multiracial babies and children. Foster care, also known as out-of-home care, is provided by States for infants and children who cannot live with their birth parents.⁷ The second is a situation called Kinship care.⁸ This refers to the care of children by relatives or in some cases, close family friends known as fictive kin. Section three offers a tool in the form of a podcast through which transracial families and others share fears, concerns, daily life, support, and victories to build a reality of acceptance, support, and trust within the culture of the primarily white church and society at large.

Sections four and five detail how to set up a studio, find the most productive time to reach an audience, secure professional and financial resources, determine topics, and explore the best equipment and technology. Lastly is the invitation to become part of the tool, to sit round the table for in-person or on-your-phone discussion, and to bring and share what you have experienced, learned, questioned, and known.

⁷ Foster care defined as, “Temporary living arrangements for children who need a safe place to live when their parents or guardians cannot safely take care of them.” www.oregon.gov/dhs/children/fostercare.

⁸ Kinship care defined as, “The care of children by relatives or, in some jurisdictions, close family friends (often referred to as fictive kin).” www.childwelfare.gov/topics/outofhome/kinship.

SECTION 1:

THE PROBLEM

My husband and I have our two biological daughters and feel God leading us to parent more children. I go to my OB-GYN and get full clearance to physically birth another baby. We carefully consider that option, but it does not rest peacefully. There seems to be another aspect to more children that we are missing. We continue to pray and listen, to share our thoughts and insights.

One of our family friends adopted several of their children as infants and those children have brought much joy and wholeness to the family. They have been giving us direct “hints” that adoption could be our path to another child. Both of our daughters have friends who were adopted as infants and those kids are happy and settled with who they are within their families. Our church family also includes many families who added to their family through adoption. Perhaps adoption is our direction to pursue.

We ask a couple who are very close friends to pray with us after a service. We ask for clarity and confirmation. Please, God, make it plain. At the end of the session, they both confirm their word from God is a positive to move forward in adopting and not only one, but the clear picture given was that before our family would be complete, adoption would include a total of six additional children in our family. Of course that information

seemed enormously skewed, but we will continue to pray and move forward toward an adoption.

Who Adopts?

According to Adoption.org,⁹ the following are the primary categories of adoptive parents:

- **Older people.** Most people who adopt are over 30. Eighty-one percent of adoptive mothers are between 35 and 44 years old, and one-half are between 40 and 44 years old. Only three percent are in the 18 to 29 age group.
- **Men.** More than twice as many men than women adopt. Some are gay couples; others are men who have previously fathered children. Men who adopt are somewhat younger than their women counterparts with 25 percent in the 30-34 age range.
- **Women who sought help to have a baby.** If a woman has used infertility services, she is 10 times more likely to adopt.
- **Christians.** Five percent of practicing Christians in the United States have adopted, which is more than twice the number of all adults who have adopted.
- **Caucasians.** Most adoptive parents (73 percent) are non-Hispanic white adults. However, they are less likely to adopt a Caucasian child. Only 37 percent of adopted children in the United States are Caucasian.

⁹ Deanna Kahler, "Who Adopts the Most?" Adoption.com Gladney Center for Adoption, April 13, 2018, accessed July 27, 2022, adoption.org/who-adopts-the-most.

In November of 2001, we attend the second information seminar on adopting. At the time there is quite a push for adoptions from Romania and there also seems to be a huge need in Vietnam. We listen to all the stats, hear from parents currently parenting through adoption, and have the opportunity to ask questions. We are told of the large amount of paperwork and clearances to adopt internationally. The cost of said adoptions can reach easily into the tens of thousands. The reward of parenting these littles is promised to be attainable. We leave feeling a bit overwhelmed but anxious to put this option before God.

In the days ahead, we check out books from the library about Vietnam and Romania and share these with our girls. In general, the children from Romania are older, and through the Vietnam adoption program, an adoptive parent can bring home a baby as young as three months. Also, most, if not all the babies from Vietnam are boys at that time so even though it does not matter to us, it would balance out our family. Finances are scrutinized and thoughts of the two of us going— or all four of us—are put on the table. We begin our paperwork for Vietnam.

A few weeks later we attend another adoption seminar, this one for waiting families. The leaders present another program that is domestic—an African American adoption. This is a new opportunity as Black transracial adoptions have been very limited in the previous two decades. A couple presents who are parenting a sweet little boy about a year old. They share about the ease of the paperwork in comparison to other programs, the fewer expenses especially

since there is no international travel, and at least for them, a truly short wait time. They do share honestly about remaining stigma surrounding Black transracial adoption and how a family must be prepared for questions and possible racial ignorance. We leave, liking some of what we heard, but doubtful it is the fit for our family. Plus, we are already in process for Vietnam and have preparations made for the trip—when we get “the call.”

Changing Landscape of Adoption

In the early 1960s, there came to be a shift in the foster care system in the United States. Children waiting in the system were identified as “waiting” children. Examples of differing categories of these kids waiting for permanent families were: 1) disabilities which needed special accommodation, 2) age, 3) sibling group, and 4) race. Adopting from one of these waiting children’s groups usually resulted in a much faster, easier adoption and were often less expensive than a private adoption contract.^{10 11}

At this same time, overseas adoptions were greatly increasing. China opened doors for international adoptions in 1992 by adding a law which enabled foreigners to adopt orphans; this added to a continued increase in international adoptions. In 2004, at

¹⁰ RainbowKids Adoption & Child Welfare Advocacy, [www.rainbowkids.com>waitingchildren](http://www.rainbowkids.com/waitingchildren).

¹¹ Child Welfare, [www.childwelfare.gov>organizations](http://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations).

the peak of United States international adoptions, 22,990 children had been brought to the United States to become part of American families.¹²

In 1993, the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect to Intercountry Adoptions regulated international adoptions in areas of mandatory home studies, fees charged and paid, and other ethical/legal issues. This change helped ensure that every child who was adopted internationally was indeed an orphan and without viable parents. These new enforcements proved to be of great importance given the definite increase in corrupt adoptions globally. Because of these new and stringent requirements, countries that had been central to international adoptions (i.e., Guatemala, Vietnam, and Romania) closed their doors to out-of-country adoptions.¹³

The Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 became the first law to address race in adoption. Per the act, adoption agencies could no longer consider and make placement decisions based solely on the race of the child or potential adoptive parents. By 1996, the act, as amended, eliminated race as relevant in any consideration regarding placement decisions.¹⁴

Currently, special needs adoptions along with transracial/transcultural adoptions continue to increase. The first and focused discernment in these children's placement is their future and well-being.

¹² "Adoption: China," Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, Brandeis University, 2011. [Brandeis.edu/investigate/adoption/china.html](https://brandeis.edu/investigate/adoption/china.html).

¹³ Jean Nelson Erichsen, *Inside the Adoption Agency: Understanding Intercountry Adoption in the Era of the Hague Convention*. (New York: iUniverse, 2007).

¹⁴ Laura Radel and Allon Kalisher, "The Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA): Analysis and Trends after 25 years." (National Council for Adoption, December 1, 2021) <https://adoptioncouncil.org/publications/the-multiethnic-placement-act-mepa-analysis-and-trends-after-25years>.

Vietnam adoption is shut down by the Vietnamese government. A new decree, issued in January 2002, greatly tightened foreign adoption from Vietnam to halt fraud and child trafficking. We are shocked and disappointed. This has seemed so very right with God leading us to pursue Vietnam. Now are we to give up the adoption path? Is there a possibility Vietnam will reopen to foreign adoption soon? How do we tell our daughters who are so very excited for this new sibling? Give us, direction, God—direction, yes, and, please, peace that only you can give.

After a short time of discernment, we decide to go forward with an African-American adoption. It is indeed easier to finish the paperwork and travel will be easy. We understand that most of these adoptions come from Oregon, Texas, Georgia, or Florida. Most of these babies are newborns and most are males. We fill out the form regarding what type of child we are willing to accept. We have no hesitations and only the most severe physical problems would we need to carefully consider. The wait times are usually very short, and 18 months is the longest that has happened.

A friend comes and takes family pictures to compile a packet for the birth mother letter. All our information is complete. The packet is ready to send out. At our small group meeting that evening, hands are laid upon the packets as we pray for the birth mom, the baby, our family, and all involved in the process. Our application and packets are sent. We wait. Our youngest who is four, asks every time the phone rings, “Is that the baby brother?”

We wait.

The Waiting Game of Hope and Disappointment

We had experiences with failure. One expected adoption completely failed and two more were so unstable in the last hours and days that we had given up all hope of them going through; we grieved. Very fortunately, our waits were extremely short with the longest being seven months, and the result of these roller coaster emotions was six beautiful babies.

Approximately 7 percent of birth mothers who have already chosen an adoptive family ultimately choose to parent instead of following through with an adoptive plan.

At an increasing rate, birth parents are looking for other options and strategies that will enable them to parent their child versus choosing an adoption route. For example, new resources may become available in the form of a new job for one of the parents, subsidies, gifts, volunteer help, housing or other federal help. In some cases, the father of the baby may choose to help co-parent. In other cases, other family members may commit to provide ongoing help and resources.

Other significant factors that may influence a birth mother to back away from an already arranged adoption plan may include 1) a family member or close friend wants to adopt the baby, 2) the birth mother develops a deep bond with the baby, 3) the birth parents experience fears of remorse and regret or disapproval from family or friends.

Waiting to be chosen by a birth mother is challenging and the length of time depends on many factors, most of which adoptive parents have little or no control over.

However, there are a few choices that can help expedite the journey. These include:

- The baby's race,
- The baby's gender,
- The birth parents' finances,
- The birth parents' medical history,
- The birth parents' substance use, and
- Contacts between birth parents and adoptive parents.

If adoptive parents are open to accepting a child of any race and gender, a child of a birth mother known as a substance user or who had no prenatal care, and a child in an open adoption, then the wait time can be significantly shorter.¹⁵

Another shortened time frame in the quest to become adoptive parents is through the foster care system and consideration of an older child or sibling group. In Oregon, early training classes, background checks, and the home study can take four to six months to complete; permanent placement and adoption finalization can take up to one year and possibly longer.¹⁶

One month to the day after we prayed over the packets, our adoption counsellor leaves a message, "It's not a baby, but call me ASAP."

¹⁵ "Minimizing Adoption Wait Times," American Adoptions, americanadoptions.com/adopt/adoption_wait_times.

¹⁶ "Adoption Step-by-Step Guide," Oregon Department of Human Services/Children. [gov/Oregon Department of Human Services/Childcare/Adoption](http://gov/Oregon/Department%20of%20Human%20Services/Childcare/Adoption).

What does she mean? I was at work and pick up the message a couple hours later. Is she still available? Has she gone home?

It is a baby. In Florida. A baby boy. The birth mom is in labor, and they need to find a family. She is young, only 16. She has had no prenatal care. There is no drug involvement that they know about, but again, also no previous care or testing. To the best estimate, she is full term. Are we interested?

We say yes without hesitation. We are dancing and jumping in the kitchen. My husband and I quickly divide the phone numbers of the calls that need made. We are given contacts with a travel agent who specializes in adoption travel and knows how to expedite reservations. We are set to travel the next day. The girls will stay with their grandmother, and our friends will provide care as well. Suitcases are packed and loaded. In the morning we will leave to meet our son who will be in our arms very soon. Excitement unleashed!

Four a.m. next day. The phone keeps ringing, and now awake, we run to answer. Is he here? Has he already been born? But our adoption counselor sounds flat in her greeting. She apologizes for the time as she now remembers the difference in state time zones. The birth mom has changed her mind. Family has stepped forward and wants to adopt him.

Nothing has prepared us for this shock and disappointment, for our tears and this new reality. We cancel our reservations, support our girls, and feel deep exhaustion. Will this end our adoption journey? Are there any feelings left to

*possibly try again? We are too confused and tired to even consider the future.
Sleep and relief.*

Another very early phone call? What? Our counselor quickly apologizes for the time difference, but states, “I thought this time you would be happy to be woken up.” He has been born. He seems perfect in every way—very healthy. The family has decided that in his best interests and the family’s, they would like to proceed with the adoption if we are willing?

We land at the airport in Florida, check into our hotel room, and 45 minutes later, answering the knock at the door, meet our new son.

The Joy, Belonging, and Bonding of the Moment

There is absolutely nothing earthly comparable to the fullness of joy centered around the birth of a healthy baby. Anticipation, preparation and longing are fulfilled in a moment. This is a truth shared by most who have planned for and sought the experience of parenting. For many, the same experience comes through adoption as it does through genetic births.

There are many advantages to adoption. Most of these can be anticipated, but some become realized as an unhoped-for surprise.¹⁷ Some advantages to adoption include:

¹⁷ Amy Newmark and LeAnn Thieman, *Chicken Soup for the Soul: The Joy of Adoption* (Cos Cob, CT: Chicken Soup for the Soul, 2015).

- The formation of a family with adventures and memories throughout the years together,
- The responsibility and rewards of teaching and guiding new lives as they grow and become adults,
- The love and emotional connection that draws the family closer as a unit,
- New opportunities, activities, and experiences that change and evolve as the child matures,
- Belonging in the sense of affinity not only for a place or situation but for other people who are loved.

Three years have passed, and our family of five is thriving and content, yet I am sensing a restlessness that there is something more for us. I take the prospect of adopting another child before God, hesitant to bring it up to Mark until my own heart discerns its motives. I just cannot lay it aside, and I ask God to open a space in our day to talk about the possibility. Mark is not supportive of the idea. He is listening but feels already overwhelmed with his job, with me as a pastor and finishing up seminary, and both of us assisting my Mom out after losing Dad. We pray together and let it rest.

Mark attends a conference in Florida and takes a moment by the motel pool for some quiet time. There are two brothers swimming and playing in the pool, and he cannot seem to look away. Something about the scene touches him deeply and he tucks it away to share when he returns home. "God spoke to me

very clearly at the pool,” he tells me. “God said, ‘This is what I have for your sons if you say yes.’”

Mark is sure we are to move forward in another adoption and this time at least offer a request for a son. We fill out all the paperwork and pray for the finances. We are open to all possibilities but do request a boy. One month later we hear that a birth mother has chosen us, but there’s one caveat—she does not know what she is having so if it is a boy, he will be ours. If she has a girl, there is another couple waiting. There are no ultrasounds scheduled, so we will not know until the baby is born in about a month. I start packing and trust God for the outcome.

The birth mom is over the due date, so an ultrasound is performed—it is a boy! He is a very big boy, and, if needed, she will be induced in a couple of days. She and the birth dad want us there, so we plan to take the other three kids along. This baby is also in Florida, so we pack accordingly.

Biblical Examples of Adoption

Pharaoh's Daughter and Moses: Exodus 1

At the order of Pharaoh, Moses's mother hid him in a floating reed basket along the river banks to keep him from being murdered. Pharaoh's daughter came to the river to bathe and discovered the baby. As she pulled Moses out from the water, Miriam, his sister, came forward to offer to find a nursing mother to feed the hungry baby. Pharaoh's daughter knew it was a Hebrew baby boy and went directly against her father's decree to murder the Israelite infant males. Instead, she made sure of his safety and once he was weaned, brought him into the palace and raised him as she would a birth child.

One can only speculate about the many circumstances that arose during Moses's upbringing. Was there ongoing drama between "Grandpa" Pharaoh, Moses, and his mother? Did he do the usual teen things and challenge the authority around him and his position? Were there expectations of his privileged status and were they granted? The assumption can only be that raising any child is never easy and the situation surrounding Moses was not a normal scenario for an Israelite male youth.

Adoption is a daily action in parenting. It is growing, loving, stretching boundaries, letting go, and drawing close. Taking in each day and saying, "Yes, this is my child," with each step.

Eli and Samuel: 1 Samuel 1

As Hannah, Samuel's mother, promised, she would give her son back to God if only she could birth a child. After Samuel was weaned, Hannah fulfilled her promise and took him to the temple to live with and be raised by Eli, the priest. Samuel would be raised to also be a priest. Hannah visited Samuel yearly and brought him gifts, but his upbringing and parenting were the responsibility of Eli, who essentially adopted him as his child.

Now, as I relate to my children, it is a moment by moment; each day I re-adopt my kids, both biological and adopted. I look at all of them at times and truly question, "Where did you come from? And I trust God knew what was best in making me your mother and you my child?" These moments absolutely require that I fully lean into God's abilities and convince myself that I am the *only* person who is equipped to do the mothering of this individual and brood collectively. There are days when I question if I really want to undertake the task. Maybe I could neatly pass the chore off to some other, greater-prepared individual—at least for the day. Ultimately, I am reminded of the gift each child is to me and to the greater good and choose adoption, but this time they have become even deeper embedded in my heart.

Creation: Genesis 1 and 2

God had a plan to create something big. On the first day, God said, "Let there be light," and light happened! God called it daytime. The darkness he called night. On the second day, God separated the sky and waters, and on the third, he created land. Water

whirled and swirled all around. God gathered the waters into seas, and then up came the land: hills, mountains, valleys, and plains. God spoke again, and plants sprouted from the earth. Colorful flowers of every kind. Vegetables. Trees tall and strong, their branches loaded with plump juicy fruit. God saw it all, and he said, “This is good!”

God saved the best for last. He made a man and then a woman, breathing life into them so they had bodies and spirits. God loved them more than anything else. They were the start of his big family.¹⁸

Really, everything about Creation, relationship, and Christ is all about adoption. God orchestrated the birth, drawing together form and light out of void and darkness. The waters beneath, the water vapor above, and the heaven between all shape the new. After every nuance of the emerging design, God enjoyed how it was coming together and accepted it as good, loving that which belonged through process and familiarity.

Adapt daily. Parenting in all my experiences is an hour-by-hour ability to adapt to what is unfolding in our family. The mornings usually start normal, whatever that is, but I easily estimate that 80 percent of our days end up totally upended at best or close to catastrophic at worst. Some may judge me at this moment, question my organizational skills, parenting ability, and mental health and chalk up my stories to too much exaggeration of life events.

But the reality is that most would never believe that all of this is truth and unbelievable even to myself. How can this much trauma and negative happenings occur in one family and with such frequency?

¹⁸ Sarah Young, “Genesis 1 and 2,” *Jesus Is Calling Bible Storybook*, (Nashville: Tommy Nelson, 2012).

Yesterday was a standard example. My husband and I left around eight in the morning with the three youngest to pick blueberries. The plan was to meet their older sister and husband and have a fun, end-of-summer family outing. As we drove, I was experiencing the intuitive vibes I often get due to the frequency of weird, misplaced behaviors and happenings in our family. I strongly sensed that both of us parents should not be gone, but the opportunity to make good memories was a strong draw.

As we returned to the freeway on our way home, we got an urgent call from our 12-year-old. The 15- and 19-year-olds were beating each other and probably causing damage to our new home. Per his report they were still going “at it” and there was broken glass everywhere. I spoke calmly to him and reassured him that we were only a couple minutes away. Upon arriving, we found broken dishes and the boys screaming obscenities to each other through the window that opened into the neighborhood. The little ones were now upset as well, and it took us a good two hours to settle life down again. Not a great beginning in our new community. The whole day was unfortunate, apart from rescued sweet memories of berry picking and eating.

Each day must be adapted to hold good memory spaces while letting go of the bad. Still, we struggle to find the why and reasons for these difficult, family-strangling events. Are we in this place of misfits because of personality? Gender? Ages? Parenting? Mental health issues? Developmental brackets? PTSD? Are our challenges because of our blended family through adoption or just adoption? Probability would conclude no concrete answer will ever rise, yet I trust that underneath all the “muck” running through my family, God intends for us to thrive.

To clarify, we have multiple avenues for counseling that we currently and regularly use as well as multiple family mentors and a support community of family, friends, and professional staff.

Mordecai and Esther: Esther 1 and 2

Mordecai adopted his cousin Esther, also known as Hadassah, as his own daughter after both of her parents died. She was very beautiful and when an order was sent out to find all the lovely young virgins of the country together in the pursuit of a new queen to replace Queen Vashti, Esther was included in that group. Esther braved many events in the process which led her to becoming queen of the Persian Empire and allowed her to save her people, the Jews.

Joseph and Jesus: Matthew 1

Joseph did not plan to father the baby that Mary was carrying. His intention was to quietly divorce her and leave the difficult outcome behind. However, as the story goes, an angel came to Joseph in the night and clearly convinced him that the baby whom Mary had conceived was of the Holy Spirit and Joseph should continue not only as Mary's husband but also become the father of this new baby boy. One Jewish naming tradition is the father names the firstborn son. Joseph followed the angel's direction, and possibly the

tradition, and named the baby Jesus. Joseph chose to adapt to this controversial event in his life and adopt Jesus as his own.¹⁹

¹⁹ Ralph F. Wilson, “Jesus, the Stand-In Father,” *Christmas Incarnation: A Study of Jesus’ Birth on YouTube*, Jesus Walk Bible Study Series.

God and Us: Ephesians 1:5–6; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6–7

“He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise and glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:5–6 NASB).

“For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons and daughters by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” (Romans 8:15 NASB).

“And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.” Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.” (Galatians 4:6, 7 NLT)

God clearly adopts us as sons and daughters, completely and equally rightful heirs. Through creation and the relationship with that creation, God has, because of the freewill given by the Creator, adapted to and brought creation back into relationship by adoption.

Parenting has such parallels. Parents adapt to how a child develops and grows. They adapt to who the child evolves daily in their “becoming.” Free will contrasts with the angst of parental letting go. Yet the adoption never waivers, even in tough times. Love and belonging hold fast through years of threadbare strain. This similarity to God’s parenting I have found true in parenting various ages and genders and in parenting adopted and biological children. However, the element of transracial adoption has brought forward new opportunities to adapt. A few of those fell into place flawlessly.

Other times—many other times—I have failed to adapt due to ignorance. Regret remains. It’s why I write. Hopefully, I, through knowledge and maturity, can do a better job parenting and adapting to my younger children’s journeys to adulthood. I encounter many obstacles to joyful and fearless parenting of my Black and biracial children—the current culture, political and societal climate, and even the Christian church as an establishment, but not the Church as Christ. I trust, I pray, I watch in the night, I watch in the day, I “lay me down to sleep” and wish I could have an arm around each one until day breaks. I offer them, and my literal pale self, back up to God. I trust.

God has and holds each and every one for the present moment throughout eternity. God with transcendent and omnipotent power has us and our future.

To have: to possess, own, have meaning. To cause (someone or something) to be in a particular state or condition. Holding something.

I *have* eight children. I *hold* eight children. I have *birthed* eight children. Two of them I physically grew inside myself and pushed from my body. Six, I grew inside myself and cleaved them to my body. All of them I birthed, maybe not all had the same expected scenario, but I had each of them, equally showered in love and joyful motherhood giddiness.

I wish that I had known things. Not volumes of information about transracial adoption, but I wish I had had a few beautiful gems of knowledge passed on like that from a benevolent older aunt or mentor. I am not talking advice like the “you should,” “make sure,” “never” or even “you will thank me later,” but sweet and savory bits of

truth and wisdom from one who went the same road before me. It could have come from a Black mom, white mom, Black or white dad, any person who had previously loved, grieved, prayed over their child and still felt their parenting had come up lacking. Where are the seven secret passages²⁰ into this kiddo's head? (Harry Potter demonstrated by map the seven secret passages leading to Hogsmead). It would be most helpful to know of one. It must be me, my parenting skills and lack thereof. It's because I'm white, I lack understanding. I don't fit into the tribe my child is currently ascribing to be a part of. Yes, I wish I had known things, things gently laid before me like gifts from the heart of one who knew the road.

In our wait for the baby to be born, there has been fraud on our checking account that is also the source for all our trips and adoption funds. Fortunately, our bank is very quick to catch the thousands of dollars of wrongful purchases. The birth mother is in labor, and we are waiting to hear. After many hours, the decision is made to do a C-section.

The next day we finally receive the words we have been waiting to hear: "He has been born. Almost ten pounds. Did not do a C-section, he came on out without it. Can you come and see the birth mom, dad, grandmother, and baby tomorrow morning?"

²⁰ J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, (New York: Scholastic, 1999).

Mark and I go to see the baby, and we are told by the birth parents that we are the perfect people they had hoped for to parent this child. As a group, we pray over him, for his future, their future, our future with our new son. We leave with pure joy knowing that tomorrow we will come and take him with us— as our own child— back to meet his siblings and head home.

Infant car seat and diaper bag in hand, we enter the hospital and excitedly head to the labor and delivery floor. The adoption counselor meets us as we step off the elevator. “The birth mom has changed her mind. She has decided to parent the baby.”

We are given no concrete reasons. The counselor encourages us to take a moment in the private waiting room to process and talk together. An emotional bullet has shot through every system in my body. This cannot even be reality. Just yesterday we were securely told that the situation was exactly what they wanted for this little one.

How do we go back to the hotel room to three siblings who are expecting us to arrive with their new brother? The birth dad comes to the waiting room door and asks if he can talk to us for a moment. He says he and the birth mom are not together and have no plans to even continue to see each other. He does not want this for the baby. He wants the baby to go home with us. She has no way of providing for the baby and neither does he. He wants so much more for this baby boy, more than he had growing up in poverty and raised by an auntie who did her best but lacked. He apologizes. He has no power in the choice. We collect our things and walk back to our car, empty baby seat in hand.

The kids are very disappointed, and we all grieve. We pray as a family and make reservations to return home. Morning comes with sunniness that does not reflect our overall mood. The kids need a diversion, so we load up and decide to spend a couple of hours at a mall. I'm getting a phone call from our counselor; I am sure she is just checking in on us and about our plans to head home. I really don't want to talk and would rather not answer, but Mark wants me to pick up.

The birth mom has changed her mind again. After having him home overnight, she has realized that she is not prepared to parent 24-7 and, without any additional support, has no way of providing for any of his daily needs. Will we still take him? We are stunned—happy, elated, joyous, all those synonyms for positive emotions! The counselor will pick him up at the birth mom's house and will meet up with us at a truck stop on the interstate close to our hotel.

Sitting at a wobbly, truck stop patio table, we sign papers and exchange other needed documents. I am sure it looks like covert activity. Mark takes our new son into the men's room to change his diaper while I finish with the counselor. He is ours—this beautiful, dark curly-headed baby boy. His sisters and brother have ordered pizza as a celebration. We are a family of five.

SECTION 2: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Alternative Approaches to Transracial Adoption

Although this paper is in support of transracial adoption and provides a tool for further discussion and discovery about the subject matter, two additional options are offered for consideration.

Sociological Concerns/Alternative Solutions

Alternative Solution #1: Limit Black Transracial Adoptions and Foster Care

Rationale. Because of sociological concerns related to Black transracial adoptions, one solution has been to limit these Black transracial adoptions and foster care. The reasons and rationale are many. Children and families can struggle with:

- Safety and survival,
- Feelings of lack of belonging and of being outsiders,
- Unwritten codes and expectations,
- Conflicts between adopted family and their own ethnicity—denying one for the sake of the other,
- Family culture compared to racial culture, and
- Hair and skin care and hygiene.

Challenges with Law Enforcement. Another reason for discouraging these adoptions is that parents in transracial Black adoptions cannot adequately provide the guidance needed from others of the same race who have had negative experiences with law enforcement. Even basic day-to-day living, such as walking down a sidewalk, wearing a hooded sweatshirt, carrying anything in a pocket, or paying for cash purchases with a large bill can draw inappropriate attention. Or, driving a car nicer than what some would find appropriate for your race, shopping in an upscale neighborhood without a white friend or business entourage, or renting or buying an apartment or house in certain areas of town can bring on racial harassment or hate crimes. Adopted parents may also not understand the need to overly plan schedules for their Black children to avoid conflicts or suspicion.

Reality of White Supremacist Society. Black children of white parents can feel perpetually as outsiders. They do not look like or resemble parents, grandparents, and cousins. They do not look like anyone in the family albums. They often do take up mannerisms and speech patterns of their family, but doing so can twist into possible rejection from their Black friends and the Black community. When there are vacations and family outings, often these transracial families are bombarded with curious and rude questions from strangers. This is a common and expected occurrence which would never take place in a same-ethnicity family. These transracial parents bring children into a family with a sweet, naïve, color-blind response to race that infers inclusion within the family and guaranteed inclusion in all the circumstances these kids will face. This

ultimately results in adults who are unprepared to deal with reality in a white supremacist society, unprepared to venture into any area of their birth culture.²¹

Language. In a white world, Black people need to understand African American Vernacular English (AAVF).²² This is not an ability regularly acquired by white adoptive parents. Blacks also need to learn the skill of code-switching between AAVF and “proper English” if they are to succeed in a predominantly white workforce. Code-switching is a necessary adaptation for Black people. It is the switch from one learned linguistic code to another, depending on circumstances, social setting, or work environment. For most Blacks, survival at work demands the ability to switch from AAVE to “proper English” quickly and with perfection. An example of a workplace code-switch is “I been bought Air Pods” to a Black coworker and then “I bought Air Pods” to a white coworker. The more education received as a Black makes it less likely for the individual to share the workforce with other Blacks. In short, the more educated you are, the fewer Black people.

Blacks seem to be more at ease and not aware of code-switching when speaking the AAVE with other Blacks. When placed in a situation where it is considered the norm to speak “proper English,” Blacks tend to become more regulated and guarded in their speech.

Limiting Black Transracial Adoptions. In 1972 the NABSW (National Association of Black Social Workers) took drastic action to denounce the placement of

²¹ Valerie I. Harrison and Kathryn Peach D’Angelo, *Do Right by Me*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2020).

²² African American Vernacular English defined as a dialect of American English characterized by pronunciations, syntactic structures, and vocabulary associated with and used by some North American Black people and exhibiting a wide variety and range of forms varying in the extent to which they differ from Standard American English.

Black infants and children into white homes and families. Their stance was against placement of Black children with white parents for any reason. “We affirm the inviolable position of Black children in Black families where they belong physically, psychologically, and culturally in order that they receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound projection of their future.”²³

This point was validated in several ways.

Ethnicity is a main social construct for most people living in the United States. However, the NABSW felt that ethnicity had been suppressed by Blacks in America and devalued under social and political pressures. Blacks were striving to bring back value, substance, and pride to their ethnicity and to that end, promoted an end to transracial adoption or placement of Black children.

Families are a base of society and the most constant component in a child’s development of self, culture, and identity. A Black child placed in a white family would not cultivate a healthy perspective of themselves as a Black person, the NABSW believed. They would not easily identify and grow positive and nurturing self-concepts and identity outside of a Black family. The transracial, adopted Black child would not look like or resemble any member of their white family. This alone interfered with self-identity and belonging to family. These children have great difficulty feeling a part of any particular cultural group.

The historical progression of white culture and society does not include Black families or children. Perceptions about identity and social orientation are missing within that history for the Black child. They often cannot find themselves in the history books

²³. “Position Statement on Trans-racial Adoption, National History of Black Social Workers, September 1972,” from Robert H. Bremner, *Children and Youth in America: A Documentary History, Vol. 3, Parts 1-4*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1974, 777-780, <http://www.nabsw.org>.

except in racist and degrading entries. This is a stark difference from white parents who can easily identify with heroes, leaders, patriarchs, and matriarchs of the historical decades that preceded them.

The Association took a clear position regarding a Black child's socialization, stating that:

In our society, the developmental needs of Black children are significantly different from those of white children. Black children are taught, from an exceedingly early age, highly sophisticated coping techniques to deal with racist practices perpetuated by individuals and institutions. These coping techniques become successfully integrated into ego functions and can be incorporated only through the process of developing positive identification with significant Black others.

Only a Black family can transmit the emotional and sensitive subtleties of perception and reaction essential for a Black child's survival in a racist society. Our society is distinctively Black or white and characterized by white racism at every level. We (NABSW) repudiate the fallacious and fantasized reasoning of some that whites adopting Black children will alter that basic character.²⁴

The NABSW concluded with support against white adoptions of Black children. The organization's reasoning included:

- Transracial adoption as positive and expedient for a white couple seeking to adopt.
- The supply of white infants was limited.
- Black infants were frequently re-defined as "white/Black," "biracial," "interracial," or "mixed race" in the premise of creating a more acceptable choice for prospective white parents.
- White people were not adopting Black children out of selfless concern and well-being of these children.

²⁴ Ibid.

- There were numerous alternatives to placing Black children with white parents.
- The assertion that there were not enough Black families willing and available to adopt Black infants and children was not accurate.
- Children should not linger in foster care, but Black children did not belong in white families.

The NABSW’s Kinship Care Position Paper of 2003 expanded its definition of *family* to include the full range of blood relatives (such as all cousins, regardless of degree). This new definition should also include extended family members—non-relatives or fictive kin (such as cohabitating spouses, godparents, close friends, and neighbors)—who are willing to serve as co-guardians, successor guardians, stand-by guardians in the event the current caregiver is no longer able to care for the children. Family and kinship should be defined by the family systems, culture and experiences. Systems need to be inclusive of the diverse cultural structures accepted in the African American community.

“We (the NABSW) support federal legislation that establishes a new permanency option for kin caregivers, subsidized guardianship, which would include eligibility for the same level of Title IV-E funds as those provided to non-relative foster families. This legislation should remove both the language and concept of “out-of-home” care, thus acknowledging that children are living within the parameters of their extended families.”²⁵

²⁵ “Kinship Care Position Paper,” National Association of Black Social Workers, adopted January 10, 2003.

Title IV-E provided direct financial assistance for children placed within the foster care system. This was an annually appropriated program with specific eligibility requirements and fixed allowable uses of funds.²⁶

In addition, the NABSW urged that the shortened ASFA (the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997)²⁷ timeframe for termination of parental rights be lengthened to provide sufficient time for treatment and rehabilitation of birth parents who may be experiencing drug addiction, alcoholism, or incarceration.²⁸

Historical Values Missing: Ma’at and Kwanzaa. Often missing in transracial adoptions are historical values, such as the Seven Principles of Ma’at and the History, Principles, and Symbols of Kwanzaa. Many consider these historical values imperative for Black children to learn and recognize these teachings may not be taught or ingrained in a white home.

The Seven Principles of Ma’at

The Goddess Ma’at is the embodiment of the Ancient Egyptian Seven Principles of Ma’at which are Truth, Balance, Order, Harmony, Righteousness, Morality, and Justice. It was expected that the priests, Pharaohs, and their families embody these

²⁶ “Title IV-E Foster Care,” Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children & Families, 2012, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/archive/cb/grant-funding/title-iv-e-foster-care>.

²⁷ ASFA Adoption and Safe Families Act, <https://www.courts.oregon.gov/programs/crb/news/Documents/2018EDC/3.ConcurrentWhatIsASFABrochure.pdf>

²⁸ “Overview: The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, in “Failure to Protect,” FRONTLINE, PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/shows/fostercare/inside/asfa>

principles, along with every member of the community. Life was to be lived in such a way that these principles guided all actions and relationships. One who did not live, rule, and lead by these principles was considered unfit for the position during the times of Egypt's greatest spiritual heights.²⁹

Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is a weeklong celebration held in the United States that honors African American culture. It is observed from December 26 to January 1 and culminates in gift giving and a big feast. The holiday is relatively new, compared to other U.S. holidays. Dr. Maulana Karenga, professor and chair of Africana Studies at California State University, created Kwanzaa in 1966. He created this holiday in response to the Watts³⁰ riots in Los Angeles in 1965 as a way to bring African Americans together as a community.³¹

Dr. Karenga researched African harvest celebrations and combined aspects of several different celebrations, such as those of the Ashanti and those of the Zulu, to form the foundation of Kwanzaa. The name *Kwanzaa* is derived from the phrase *matunda ya kwanzaa*, which means first fruits or harvest in Swahili. Celebrations often include singing and dancing, poetry reading, African drumming, and feasting.

²⁹ "The 42 Ideals of Ma'at," October 11, 2017, Iseum Sanctuary, <https://iseumsanctuary.com/2017/10/11/the-laws-and-ideals-of-maat/> .

³⁰ Watts riots: a six-day riot in Los Angeles with the goals of ending mistreatment by the police and to end discrimination in housing, and schooling systems toward the Black community.

³¹ "The History, Principles, and Symbols of Kwanzaa," *InterExchange*, July 20, 2022, www.interexchange.org/articles/career-training-usa/history-principles-and-symbols-of-kwanzaa/.

Dr. Karenga created seven guiding principles to be discussed during the week of Kwanzaa. The seven principles represent seven values of African culture that build and reinforce community among African Americans. The seven principles are: Unity, Self-determination, Collective Work and Determination, Cooperative Economics, Purpose, Creativity, and Faith.

Each day a different principle is discussed and a candle is lit on the *kinara* (candleholder). On the first night, the center candle is lit, and the principle of *umoja*, or unity is discussed. On the final day of Kwanzaa, families enjoy an African feast, called *karamu*.

Codes, Expectations, Safety: Survival Tools for Black life in a Racist Society

A significant proponent of ending transracial adoption is the NABSW (National Association of Social workers). In 1972, within the Transracial Adoption Statement, the NABSW took a vehement stand against the placement of Black children in white homes for any reason. “We affirm the inviolable position of Black children in Black families where they belong physically, psychologically, and culturally in order that they receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound projection of their future.”³²

The NABSW based its stance primarily on two points.³³

1. Transracial adoption prevents Black children from developing a clear racial identity and self as a Black.

³² “Position Statement on Trans-racial Adoptions,” (National Association of Black Social Workers, 1972) Nabsw.org/page/positionstatements.

³³ Ibid.

2. Transracial adoption fails to equip Black children from developing the skills needed to survive and navigate life in a racist society.

Since 1972 the NABSW remains clearly opposed to transracial adoption and in 1985 the president of the association testified before the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources. The testimony stated, “The NABSW views placement of Black children in white homes as a hostile act against the Black community, considering a blatant form of race and cultural genocide.”³⁴

Again, in 1991, their position was reaffirmed stating, “that even the most loving and skilled white parent could not avoid doing irreparable harm to an African American child.”³⁵

The 1994 statement gives a small concession to a transracial adoption outcome, but again, only very slightly, “Transracial adoption should only be considered after documented evidence of unsuccessful placements has been reviewed and supported by appropriate representatives of the African American Community. Transracial adoptions would only be given any consideration after options for placement with biological family or other Black families.”³⁶

The Welfare Reform Statement offered up by the NABSW steering committee in 2002, continued the same anti-transracial agenda. Their testimony: “Find culturally grounded options for a child of African Ancestry before giving consideration to placing

³⁴ Testimony of William T. Merritt, President of the National Association of Black Social Workers, Hearings Before the Committee on Labor and Human Resources, United States Senate, 99th Congress, June 25, 1985.

³⁵ Griffith and Bergeron, “Cultural Stereotypes Die Hard: The Case of Transracial Adoption,” *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, Sept 2006. <https://jaapl.org/content/34/3/303>.

³⁶ “Preserving Families of African Ancestry,” NABSW, 2003, [Nabsw.org/page/positionstatements](https://nabsw.org/page/positionstatements).

our children outside of the community.³⁷ The Indian Child Welfare Act has emphasized for nearly 30 years that Native American Children be placed within their tribe or the Native American Community before being considered for placement in other communities.”³⁸ The cornerstone of this legislation supports the notion of the importance of the culture in the lives of Native American Children. The IEPA (Interethnic Placement Act, 1996),³⁹ and the ASFA (Adoption and Safe Families Act, 1997) seem to deny the importance of culture in the lives of children African ancestry.”⁴⁰

In the previous statement, the association is strong about their efforts to protect and support not only Black children, but also Black families and Black ancestry. Their viewpoint is that the Black race and ethnicity is dealt inequity, disparity, and discrimination through the Child Welfare System, and ultimately this is a social justice issue for all people. “It is our collective best interest to commit ourselves to ensuring the well-being of our children and families, NABSW 2003.”⁴¹

³⁷ Welfare Reform, NABSW National Steering Committee, 2002, [Nabsw.org/page/positionstatements](https://nabsw.org/page/positionstatements).

³⁸ Indian Child Welfare Act, 1978. Legality of this federal law is currently being challenged in the Supreme Court, 2022.

³⁹ “Ensuring the Best Interests of Children,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Office for Civil Rights. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ocr/civilrights/resources/specialtopics/adoption/mepatraingppt.pdf>.

⁴⁰ “Summary of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997,” Civil Welfare League of America, <https://adoptioninchildtime.org/bondingbook/summary-of-the-adoption-and-safe-families-act-of-1997-pl-105-89>.

⁴¹ “Preserving Families of African Ancestry,” NABSW, 2003, [Nabsw.org/page/positionstatements](https://nabsw.org/page/positionstatements).

Alternative Solution 2: Kinship Care

Kinship care is viewed and defined as foster care. Kinship care, which is currently defined as an “out-of-home placement,” falls under foster care regulations that are designed for non-relative caregivers. Federal and state legislation require relative caregivers to meet the same licensing standards as non-relative caregivers in order to receive foster care funding and other services.

Kinship care is not considered a form of permanency. Because kinship care is defined as foster care, it is considered as temporary, rather than a form of permanency.

There is no uniform definition of “relative.” Each state has its own definition of relative and criteria for what constitutes kin.

Lack of Adequate Financial Support. The level of financial support provided to relative caregivers is often determined by designated funds that can vary from state to state. Unfortunately, some states force kin families to accept TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), which does not provide children and families with essential services such as educational and mental health counseling or childcare and respite services.

Limited Timelines. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) requires states to initiate or join proceedings to terminate parental rights for parents whose children have been in care for 15 of the last 22 months, except in situations in which the child is placed safely with relatives; or if there is a compelling reason why

termination of parental rights is not in the child's best interests or when the family has not received services that were part of the case plan.⁴²

Most states recognize only the first part of the mandate relating to termination of parental rights and do not acknowledge the other two parts of the law regarding placing children safely with relatives and ensuring that families receive services that are part of the case plan.

Background Information

Informal adoption, or the rearing of children by relatives, is one of the most enduring African traditions that survived the Middle Passage. During slavery, elderly relatives reared thousands of children whose parents had been sold as chattel. Informal adoption continues to be widespread in the Black community. Today, over two million African American children are raised by grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, cousins, and others who are not formal relatives.⁴³

Before the 1980s nearly all of the African American children who were reared by kin were outside the child welfare system. After 1986 the number of children placed in foster care with kin soared as a result of the crack cocaine epidemic and the spread of HIV/AIDS in inner cities. By the 1990s over half of the children in foster care in many large cities, such as New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago were reared by relatives. In addition, there were consent decrees requiring some states to pay relative caregivers as

⁴² The Adoption and Safe Families Act 1997.

⁴³ "Kinship Care," NABSW, 2003.

they did licensed foster parents. However, the family had to have a report of neglect or abuse to qualify for financial support.⁴⁴

While the number of African American children in kinship care has increased markedly, the overwhelming majority of children reared by relatives remain outside the child welfare system. Of the more than two million Black children who are being reared by relatives (without the presence of either parent), 20 percent are in foster care, and the remaining 80 percent are in informal adoptive families.⁴⁵

Research studies consistently underscore the positive functioning of children reared by relatives. The lowest levels of child abuse are found among children raised by kin. Kinship care has the highest rates of stability and permanence for children. On the other hand, research has revealed that kinship caregivers receive much lower funding than non-relative families.

Despite the unique needs of children in kinship care as a result of parental chemical dependency or HIV/AIDS infection, caregivers who are relatives often receive fewer social services than non-relatives. Such inadequate services often lead to severe hardships for caregivers, who are more likely to be elderly, low income, and single parents.

As previously mentioned, each state has its own way of defining “relative” which presents unique challenges. Often these definitions do not take into consideration the cultural perspectives on family. In the African American community, the term *family* is broadly defined and based on relationships and function. With this in mind, family is

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

defined by African Americans and those of African descent as including the relationships by formal or informal marriage (step-parents, half-brothers, half-sisters, for example) and the full range of blood kin (encompassing all cousins, without regard to degree and paternal relatives of children born outside of wedlock). This African-based definition of family extends to a broad range of non-relatives or fictive kin (godparents, friends, neighbors, and community parents) who provide very important emotional support and tangible assistance to the children and parents. In addition, the African American “family” extends beyond people who live in the same household and includes persons who live in different households, but perform important family support functions.

Efforts to legislate kinship care through the enactment of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) have resulted in further challenges for child welfare practitioners. The July 2001 final rule clarification of ASFA eliminated state’s rights to modify licensing standards for relative caregivers and mandated a single strict standard. This single strict standard resulted in fewer relative caregivers being able to become licensed foster caregivers.

Position Statement: Kinship Care

Adopted by the NABSW National Steering Committee, January 10, 2003.⁴⁶

We place children in kinship families because we believe in family and we support family preservation. We affirm the following values of kinship care:

- Kinship care is a continuation of the African tradition of caring, supporting and providing cultural continuity for families. It has been manifested over many generations by an enduring tradition of informal adoption of children by extended family members.
- Kinship care provides cultural and historical continuity for children who are unable to live with their parents. Kinship care facilitates cultural, spiritual, and social growth of both the children and extended family through continuous connectedness of families.
- Kinship care is a viable component of family preservation, reunification, and permanency for African American children.

In order to preserve and enhance the vitality of African American families, this country must develop national and state legislation, policies, practices, and support services that are equitable, family-centered and culturally sensitive. Government policies need to focus on providing culturally-competent services to the “kinship triad,” which include the kin caregivers, children, and birth parents. These services must not be “child-

⁴⁶ “Kinship Care Position Statement,” adopted by the NABSW National Steering Committee, 2003. <http://www.nabsw.org/page/positionstatement> .

focused,” but “family-centered.” In addition, states should once again be permitted the right to modify licensing standards and not have to adhere to a restrictive single standard.

Kinship caregivers raising children or siblings placed formally or informally in the home should have the opportunity to access and receive important resources. Thus, there is a need to remove many barriers, especially culturally insensitive licensing standards.

Children and kinship families should be entitled to the same benefits and services as non-related foster families, whether they are licensed or not. These services include parenting education, day care, health coverage, job training, legal assistance, housing support, respite care, and other services.

Kinship care families should receive equitable and adequate financial support. Kinship families should not be forced to rely on TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) funds, which are temporary and considerably less than foster care stipends. Moreover, since it costs the same to raise children, whether they are with relatives or not, it is imperative that kinship families be entitled to the same level of foster care stipends as non-related families.

Since social work practice has traditionally focused on non-related families, there is a need for specialized training to enhance worker capabilities to understand the unique interfamilial dynamics, family legacies, transitional issues and lifestyle changes within kinship care families. Kinship families should receive strengths-based, quality services that will be evaluated for effectiveness.

It is also important that the definition of family in public policies be expanded to include the full range of blood relatives (such as all cousins, regardless of degree). This

new definition should also include extended family members who are non-relatives or fictive kin (such as cohabiting spouses, godparents, close friends, or neighbors), who are willing to serve as co-guardians, successor guardians, or standby-guardians in the event that the current caregiver is no longer able to care for the children. Family and kinship should be defined by family systems, culture and experiences. Systems need to be inclusive of the diverse cultural structures accepted in the African American community.

We support federal legislation that establishes a new permanency option for kin caregivers, subsidized guardianship, which would include eligibility for the same level of Title IV-E funds as those provided to non-relative foster families. This legislation should remove both the language and concept of out-of-home care, thus acknowledging that children are living within the parameters of their extended families.

In addition, we strongly urge that the shortened ASFA timeframe for termination of parental rights be lengthened to provide sufficient time for treatment and rehabilitation of birth parents who may be experiencing drug addiction, alcoholism or incarceration.

Summary of Recommendations

Long before “it takes a village to raise a child” became a trendy phrase in the 20th century lexicon, it was an African and later African American child rearing philosophy.

To preserve and enhance this legacy, we recommend the following:

- Provide the opportunity to access and receive important resources for kinship caregivers raising children or siblings placed formally or informally in their homes.

- Remove barriers such as culturally insensitive licensing standards. Kinship families that meet the safety certifications for children should be entitled to the same benefits and services as non-related foster families, whether they are licensed or not. States should be restored their prior rights to modify licensing standards as they deem necessary and not have to adhere to a restrictive national standard.
- Entitle kinship families to the same level of foster care stipends as non-related families. We strongly support federal legislation that establishes a new permanency option for kin caregivers of subsidized guardianship, which would include eligibility for the same level of Title IV-E funds as those provided to non-relative foster families.
- Provide quality services that are easily accessible, strengths-based and family/child friendly. Kin caregivers should be entitled to the full range of services, such as parenting education, day care, health coverage, legal assistance, housing support, respite care, etc.
- Lengthen the shortened ASFA timeframe for termination of parental rights to provide sufficient time for treatment and rehabilitation of birth parents who may be experiencing drug addiction, alcoholism or incarceration.
- Provide child welfare workers with specialized training that enhances their capability to understand the unique interfamilial dynamics, family legacies, transitional issues and lifestyle changes within kin families.
- Expand the definition of kin/relative in public policies to include the full range of blood relatives (including all cousins, regardless of degree). This new

definition should also include extended family members who are non-relatives and who are willing to serve as co-guardians, successor guardians or standby guardians. Family and kinship should be defined by the family's systems, culture and experiences.

SECTION 3:

THESIS

Compelling, Significant, and Insightful Support of Transracial Adoption

At Christmastime in 2008, it seems everyone just expects us to have another baby. It is in the air as strongly as fake pine scent. All four kids keep saying a new baby is “all” they want for Christmas. We have moved to a much larger home with ample bedrooms. My mom has also moved in with us and is one of the children’s cohorts, wanting one more grandbaby.

In flat out honesty, Mark and I cannot find a great reason why not. I am entering into my Doctoral program, but most of the classroom work will be done virtually in my home office. Mark is extremely comfortable in his job and all the kids are doing well.

We fill out the paperwork, now easy and familiar, no longer daunting or intimidating. Our home study is updated. Our adoption counsellor gives us the mandated clause that it might not happen or at least quickly. We are getting older, sometimes birth moms prefer younger or first-time parents. It is not the first time we have heard those warnings. It is a total God thing. If it happens, we are blessed. If not, we are still blessed with all the kiddos we have. There is peace throughout.

Quick. That was quick. A birth mom has chosen us. She is a prison mom and does not want her baby to go into foster care. She is very young and has had previous abortions. However, she did not know she was pregnant when arrested and the state she is in does not allow abortions for incarcerated moms.

Are we interested? This truly is so very quick that we are dazed. I guess that means yes and yes. Yes, God has chosen for us to parent again, and, yes, we want this baby. I am at a retreat with my class and phone reception is sketchy, but Mark and I manage to convey to each other and the adoption agency our questions and responses. The birth mom has been incarcerated for a while and is just now deciding to make adoption plans. There has been wonderful prenatal care and nutrition provided the mom to the full extent of adequate exercise and vitamins. Are they trying to sell us a car or find this baby a good home? She has no family to possibly take the baby and does not want the baby to go into foster care. Because the birth will be planned and induced, an ultrasound is scheduled for the next day. The sex of the baby will likely be determined at that appointment. We say a concrete yes. We make plans. We decide on a plan for the travel and hear the date the birth mom will be induced but are also told it is possible she could go into labor anytime.

A couple of days pass with no word, then three. I leave my morning meeting, resolved to contact our adoption counselor when I get home. The counselor is hesitant to check out the situation for us, feeling that she would have heard if there were any changes. However, she calls.

The baby has already been born, and the birth mom is back in the prison. The hospital wants us there now so they can release their responsibility. The baby is on the East Coast, and we are on the West Coast with no travel reservations. I call Mark and he heads home to help pull it all together so we can leave. Our adoption travel agent saves the day again and we get the last two available seats on a flight to our destination. We do the red-eye, land, and drive for an hour and a half. Finally we are at the hospital.

The counselor meets us in the labor and delivery lobby to sign all the paperwork before we see our baby. The birth mother has chosen not to meet us, so we shelve another set of mixed emotions for a different day. A nurse guides us through the nursery as we speculate on which little bundle is ours. None.

We are taken beyond the cute and colorful walls to a tiny obscure, dimly-lit room. There we meet him for the first time! Joy! He has lots of dark hair and is so cute. We bond immediately. The nurse hurries us to dress him and get through discharge. She barely allows a moment to take a couple first pictures. We are told later that the hospital receives only a set amount of money for the care of a prison inmate and if the inmate has had a baby, they get no additional funds. That explains the dingy back-room housing and curt, throw-away discharge. They give us an extra diaper and a bottle and direct us to the local Babies R Us store. But none of that really matters, especially in the moment. We have our new son, and he is perfect in every way. We are in love.

He has a terrible diaper rash so we question if his diaper was changed regularly at the hospital. For the first two days, he does not cry. I wake him up

to feed him and stimulate him. He soon responds to the love and constant care and begins engaging us and letting his needs be known! (Our pediatrician agrees that the baby had not been held or stimulated during those first couple of days in the hospital, but he was now checking out 100 percent on track.)

Going home. Our church family and four siblings wait up until after midnight to meet our newest family and church member. A new chapter has begun.

Advice to Persons Considering Adoption

Inclusiveness in your adoptive criteria will, in most adoption opportunities, allow you to be chosen sooner, have fewer hurdles regarding the birth mother's decision to adopt out her baby, and often require fewer expenses. This is in many ways similar to a biological birth. If you are a person who would require little or no prenatal screening in a biological pregnancy because you would never terminate the pregnancy, then inclusiveness in an adoptive situation may be a good strategy to consider. But if you, as a birth parent, would need to know a full genetic screening, get an ultrasound, or even determine the sex of the child to take a pregnancy to full term, then an inclusive adoption choice may not work for you even though it might produce a baby sooner.

Whatever method is utilized to fulfill parenthood—biological, surrogate, or adoption—becoming a parent is the willingness to accept and love unconditionally. Parenting is knowing that you are the person God is trusting to raise up this little person.

You are the one, regardless of how you came to be the child's parent. There is not another person who can replace you because God chose *you*.

Philosophical and Fundamental Nature of Findings, Numbers, and Reality

Irene Powell and Mark Montgomery in their 2020 article “Transracial Adoptions in the Time of Black Lives Matter”⁴⁷ speak to the issue of developmental and adjustment problems among Black children adopted by white parents. Transracial adoption, particularly of Black children by white parents, has aroused controversy for more than 50 years, especially after being famously denounced by the National Association of Black Social Workers in 1972. But the empirical evidence on transracial adoption suggests strongly that Black children adopted into white families suffer no more developmental or adjustment problems than Black adoptees into Black families.

Given the significant shortage of Black families available to adopt Black children from foster care, opposition to transracial adoption does not serve those who need a permanent family.

Transracial adoptees were as integrated into their white families as the children born into them. School performance was also high: a “B” average for the transracial adopted children of color and “B” average for white children.

⁴⁷ Mark Montgomery and Irene Powell, “Transracial Adoption in the Time of Black Lives Matter,” American Enterprise Institute, November 20, 2020, [Aei.org/research-products/report/transracial-adoption-in-the-time-of-black-lives-matter/](https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/transracial-adoption-in-the-time-of-black-lives-matter/)

There was also no difference between the two groups in behavioral or academic difficulties.⁴⁸ Objectively, for biracial adoptees, the race of the parents had only a small, if any, influence on the outcomes of school performance, behavioral problems, and integration into the family. Subjectively, exposure to birth culture, having peers, role models, and mentors that look like them, living in a diverse neighborhood will help facilitate a positive and healthy racial/ethnic identity.⁴⁹

Studies show that Black and biracial adoptees living with white parents do as well as they would have if adopted by Black parents.

Numbers and trends – May 2020

Foster Care Statistics 2019

In 2008, 26 percent of the Black, African American children in foster care exited the system, compared to 21 percent in 2018. This was a decrease of 5 percent.

For white children in foster care during the same years, there was a 2 percent increase—44 percent to 46 percent—of those exiting the system.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 4.

⁵⁰ “Foster Care Statistics 2019,” *Child Welfare Information Gateway* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth and Families Children’s Bureau, March 2021). <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/foster.pdf>.

In the January 13, 2023 article “Dreaming for a Better Tomorrow,”⁵¹ children of color are more likely to experience multiple placements and not be reunited with birth families. They are more likely to be placed in group care settings and less likely to find permanent homes and families.

Data from 2018 shows that of all children in the United States, 50.5 percent were white, 13.71 percent Black. In foster care, however, 43.37 percent were white, 22.75 percent Black.

⁵¹ Chloe Fuller, “Dreaming of a Better Tomorrow,” *Kidsave*, January 13, 2023. [Kidsave.org/dreaming-of-a-better-tomorrow/](https://kidsave.org/dreaming-of-a-better-tomorrow/).

2018 Children, ages 0-17

Percentage of white children in population 52.5 percent
 Percentage of Black children in the population 15.1 percent

Percentage of white children in foster care 48.9 percent
 Percentage of Black children in foster care 25.2 percent

Percentage of white children entering foster care 51.27 percent
 Percentage of Black children entering foster care 23.5 percent

Percentage of white children exiting foster care 50.9 percent
 Percentage of Black children exiting foster care 23.1 percent

Greater than 1 = overrepresentation
 Less than 1 = underrepresentation
 1 = no disproportionality

Blacks 1.52
 Whites .97

Disproportionality is the level at which groups of children are present in the child welfare system relative to their proportion in the general population.

Transracial adoptions remain a clear reality in our everyday world. The idea of colorblindness has dramatically impacted the desire for people to make the choice to parent across racial differences. Does this reality equal adequate parenting? Are there amazing, inclusive families? Is there recognition of and respect for ethnic differences within the family? Do children thrive within the family or just exist?

Statistics from 2019, within international adoptions in the United States, show 84 percent were transracial. In the domestic adoptions, three-fourths of adoptive parents were Caucasian/white.

Transracial adoptions are a significant benefit in that children are cared for and provided for outside of government entities and programs. The adoptive parents all have

passed through a multitude of background checks and scrutiny; thus, it is safe to say that the children of these parents will be safe and physically and financially provided for.

But how do these adoptions impact the parents, families, and most importantly the adoptees in the long term?

There are voiced concerns beyond those of NABSW. Author and speaker Rhonda Roorda addresses many of these through her writing and speaking. She herself is a transracial adoptee and lived in the foster care system for two years before being adopted.

Writer Alice H. Murray presents Roorda's views in a 2019 article "Transracial Adoption: Red or Green Light for the Colorblind Policy?"

As I have talked about elsewhere, Roorda points out:

- There is often a lack of connection with transracial adoptees' ethnic community.
- Black children can struggle with assimilation into white culture while keeping racial identity.
- There is a need to ensure these adoptive placements have long term success.
- The focus of transracial adoptions is finding a loving home for children. Race, history, and
- Cultural awareness are key components to consider in these adoption placements.

In this article, Roorda stresses that transracial adoptive parents must realize at the outset of the process that transracial adoption is a long-term commitment.

The work does not stop when the child becomes an adult. In the beginning the adoptive parents see a cute little child or baby of color in need of a home. But that child will grow into an adult of color. Transracial adoptees face challenges when they leave their adoptive homes and lose the "white privilege" they had with their adoptive families. They may not know how to maneuver in a racist society. Reading about the history of race relations can help both the adoptee and the

parents grasp the societal issues which face people of color in this country— issues the adoptee can and will face in life. —Alice H. Murray⁵²

This too is uncharted territory, continuing to raise my transracial boys as they enter adulthood. The concerns of their unmistakable “white privilege” – of being safe in a car, in the mall, walking down the street...if they are with their white parents. Given the happenings in our country at this moment, it is clear that my six transracial children are in possible danger whenever they walk out the door unaccompanied by their parents or white sisters. As babies, I offered simple prayers of thanksgiving for the opportunity to be their mom. Now, I beseech God daily for their safety.

Over two years have flown by. So many changes. Too many? I make the purposefully delayed decision to find a care facility for my mom. It must happen for her safety and best care, but the decision is totally heart wrenching for our whole family. She is still so close to the kids and will frequently join in with their play, but along with her physician, we decide on a great place that is close by. My mom has always loved to travel, so we gather all our extra energy plus and take her with us on one last vacation before we move her. It is a wonderful and memorable trip that grips our hearts, knowing it won't come again. Mom transitions well and is even making new friends. Her disease process is taking over, and she is failing a little more every week.

⁵² Alice H. Murray, “Transracial Adoption: Red or Green Light for the Colorblind Policy?” *Florida Adoption Council*, Nov. 11, 2019. <https://floridaadoptioncouncil.com/transracial-child-adoption/>.

For some reason Mark and I simultaneously start thinking of a baby girl. We don't share with each other for quite a while. I believe in retrospect the whole idea just seems, well, insane? The topic eventually can no longer be held back, and we simply agree to move forward. No drama, debate, weighing, just moving forward. Fourth verse, same as the first. No guarantees, we are older so birth moms may not choose us. Whatever. It's so much a God thing— we have absolutely zero expectations, just wait and see. Again, it is quick. Birth mother is young. We talk with her on the phone. She already has a little girl that is a toddler. The situation is solid, and she would like for us to be there for the birth or shortly after to take the baby home. We commit to the adoption. Our church family has a baby shower for us because we cannot put this little girl in all the blue we have collected.

The baby is born, healthy and the birth mom is anxious for us to get there. The plane lands and I take my phone off airplane mode. There are multiple messages from our adoption counselor to “please call.” Standing in baggage claim, we hear the birth mom has changed her mind. She has taken the baby home. Please go ahead and check into a hotel, because as you know, the birth moms frequently change their minds. Mark and I decide to get our car and drive to where we can take a walk and clear our minds. Do we really want to check in and wait? Should we and how do we tell our kids? Let's just be done. No, we should let God have the moment and not escape just because it is hard.

We check in and reach out to our counselor. Nothing from the birth mother, but the counselor will connect with her tomorrow. Even the hotel bed is too

inviting not to collapse and forget for a few hours. The next morning brings the word that the birth mom is adamant on keeping her baby. We are let down, but not surprised. The location of our hotel is very close to a national landmark, so we decide to spend the rest of the day gathering some respite and touring the park. We fill in our family and church friends and ask for prayer. Coffee in hand, we set out to make the best of this strange day.

The Park entrance asks for all visitors to put their phones on airplane mode unless they have an emergency, so of course we comply. It is good to have our minds on something else and we agree to bring the kids here someday in the future.

Leaving the park behind, my messages tell me to call our counselor ASAP. What's up? Has the birth mom changed her mind after all? There is another birth mom that had been previewing our packet back originally when we started this round. Her due date was later, so she is just now making her choice and is very interested in us and our family. She is due in about a month and is having a baby boy. Would we be interested? What a whirlwind of emotions! Mark and I grab a snack and try to think clearly about this possibility before responding. Ultimately, we decide to move forward with the adoption and schedule a phone call with the birth mom before heading back home. The birth mother is an older mom with four other children. She is doing OK, but another baby would push her over the limits personally and financially. She is not sure who the birth father is and reassures us that both potential men are healthy and nice people. She would like us to be there for the birth and recognizes the trauma we have

just come through. Our adoption agency allows us a travel stipend if we agree to this baby boy. After considerable prayer, we say yes to our fourth boy.

We arrive as the birth mom is going into labor. Things stall, then active labor, stall, this continues for about four days and the doctor determines she has low iron. Iron on board, the labor is now progressing, and we wait to hear when delivery happens.

It has been a very long and grieving month. I returned home from the failed adoption anticipating this new opportunity, to find my mom has severely declined and is now on hospice care. She lingers in and out of a coma state for several days and passes peacefully. We prepare to say the last goodbyes here on earth and lay her to rest in a simple graveside ceremony. She and dad are now together with Jesus. I miss her so very much. This little guy will be the first grandchild she will never hold or play with.

But we are here holding him at last and there is of course that joy beyond description. The birth mom loves the name we have picked out and agrees it should not be changed. We are given our own room in the hospital to room with him and take care of all his needs. The birth mom just wants to recover and go home to her other children. She says one last tearful goodbye as she cuddles him in her room. We part ways, her with a bouquet of flowers and us with a new precious bundle to raise.

SECTION 4:

ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

I am interested in developing a podcast that provides a venue for the discussion of transracial families and the nuances involved. The study and writing of this paper have brought growth and discovery to our family and allowed us to venture into topics that we had not previously addressed. Perhaps sitting round a table and sharing fears, concerns, viewpoints and experiences are a tool for acceptance and a way to belong. Everyone can listen and respond to a podcast. Not everyone will read a dissertation.

Additional rationale for this podcast:

- To give others information that I wish I could have known years ago.
- Disseminate information in manageable chunks for discussion and thought.
- Relevant to our countries' growing multiracial families and thus growth in relevance to everyone.
- Encourage a sense of belonging, of not being alone. Sharing, growing, reaching out, co-learning in a common struggle.
- Personally, to utilize this podcast as a tool to further bind us together in surety of how God created our family.

I offer this description of planning for a weekly podcast, as described by Daniel Larson and Jake Felding:

A weekly podcast broadcast from an at-home studio. Usual format is a relaxed, informative narrative that transitions into a question, discussion, and answer time.

Most weeks will include guests who have experience and expertise in the scheduled topic. The podcast must have ease of access support. The information will be intriguing to a large segment of the broadcast domain. The discussion will provide greater understanding of a topic.

The podcast will initially have 5–8 produced segments ready to broadcast. These segments/episodes are approximately 25 minutes in length. The episode is uploaded every Monday morning by 4:00 a.m. Eastern Time. This allows listeners to access while preparing for the workday and during their commute. The podcasts will also be downloadable from the site.

The podcast requires an appropriate name and initial topics. The beginning sets the theme of the podcast and always remains the same. The podcast name, host name, a brief explanation about what the podcast is about. The listeners need to know if the podcast is right for them. The intro comes next with possible snippets of the best parts of the episode, bio of the guest, a question that “hooks” the audience to listen for more information. This can include a teaser for what is coming up. Keep all of this brief and simply said.

Keep the episode moving into the main event/topic, this is what the listener came for – if too much time lags before getting into the “meat” of the topic, listeners will literally tune out and turn off. Get into the good stuff and keep it lively with engaging information that listeners are anxious to hear.

The content is up to the podcast creator and is the time to be creative and develop a climate where listeners want more. The content should feel different each week to keep the podcast fresh and not leave the audience feeling like they have heard it all before. Ask questions of the guest and audience in curious ways. An example would be, “What did that information bring up from your past experiences?” The host should be a great listener with the ability to monitor and control the direction of the discussion. They will possess the skills needed to make the guest and listening audience feel safe. Each episode has an energizing effect that sparks response from those listening and has them anticipating what the next week’s topic holds in store. That said, the podcast will have favorite episodes that people can’t get enough of seeing/hearing. The highlights of these can be included at the very beginning intro or outro of the show to remind the audience of those great segments and why they will not want to miss an episode.⁵³

Open dialogue around highly-debated and heated concerns of the allowance of white parents to adopt Black children is a basecamp for understanding and discovery. The

⁵³ Daniel Larson and Jake Felding, *Podcasting Made Simple: The Step by Step Guide on How to Start a Successful Podcast from the Ground Up*, (AT Publishing, 2020).

goal of the dialogue is acceptance and tolerance for transracial adoptions as well as learning and acquisition of resources that benefit these adoptions and the adoptees.

SECTION 5

ARTIFACT SPECIFICATIONS

As section five begins, a rather dry and technical read, it is bookended with my last two adoption stories. This leads to the conclusion of building our family and reiterates why I am putting this to paper and pod.

Days are going by as we wait for clearance to travel and return to our home state. Christmas is approaching, and we did very little shopping before we left. We send a small list to the girls to take to Toys R Us and have ready. Mark and I go hunting for a very large, red suitcase. So much fun shopping for the girls and our boys, secrets to hide in a huge red rectangle for the trip home. Permission is granted by the state to travel. We will make it home for Christmas.

But we have experienced a slew of events and accompanying emotions. Settling Mom's estate and parting ways with so many of her belongings. My brothers and their anger focused on me (though grief redirected) around everything "mom" related. Baby showers. Baby dedication. Family bonding together like super glue.

We have the two older daughters who are biological and four sons, ages 10, 6, and 3—all adopted as newborns. Mark surprises me on my next birthday with

a trip to a beautiful beach. We take the baby with us, and it is marvelous refreshment.

Mark broaches the fact that we have not resolved the direction from God to parent a Black baby girl. I agree, but joke that God just had a change of plans. He convinces me to get in touch with our adoption counselor and just “run it by her.” Maybe then what she says will solidify we are done adopting. We are not stunned at her encouragement to try again. It may not happen due to our age and the fact we already have several children. She repeats what we have been told since our first adoption: “It may take a long time if it does happen and are we willing to wait a long time?” Our answer and concise feeling are we will know when it is time to stop and be done. Until we are sure, we will give it a try.

In a parking structure waiting to go into a meeting, a call comes from an adoption agency in another state. They had contacted our agency to try to find adoptive parents for this situation. The counselor was very to the point and terse in the explanation. There is a baby boy who is a Safe Haven infant. His teenage mother had no prenatal care and delivered him at home. She then called an ambulance to transfer the two of them to a nearby hospital. Once there, she signed documents releasing her from her rights as the mother and requested that all her personal information not be made known. Without further questions, the baby was taken to the newborn nursery for a full evaluation. The staff asked the birth mother to have a full evaluation for herself to ensure her health and recovery. She agreed but left the building without any formality. The baby has checked out very healthy. His APGAR and other testing are all normal. He is

totally available for adoption and the agency must find adoptive parents ASAP or place him in foster care. The adoption costs are greatly reduced because of the circumstances and the agency will provide a stipend for travel to whoever commits to this baby.

The counselor now starts flowing with additional information about how cute he is and what a mellow infant he is. I think the agent was fearful we were not ready to commit. I convey that I need to talk it all through with Mark and get back quickly. Still the counselor keeps spewing words. Finally having enough, I asked, "Are you trying to convince us? If we want this baby, is he ours?" The answer was yes, and yes. The baby must be discharged the next day and they will keep him at the agency until we can get there.

I try to call Mark but get no answer. I text but receive no reply. I call the receptionist at his work. She cannot reach him either. Messages left; more messages left everywhere he might be. To get input, I call some very close friends who immediately say they are praying but think we should move forward. Mark calls and we agree to get the specifics on travel, time frame, and expenses. Our flight leaves very early in the morning and should put us into the agency to meet our baby mid-afternoon. Self-assured, we toss our supplies into the bags haphazardly. After all, this is not our first rodeo. Our kids are completely and beyond excited. It also happens to be December. What a Christmas gift for all of us!

The outdated doorbell rings with a rusty awareness that we have arrived to become new parents again. The counselor greets us and guides us into the office

where an infant seat is on the floor holding our precious son. Hands shaking, I unlatch the harness and lift him to my cheek. His newborn smell is intoxicatingly sweet. We sit on the stiff chairs and sign the papers. It is all surreal and odd. No birth parent to meet. No waiting in angst that her mind might be changing. No waiting to completely bond. He is ours right now and forever. We begin to collect ourselves to head to the car and hotel.

Dressed in a white holiday stretchy with matching pixie hat, the baby flies home with us on Christmas Eve. Our new son is the highlight of the flight as all on the plane feel they have a part of getting this sweet new babe home for Christmas. The flight attendants take turns showing him off as they “give us a break.” I am sure it was a flight to remember for those on-board. We are welcomed by friends, church family and family with hugs, tears, squeals, and “when can we open presents?” We are a family of nine. Merry Christmas!

A Podcast Series

Podcasts are entertainment and information. There is an ease about accessing support and knowledge through watching or simply listening. The programing is available to individuals or can also be utilized as an event for groups. The discussion material can be integrated into continuing education; it can be for training, enlightenment, or individual encouragement. Whatever the reason, the communication allows an uncomplicated method of obtaining the podcast information, making it even more intriguing and friendly.

As part of my research about podcasts and looking for expert direction and advice, I interviewed two professional podcasters, Heath Hollensbe, a public speaker, author, and podcaster who lives and works in Washington State, and Justin Hickox of Portland, Oregon, who began his podcasts teaching viewers how to care for their own hair during the pandemic. He also owns Hickox salon in downtown Portland.

Here are a few of the recommendations they conveyed:

1. Find an audience in a Facebook group, local affinity groups, certain organizations. Get their feedback and establish ownership of the information; create an eagerness for more material. Get their “buy-in” and commitment for participation. This is the initial audience—the ones to whom you are directing the information.
2. To begin, develop five to six podcasts; then conclude a series at around 12.
3. Title of the podcast is important. There must be an underlying intended purpose even if not stated to the audience. Writing the complete series helps stay focused

and on track. Diversify the marketing of the podcast to reach multiple communication venues.

4. Create a brand which is the brand of the podcast. This establishes a look and feel around the series. These are what the audience is anticipating as they are begin listening and watching—a certain comfort, anticipation, ambiance, and perhaps a momentary get away from their usual routine. Select three big takeaways for each podcast. These are the formative ideals that are the substance of the podcast.

5. Develop a webpage and an option to download in PDF each podcast for viewers' convenience and replay. Open a dialog forum for questions and answer. Have clearly-stated guidelines for appropriate conduct and language. Be unwavering in those guidelines.

6. Choose episode guests carefully; include diversity of races, ages, backgrounds. Have a thorough knowledge about the guests and promote their expertise. This knowledge will encourage a very personal and organic conversation with the guest. Send ahead questions to the guests as well to help them prepare for the event. If they are marketing their product (i.e., a book), offer to extend a promotion of a discount to the audience and a kickback bonus to the guest. Ask curious questions. What is it that is fascinating, puzzling, appealing about this guest?

7. Begin the intro to the segment with a hook; get people excited to listen. Perhaps the hook is a snippet of the upcoming discussion. Leave the audience anxious to find out more. The listeners need to know that the content is right for them. Keep the intro brief, no more than 10 to 15 seconds. Introduce the guest and host. State to the

audience that they are joining the (state name) podcast. Play a shift in camera angles and intro music; then begin.

8. The podcast is best played on a Monday morning during commute time. Best length is approximately 25 minutes.

9. The typical audience attention span lasts about 18 to 19 minutes, or 20 if the topic is extremely interesting. Twenty minutes may be attained through diversifying focus and introducing stimulation such as audience engagement.

10. At the close, briefly preview upcoming topics and direct the audience back to the webpage for further interaction and discussion of the day's segment.

11. Intend to video graph five to six segments of the series in one day. This cuts back on the number of preparations of the people and room. It allows for streamlining of props, catering, and wardrobe.

Equipment and Software

Equipment list for beginning a podcast.^{54 55}

Microphone

- USB microphone – connected directly to the computer.
- XLR microphone – a good option for multiple guests. Must be connected to a mixer which allows toggling individual audio levels.
- Condenser mics – produce more delicate sounds which are crisper and cleaner. They also afford voice clarity.

Headphones

- Closed back headphones – the facing outward surface of the earcup is completely sealed off from airflow and provides for better clarity preventing unwanted noise.
- Headphones can be either wired or wireless, but the capability of both is beneficial for use in various circumstances.

Laptop

- Memory/RAM – 8 GB is usually enough for most podcast needs; however, 16 GB will amply handle whatever is needed to load plug-ins and audio.
- Processor – Triple core processor that processes at a speed of at least 2.5 GhZ or faster.
- RAM of 8–16 GB is recommended for optimal performance.

Video camera

- Microphone stand.
- Shock mount – protects mic from vibrations, noise interference. Disturbance is minimized.
- Boom arm – with full mic adjustment.
- Pop filter – reduces popping sounds like p's and t's. Reduces risks of audio problems.

⁵⁴ “Your Online Recording Studio,” Riverside Blog/Podcast, RiversideFm. Inc., <https://riverside.fm/homepage>.

⁵⁵ Andru D. Morgan, Nate Macy, JonMarc Stevens, S.G.B. Media LLC.

- Mixer – essential for more than two people plus the extra mics and headphones for each guest.
- DAW – Digital Audio workstation. This is software that records, edits, and will produce the audio files for the podcast.
- Audio interface – connects to the microphone and converts analog signals into digital signals that then go directly to your computer for the podcast.

Items for consideration

- How much does it cost to start a podcast?
- Will it be a hobby or a business?
- What are you willing to invest in your podcast?

Basic startup costs can include: equipment, software, marketing materials, music and effects, according to the Riverside Blog/Podcast information. You can save by using what you already have and by keeping your podcast setup minimal. Invest in aspects of your podcast. If you've got money to spend, invest in a full podcasting set-up you won't regret it. You can also think about extra bells and whistles like outsourcing your graphic design.⁵⁶

Best Podcast Starter Kits on a Budget

SOLO SET-UP

Microphone

- A. Blue Yeti Nano USB Microphone
 - Type – condenser
 - Audio-Technica ATR2100x-USB
 - Type – dynamic
 - Connectivity – XLR/USB
 - Cost - \$99.00

⁵⁶ Riverside Blog/Podcast, RiversideFm. Inc., accessed October 19, 2021. <https://riverside.fm/homepage>. <https://riverside.fm/blog/podcast>.

- B. Samson Q2U handheld USB Microphone Recording and Podcasting Kit
 Type – dynamic
 Connectivity – USB/XLR
 Cost - \$99.00

This bargain equipment bundle also includes:

Desk mic stand
 Mic clip
 USB/XLR cable
 Stereo headphones closed back
 Microphone sanitizer

Headphones

- A. Audio Technica ATH-M30x
 Closed back
 Circumaural
 Wired
 Cost - \$69.00
- B. Sony MDR-7506
 Closed back
 Cost - \$98.00

Laptop

Stick with what you have already. If you have a working laptop, there is no need to buy a new one just for podcasting. There is a wide array of budget laptops out there, but if you're an Apple person, the cheapest available model is the Macbook Air.

- A. Asus VivoBook
 Operating system – Windows 10s
 Manufacturer – Intel
 Screen size – 15.6 inches
 Cost - \$349.00
- B. MacBook Air
 Operating system – MacOS
 Manufacturer – Apple
 Screen size 13 inches
 Cost - \$999.00
- C. DAW
 Garage band
 Easy-to-use even for first timers.
 Intuitive and familiar interface
 Cost – free with all Mac computers.

- D. Audacity
 - Learning curve can be steep.
 - Powerful features.
 - Free to use.

2+ PERSON SETUP

You will need a microphone and headphones for each participant, as well as the following:

Audio Interface or Mixer

If you have XLR mics, then you will need an audio interface or mixer with at least enough inputs for you and your guests.

- A. Yamaha MG10
 - 4 microphone inputs (XLR/Jack)
 - Connectivity – USB
 - Cost - \$153.00
- B. Zoom PodTrack P4
 - 4 XLR microphone inputs
 - Records all inputs as separate tracks
 - Also doubles as a USB audio interface and can record up to four local participants and remote guests.

Headphones Amplifier

You will need a way to plug in multiple sets of headphones so each person in the podcast can monitor the audio in real-time.

- A. Behringer HA400Microamp 4 Channel Stereo Headphone Amplifier
 - Cost - \$26.00

2+ PERSON REMOTE SETUP

If you are including international or remote guests in your podcast, you will need to optimize your audio and video recording quality.

A. Zoom

Zoom is a household name and has an in-built recording function. Recording relies on internet connection. Zoom's recording is entirely dependent on a strong internet connection, so it's likely that your recording will be negatively impacted

by unstable Wi-Fi. This also means you will not get crystal clear HD recordings. Your recording is only uploaded once our session has concluded. This means there is a much higher risk of losing your files. Lower audio-visual quality. Zoom uses compressed mp4 files which sacrifice quality for size.

Cost – Free up to 40 minutes. If you have a tight budget, you can use Zoom’s free plan which lets you call for 40 minutes free.

B. Riverside.fm

Full HD Local recording. Each person is recorded locally on their computer, which means your internet connection has no influence on how the final product looks. Your recording is progressively uploaded throughout your session, which significantly lowers the risk of losing your data. Studio quality audio visual quality – Riverside.fm uses WAV file format, which is uncompressed and lossless, meaning quality is preserved. It also records your video in up to 4K quality. The only limitation is your equipment.

Cost – Basic subscription starts at \$7.50 per month

Best Podcast Starter Kits (No Budget Constraint)

- A. Shure Mv7
 Connectivity – USB/XLR
 Type – Dynamic
 Cost - \$249.00

Can also buy with stands included:
 Desktop stand - \$259.00
 Tripod - \$ 279.00
 Boom - \$ 329.00

- B. Shure SM7B

Connectivity – USB/XLR
 Type – Dynamic
 Cost \$399.00

Headphones

- A. Bose Quiet Comfort 35
 Closed back
 Circumaural
 Wireless
 Cost -\$268.00

- B. Sennheiser HMD 300 -XQ-2
 Closed back
 Circumaural
 Wired
 Cost - \$295.00

Laptop

- A. Mac
 Operating system – MacOs
 Manufacturer – Apple
 Screen size – 16 inches
 Cost - \$2799.00

- B. DAW
 Adobe Audition
 Pro-level production tool with spectacular edition capabilities and functionality.
 Steep learning curve
 Cost – \$29.99/month

- C. Logic Pro X
 Pro-level production software
 The interface is similar to Garage Band
 Cost – available only for Macs, \$199.00

- D. Hindenburg Journalist Pro
 Designed specifically for podcasts, interviews, and radio
 Straightforward and intuitive interface.
 Multi-track recording and enhanced editing capabilities.
 Cost – \$375.00

Mic Stand/Boom Arm

- A. Rode PSA1 – Swivel Mount Studio Microphone Boom Arm - \$99.00
- B. Heil Articulating Mic Boom - \$153.00
- C. K&M 210/9 Black - \$44.00
- D. Rode PSM1 Microphone Shock Mount - \$46.00

Pop Filter

Aokeo Professional Microphone Pop Filter Mask Shield - \$12.00

Video Camera

Canon Vixia HF G50 4K30P Camcorder

4K video quality even in low light settings

6-hour battery life

HDMI output so you can live stream directly from the camera.

Cost - \$ 999.00

2+ PERSON SET-UP

Audio Interface

Rode Rodecaster Pro

3 XLR Microphone Input

Blue tooth functionality enables you to record phone interviews directly.

Can add pre-recorded sounds.

Cost \$499.00

Remote Recording Software

Riverside.fm

Basic subscription starts at \$7.50/month

Of course, now our family is totally complete. We settle into life together. Our oldest is married and our next daughter is working full-time as well as attending college. Mark is busy with his job. I am working on my DMin and pastoring a church. Our 14-year-old is having some struggles, but all kids “go through something.” The littles are into soccer, gymnastics, Legos, and just all-around happiness.

Our Christmas baby is now 21 months old and well into toddler land. We are rapidly moving away from babies, bottles, and diaper bags. Outside the spring buds are just beginning to poke through the still hard ground, a promise that winter is almost gone. I am outside with my daughter taking some photos for a family book when Mark calls. He tries to get my daughter to go get me to the phone, but she keeps cutting him off insisting I can call in a few minutes. He is forceful to talk to me and she relinquishes our project to get me to the call. He was called out of his meeting to take an urgent call from our local adoption agency. Apparently, they had tried several times to reach me. Our

counselor knows our home study is still valid. There is a situation in another state where a birth mother is in labor. She does not live in this state but has traveled out of her own state to give birth secretly. She is in another relationship and has several other children. She is older and her significant other is not aware she is pregnant. The baby is not his. She does not want to put her current family and relationship at risk by revealing the pregnancy. Her requests are for a Christian family and a family that has other children who look like the baby. The adoption agency in the other state does not have a family with those criteria who are home study ready, so they reached out to our state and agency hoping to find a match. She would like us there quickly. She will be discharged soon after the baby is born. It is a baby girl. Are we interested? We have 24 hours max to decide. Mark comes home and we pray—prayers for direction, for our family, for finances that would need to surface from somewhere in a few hours, prayers for travel arrangements finalized in hours. Without any definite assurances of any of the material needs, we call the agency back and say yes.

Many miracles take place in a very short amount of time. Flights too full already find openings for us. The few baby girl clothes I saved are found quickly in storage bins. Most significant is an older friend heard about our opportunity and she herself had adopted a baby girl decades ago. She would like to fund the adoption today with the stipulation that we will pay her back when we can. She will make the deposit at our request. Thank you completely to God for almighty power, protection, provision, and peace. We are on a river that God ordained; the destination is a baby daughter.

Our flight was delayed. The drive took longer than we were told to expect. Now at the hospital early evening. The birth mom and hospital staff have been waiting for us to get the birth mom and baby discharged. We sign documents and handle the exchange of funds in a lobby before heading upstairs to the nursery. Our 21-month-old is accompanying us and is now tired as a toddler should be after a long flight and drive. As we walk into the room with his new baby sister, his little face comes back to life in smiles, and he settles into our laps as the counselor of the birth mother makes introductions. The birth mom is enamored with our toddler and deems him the perfect big brother. Our small group chats a few moments more, and then decides it is time to pray for this new baby girl and the whole of the situation. All with teary eyes, it is time to say goodbyes.

The birth mom turns our baby girl toward us and tells us lovingly, “She was always meant to be your daughter.” We give hugs and Mark leaves to find busy activities for our toddler while I go to the nursery to dress our daughter and get the discharge instructions.

After a quick stop to grab formula, a late dinner, and more diapers, we relax in our hotel room, waiting for tomorrow to come and further updates on clearance to travel home. Life is good.

SECTION 6
POSTSCRIPT

Why do I think my very personal family story is of interest? And why would I share the raw and unembellished written truth of how we have become and belong as a family? I suppose it started somewhat of a self-experimentation. Will we belong to each other? Will we belong within our church? Will others be encouraged by our experiences? Our family is very unique and we are not aware of any others as large and diverse as ours. We have many scopes of experiences and situations given our racial variety and sheer number of family members.

I like to think that this paper and following podcasts are a bit of a blazed trail, with some provisions for others who might choose to navigate this difficult and beautiful terrain of a transracial journey. For others, it may be a safe table to lay down fears and distrust and, in turn, learn to savor from the “small portion” podcast, equity, understanding and ultimately belonging.

This is our family mission on this third planet from the sun. Our heart is to belong together and encourage others to embrace the same bold acceptance of belonging. The call to this mission can only be heard through the very mystical and personal voice of God. If it were not for our faith in God, we would not be a family of ten. We stay the course by the powerful grace of Christ. Most every morning I cry out “Abba, take these children and this day and redeem all for your glory. You love my children more than I do and that knowledge gives me peace. Thank you for this extraordinary and glorious

opportunity. May you continue to bind us to you and to each other. Amen.” We have a clear sense that we are encircled by Christ Jesus and this is where we truly belong.

To Gather in and Summarize our Journey of Belonging

Belonging is the heart of our family and relationships are at the heart of belonging. To be part and gathered in, to be protected, loved, treasured, and unconditionally accepted is to belong. To possess a name that was owned by another generation carries within it a relationship and solidifies belonging.

Belonging is a clear sense and feeling of being accepted.

Belonging is more than inclusion. Inclusion is an action. It is like getting an invitation to eat a meal with others at a table.

Belonging is being given a permanent seat at the table.

Belonging in our family is loving and supporting each other regardless of possible risks or fears.

Do we tire of constant questions about how we became a family? Yes, but the bond we have to each other makes us fierce and strong. We can and will continue to welcome conversations about us. By telling our story and sharing our fears of living “out loud” as a transracial family, we hope to cultivate open-mindedness and acceptance. What we have discovered is that for us, initial inclusion is the biggest hurdle. Once our family is accepted into a group, whether a church, sports team, or workplace, our sense of belonging has come quickly. The fears or bigotry others may have initially felt toward our family turns into curiosity, then understanding, and finally to belonging.

Birth Mothers and Birth Families

So many things to think about in this process. Our adoption story unfolds in six vignettes.

Adoption 1

Our first birth mother was a young teenager who was from an extremely wealthy family. She was in a private school and hid her pregnancy for seven months. As the story was told, she was on vacation with her family and was raped by a young man who was tallish and white. She was captain of her soccer team and had quite a family social calendar. The family had a very lofty future ahead for her. In their statement, they established her academically and socially to continue in the wealth and affluence known by her family for several generations.

When the teen was seven months pregnant, a close friend discovered the secret and went to a school counselor. Rapidly, the birth mother's father, a well-known physician, made secret arrangements for her to travel to a remote location and give birth in a tiny, dingy hospital incognito. After the arrangements for the adoption had been made, the grandparents of the birth mom intervened/interfered with the proceedings, arguing that as adoptive parents, we were not family, not white, and not able to provide the baby with an acceptable lifestyle. Wealth. They declined to let the adoption move forward and indicated to the agency that they would manage the situation privately in-house.

But after only a few hours we had a call asking us to reconsider. They had had a change of heart and had no one to parent the baby. They would not allow their daughter to keep the infant and jeopardize the young woman's future, nor would they personally raise the baby and assume with him his history. The birth mother was not allowed to hold her baby and was only given the opportunity to see him from a distance. She was escorted back to classes at the boarding school via private jet. We were now his parents and decided on arrangements to return home with our beautiful new son.

Adoption 2

Our next adopted son had again a very young birth mother who lived on welfare along with her mother and brother. She was white and the baby's birthfather was Black. They embraced us as the couple who would parent this baby and were happy to not be part of his emotional or financial upbringing. They had no requests of us at all and simply seemed relieved to have a plan established. The birth grandmother was thankful to step aside from this moment in her daughter's life and move forward. Parting conversation with the birth parents was about their plans to adopt a new puppy. They appeared to normalize and balance the life-changing juncture by equating their adoption with ours. Interesting dialogue indeed!

Adoption 3

The circumstances building into our third adoption was an imprisoned birth mother and a baby with Cherokee heritage. In this situation it was the prison and hospital staff who exhibited some extreme bigotry and racist attitudes. The birth mother was only

brought into the hospital after she had been induced. She delivered the baby and was given no opportunity to hold or care for her newborn son. She was immediately expedited back to the prison with no regard for her needs, emotional trauma, or a moment for a memory and closure. They told us that she was a female prisoner and did not have those rights.

The baby was not being cared for in the multi-staffed nursery but was isolated in an extremely small storage-type room. The nurse who checked us out used the title “prison baby” more than once. There was a comment about how great it was that we would consider adopting a Black child. When we got him back to our hotel room and changed his diaper, he had very irritated skin from what could be assumed as infrequent diaper changes.

Adoption 4

Next in our adoptions was an older mom who had three kiddos already, two boys and a girl. She had adopted out a baby boy the previous year and was now hoping to do the same with this pregnancy. She said, “I have always planned to have a family of two boys and two girls, and I am waiting on the second girl.” She had no reservation about our status as white parents and was only focused on placing this baby and getting back to her other kids. She did let us know that she was happy we did not live close by as her family preferred he not be raised by white parents. She had no intention of ever connecting with him or us.

Adoption 5

Our Safe Haven Baby was a total surprise. Our agency called us, and a baby boy had been left at an ER with parental rights already severed. He presented with no deficits and was full-term and healthy. The only thing needed for us to become his parents was to just come and get him. Honestly, this was the easiest baby I had. We walked onto an office, signed a very few papers, and left with our sweet, new baby boy. We did not know his ethnicity except that the agency said they had worked with this birth mother in the past and to their knowledge, the mother was a Black young lady in her teens. She was possibly biracial and there was absolutely no information about the birthfather. The nursing staff was excellent in this unusual birth. Their care for him was loving and kind. They had normal questions for us simply out of curiosity, such as “How can you do this without knowing more about his background?” and “Isn’t it difficult not knowing about possible health concerns or prenatal care?” These people asked genuine, everyday-people kind of queries.

Adoption 6

Our last baby, this time in pink, was a door we did not open but did walk through. A much older birth mother, with multiple children and in a long-term relationship, discovered herself expecting another child. She was certain the news would not be a happy announcement to her partner and chose to hide the pregnancy by traveling to see relatives and attending business commitments. If all worked out as planned, she would be

in another part of the country when it was time to deliver and hand over the new baby to the adoptive parents as she headed back home. It was complicated. She could not divulge any details of her family, relationships, or history as she wanted to not be known by us or this baby. She did want to meet us briefly, but only for momentary exchange of the baby. We were to not ask her questions or take any extra time. She chose us because we had a blended family and others that would look like this biracial infant girl. The birth mother was a sweet, calm-appearing woman. She quietly smiled and agreed when I said it would be very meaningful if she would consent for us to pray for this little girl together. A short, tearful prayer was spoken and after a cursory hug, the birth mother handed the baby bundle to us, and we left behind our daughter's history.

Family, Friends, Our “Stuff”

If I were reading this, I might assume there had to be a long line of non-racist, non-bigoted generations of those folks in our family. Well, I would have assumed wrongly.

Family. On *all* sides and down every family branch in the orchard for at least three generations back, there flamed strong prejudice against Blacks. All our kids' great-grandparents made this loudly heard whenever they felt called to make their stance known. Our parents grew up educated in this bias as well and with the attitude it was the rightful way to think. Mark's father remained staunchly racist through his whole life, but knowing my father-in-law as I did, I have no doubt that our squadron of littles would have stolen his heart instantly and forever. They would have been the line at the end to

the bigotry. My parents always were open to racial differences and had a vast assortment of friends of different backgrounds and ethnic diversities. My father did not have the opportunity to meet our kids. But I envision both grandpas in heaven watching their joint heirs together and smiling, perhaps plotting how to drop a pony into our backyard.

Friends. Our friends have 100 percent been supportive of our choices and loving to the kids. They know us well and trust our listening to God and following those directives. Again, people are just genuinely curious about how adoption works, especially transracial adoption. They have questions about the children's histories, open vs. closed adoptions, the wait times, and even the costs.

Our church families have cheered us on each time and loved each new baby like family. We have been blessed with a shower for every baby. As one dear friend stated with our baby girl, "That baby in a *blue* outfit is not going to be happening on my watch."

Friends have stepped in to come alongside our older kids for mentoring, sports, outings, and pure friendship and support. They have all taken a great interest in the kids and have invested likewise with their time. We are blessed.

Stuff. The "stuff" is our life—my self-doubt, our ability to parent this many kids regardless of race, even learning to do Black hair and going to the grocery store every day because it just takes that much food and our refrigerator can hold only so much. Mundane? Yes, many days. But I am also awed daily that I won the prize, the gift of being the mother of these amazing children.

Do we have struggles and hurdles? All the time. We have a child currently with a diagnosis of bipolar syndrome. Another one is finding COVID and school equally scary

and wonders if there will be a future. As a couple, we have very little time together and have not had an evening out in years. But it is truly OK. Time is extremely fleeting and those handprints all over the window glass and the milk on the floor will soon be only precious memories. We take it in stride—by God’s grace—most days. God very purposefully built our family, and we are unique according to the plans we will be used for.

Our kids fight. Sometimes they just despise each other. It’s hard to be an introvert in a house with so many people. Underwear is always missing, mixed up with someone else’s or it’s pink? Oh, it’s their sisters, back into the basket. Bathroom time is prime especially for the older kids. Who is going over the limit, using up all the shampoo, hot water, or big towels? Buying new shoes is an investment. Vacations take a spreadsheet to pull off. Weekend breakfast requires at least three pounds of bacon, two dozen eggs and a whole box of pancake/waffle mix. We have a family gym membership, and it’s worth every penny. We swim and hike; some do gymnastics, others soccer, football and wrestling. We love to ride bikes. Of course, they all like to game and watch movies. Birthdays are big events; Christmas is six weeks of celebration.

It is never boring at our house. Oh, and we have not mentioned all the additional friends that come over after school and on weekends. The piles of adolescent athletic shoes have their own quirky tang.

Situations and Experiences in Raceville

The following is a true collection of non-embellished experiences that have happened more than once in our family’s journey in Raceville.

Rude Assumptions. We experience stares and confused looks which settle out on faces when I take the kiddos anywhere alone and people inwardly assume dad at home obviously is Black. Some will forwardly ask for their own curiosity. I have had the rude direct confront that *I should not be entering into territory not my own and stealing a man that is not rightfully mine* to have been not acceptable – how dare I. Then there have been the clicking tongue grandmother figures who take it upon themselves to judge whatever they find wrong about a white mom and Black kids.

Other random, assumed judgments we have heard include:

- It's too bad that this is the only way you can have kids.
- Are you trying to save these kids or do you just like collecting them? Who adopts this many kids?
- You must be getting a lot of money for taking these children.
- Oh, you're the foster mom. That makes sense.
- You're an irresponsible whitewashing woman. You are going to get him killed. That hoodie will get him shot.
- What the (insert profanity) are you not doing with their hair? Get them to someone who cares.
- Get some bling on that baby girl.
- Black boys do not wear jeans to Sunday service!
- We are making chicken. Your kids love chicken, right?
- They don't look like you. Who do they look like?
- Are they "real" brothers and sister?

- Are they, you know, OK? Most babies from Black moms are addicted.
Did you have them checked out before you signed papers?
- You will regret this when they want to find their birth parents.

So, the next time you see us in the mall, grocery store, park, children's museum, or at church, please don't stare at us like we're an unknown hazard or a lot of thugs waiting to take you out. We are a family, simply like the other family who just walked by who you did not stare at. If you honestly are intrigued and would like to know more or have a word of positive support for a mom with six kids, approach me personally and I will find a time to share with you—without the kids. See, on any given day, any moment, our kids do not see us as unique, different, special, or odd. We are a family.

Family.

I will say it again. Family!

Probably at the core ours is very similar to yours. So put the microscope away and stop trying to discover why we are doing this. Again, nothing is different from most. Two adults fell in love and because of that love, wanted to share it with children and become a family.

So, if you have time or questions or perhaps would like to be a guest, stay tuned for a podcast to boldly address transracial adoption and perhaps go where no one has gone before.

APPENDIX 1:

RESOURCES

Adoption Agencies Utilized for Stevens Family Adoptions

*Advocates for Children and Families, ACF

<http://adoptionflorida.org>

305-653-2474

Miami, Florida

*African American Adoptions

<http://www.AfricanAmericanAdoptionsOnline.com>

1-800-923-6784

*Christian Family Adoptions, CFA – rebranded as Choice Adoptions

<http://choiceadoptions.org>

503-550-9310

Portland, Oregon

*Cradle of Life

<http://cradleoflifeadoptionagency.com>

409-230-0426

Beaumont, Texas

*Open Adoption and Family Services

<http://openadopt.com>

1-800-772-1115

Portland, Oregon

*PLAN Loving Adoptions Now

<http://planlovingadoptions.org>

503-472-8452

(Closed – files transferred to Christian Family Adoptions, CFA)

Other Resources

Culturally Responsive Child Welfare Practice, Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, University of Minnesota, School of Social Work. cascw.umn.edu/wp-contact/uploads/2015/03/cw360-winter2015.pdf

Racial Disproportionality and Disparity in Child Welfare. Child Welfare Information Gateway, Administration for Children and Families. [childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue-briefs/racial-disproportionality](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue-briefs/racial-disproportionality)

Disproportionality Data: State and Local Examples, Child Welfare Gateway, Administration for Children and Families.
[Childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/culture/disproportionality/data/state](https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/culture/disproportionality/data/state)

A Blueprint for Using Data to Reduce Disparities and Disproportionalities in Human Services and Behavioral Health Care, Technical Assistance Partnership and the American Institute for Research.

Ken Martinez, Karen Francis, Jeffrey M. Poirier, Larry D. Brown Jr., Ming Wang, “A Blueprint for Using Data to Reduce Disparities/Disproportionalities in Human Services and Behavioral Health Care,” National Child Welfare Workforce Institute.
https://ncwwi.org/files/Cultural_Responsiveness__Disproportionality/A_Blueprint_for_Using_Data_to_Reduce_DisparitiesDisproportionalities_in_Human_Services__Behavioral_Health.pdf.

Jina Lee, Zenobia Bell, and Mae Ackerman-Brimberg, ed Michael Harris and Hannah Benton. “Implicit Bias in the Child Welfare, Education and Mental Health Systems,” National Center for Youth Law.

Kids Count Data Center, Annie E. Casey Foundation.
[Datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6246-children-in-foster-care-by-race](https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6246-children-in-foster-care-by-race).

Disproportionalities Dashboard, National Center for Juvenile Justice.
[Ncjj.org/AFARS/Disproportionality_Dashboard.aspx](https://ncjj.org/AFARS/Disproportionality_Dashboard.aspx).

Movies of Interest

12 Years a Slave (2013)
*Amazon Prime, Netflix

Barbershop (2002)
*Hulu, Amazon Prime, Vudu

Black Patriots (2020) documentary
*History channel, YouTube

Boyz N the Hood (1991)
*Google Play, AMC, Amazon Prime

Cooley High (1975)

*Vudu

Daughters of the Dust (1991)

*Google Play, YouTube

Do the Right Thing (1989)

*Amazon Prime, Showtime

Fences (2016)

*YouTube, Google Play, Amazon Prime

Fruitvale Station (2013)

*Amazon Prime, YouTube, Google Play

Get Out (2017)

*YouTube, Google Play, Amazon Prime

The Last Black Man in San Francisco (2019)

*YouTube, Google Play

Malcolm X (1992)

*YouTube, Tubitv

Moonlight (2016)

*Netflix, YouTube, Amazon Prime

Precious (2009)

*YouTube, Google Play

A Raisin in the Sun (1961)

*Netflix, Amazon Prime

School Daze (1988)

*YouTube, Amazon Prime, Hulu

She's Gotta Have It (1986)

*Netflix, Wiki

Sorry to Bother You (2018)

*YouTube, Hulu

Souder (1972)

*Amazon Prime

Talk to Me (2007)

*YouTube, Google Play

They've Gotta Have Us (2018) series

*Netflix, YouTube

To Sleep with Anger (1990)

*YouTube, Google Play

Waiting to Exhale (1995)

*YouTube, Amazon Prime, Vudu

APPENDIX 2:

GLOSSARY

Appropriation: Taking something that does not belong to you. The exchange that happens when a dominant group takes or borrows something from a minority group that has historically been exploited or oppressed.

Black: I have chosen to capitalize *Black* while leaving *white* in lowercase as a deliberate expression of my desire to disrupt cultural tendencies which center whiteness and de-center Blackness.

cultural appreciation and respect: Respectful borrowing of elements from another culture with an interest in sharing ideas and diversifying oneself, for example, learning martial arts or eating Indian food. When done correctly, cultural appreciation can result in creative hybrids that blend cultures together.

cultural appropriation: The unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of customs or ideas of one people or society by members of another and typically more dominant people or society.

cultural denigration: Adopting an element of a culture with the sole purpose of humiliating or putting down people of culture – example: blackface

dap: Friendly gesture of greeting, agreement or solidarity between two people. Found in Western cultures since the 1970s but originating from African American communities – example: handshaking, pound hugging, fist pounding, chest or fist bumping.

Race: An evolving social construct used to define relation to others through varying degrees of dominance and subordination.

racial reconciliation: An ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God's original intention for all creation to flourish.⁵⁷

Racism: The systemic use of the social construct of race to legitimize racial inequity and protect white advantage.⁵⁸

shalom theology: Rooted in a reading in Genesis 1, *shalom theology* sees the interconnectedness of all of creation born in God's proclamation that was both very good and designed to cause the flourishing of all things. To be an image-bearer is to be responsible to facilitate flourishing between all of God's creation and with God. To diminish this creation, and one another, is to diminish the image of God on earth and reflects our fallenness, not our created intent.

white identity: An identity largely associated with those of European and North African descent, rooted in a cultural background not imbued with white-body supremacy or white privilege.

⁵⁷ Brenda Salter-McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

⁵⁸ Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*, (Beacon Press, 2018).

white privilege: The cultural and societal advantage and opportunities experienced by those who present as white over those who present or are labeled as Black or people of color.

white-body supremacy: A term coined by Menakem and which I will use primarily as the term that refers to the belief that white-skinned bodies—regardless of who inhabits them, what they think, believe, do or say—automatically benefit from the color of their skin because it is deemed as more valuable than other skin colors.⁵⁹

white supremacy: A highly descriptive term for the culture we live in; a culture which positions people and all that is associated with them (whiteness) as ideal.⁶⁰ Because *white supremacy* often gets associated with extreme views of this perspective, per Menakem, I will rely on the term *white-body supremacy* when referring to the overall belief that white bodies are more valuable than Black bodies.

⁵⁹ Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands; Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies*, Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press, 2017.

⁶⁰ DiAngelo, *White Fragility*.

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