



Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption

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

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

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

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

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

reframing the controversy as a debate that encompasses human rights, peace, and reproductive justice.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In 30 personal essays, research-based studies, poems and accompanying artwork, transracial adoptees "challenge the privileging of rational, 'expert' knowledge that excludes so many adoptee voices." Conceived by the editors as "corrective action," the collection offers an eye-opening perspective on both the "the power differences between white people and people of color, the rich and the poor, the more or less empowered in adoption circles" and the sense of loss and limbo that individual adoptees may feel while "living in the borderlands of racial, national, and cultural identities." This provocative, disturbing collection reveals the sociological links between African-American children placed in foster care and El Salvador's "niño desaparecidos (disappeared children), between Christian missions and "the adoption industry," between a transracial adoptee born in Vietnam and raised in Australia and one born in Korea and raised in the U.S. "We must work," the editors urge, "to create and sustain a world in which low-income women of color do not have to send away their children so that the family that remains can survive." Anyone contemplating transracial adoption will find provocative ideas, even as they may quarrel with generalizations that don't fit their own lives. (*Nov.*)

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About the Author

Jane Jeong Trenka, born in Seoul, Korea, was adopted into a white family in rural Minnesota in 1972. She was reunited with her birth family in 1995. Her book, *The Language of Blood*, received the Minnesota Book Award for Autobiography/Memoir and was a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers Selection. Trenka has received many literary fellowships and commendations. Sun Yung Shin is a poet, essayist, journalist, and writing teacher who has won literary fellowships from the Jerome Foundation, the Minnesota State Arts Board, and the Loft Literary Center. Adopted from Seoul, Korea in 1974 into a white family, currently Shin lives in Minneapolis with her husband (a domestic kept-in-the-family adoptee from Chicago) and their two children.

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