

“Should most adoption agencies close and discontinue all adoptions?”

By Cam Lee Small, MS, LPCC
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I recently posted a graphic that said, “Adoption doesn’t erase a child’s race, ethnicity and culture.” Adoptive parents do. But it doesn’t have to be that way.”

In the caption I shared:

You have options. Information. Resources. Most importantly, you have someone else’s child in your arms. You, simply seeing and honoring that child’s being, will help them overcome the ones who don’t. Then, it’s no longer a question of whether or not your child “sees” race. It’s about connecting them with the relationships and tools they need to receive love, to love themselves as they’ve been wonderfully made, and pursue kindness, humility, and justice with their neighbors, locally and across the earth. Do you believe that’s possible?

Of course this topic goes wide and deep; cheers to everyone who has been unpacking these ideas with me throughout the years.

I followed up with an excerpt from an article I had written on [adoption and “re-homing.”](#)

“My observations are not punitive; they’re meant to re-posture us as a community to consider how our current laws, policies, and beliefs around adoption don’t serve the ones being adopted. If we’re concerned about the current and next generation of adoptees, we must have the courage to ask those in power, trusted leaders, policymakers, and arbitrators to do better.”

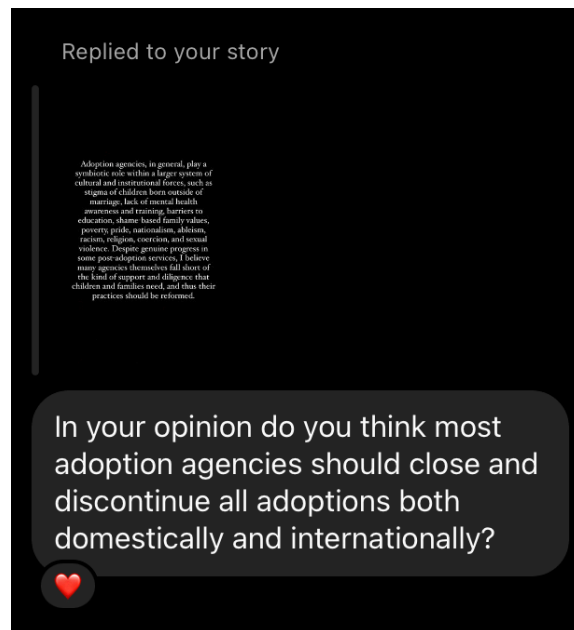
“If we’re concerned about the current and next generation of adoptees, we must have the courage to ask those in power, trusted leaders, policymakers, and arbitrators to do better. We must also have the courage to look within ourselves.”

“In our relationship with God, where have we replaced God with something (or someone) else? In his book Parenting, author and theologian Paul Tripp explicitly names the tendency parents have to use their children as a means for self-serving purposes, robbing God of glory because they want it for themselves. Adoption is an occasion for those

distorted desires to hijack our families and institutions for the worst of our humanity to flourish under the guise of our best humanitarian efforts.”

“Adoption agencies, in general, play a symbiotic role within a larger system of cultural and institutional forces, such as stigma of children born outside of marriage, lack of mental health awareness and training, barriers to education, shame-based family values, poverty, pride, nationalism, ableism, racism, religion, coercion, and sexual violence. Despite genuine progress in some post-adoption services, I believe many agencies themselves fall short of the kind of support and diligence that children and families need, and thus their practices should be reformed.”

I then received a very important question from a community member (thank you!). Because I’ve received this question multiple times, I thought it could be helpful to share a brief response publicly, that others may get a feel for the heart behind my post(s).



Dear J,

I wish there was a simple binary yes-no answer - unfortunately though, at this point in time, that's not realistic and would short-change adoptees, parents, professionals and institutions in our shared efforts toward learning about and pursuing racial justice/liberation together.

It might be helpful for us to come in from a different angle, for example, “Who’s been hurt by adoption practices, internationally and domestically, how did we get to that point, how did those patterns develop, why haven’t they changed, and what could we do make sure we don’t repeat patterns that oppress the most marginalized communities among us?”

On the individual level, one of the biggest threats to an adoptee's race and culture is their adoptive parent(s). The lack of education about that is not always their fault; but it still doesn't have to be that way. I truly wish adoption wasn't the place where a child's racial identity disappears. Instead, I believe it could be a place for it to be seen and understood... perhaps where it emerges AS IF their family was preserved in the first place (?) Meaning, to some degree, I wonder if race and culture could be embraced as if the child had grown up with their birth parents and their surrounding communities. In that regard I imagine a world in which adoption would steward a child's race and culture, not dissolve it.

And I can understand to some degree how we got here, I think about this quote from Penn Law and sociology professor Dorothy Roberts, in her book *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare*:

“Racism is a ‘*structural*’ relationship based on the subordination of one racial group by another.’ In America, racism is a system of white privilege that is maintained by ideologies, institutions, and practices that place white people in a superior position and people of color in an inferior position economically, socially and politically. This definition of racism describes perfectly the differential treatment of white and Black children by the child welfare system.” (p. 95; citation from Wellman, 1977)

If the end goal of trans-racial adoption is child welfare, we have to have the willingness to pursue the welfare of the child beyond the finalization of their paperwork, *and* beyond the single story of any particular child's adoption/“rescue.”

It needs to be more than, “*our white family adopted a child of color from an orphanage and now the work is done.*”

Part of our calling in transracial adoption, in my opinion, is to a) understand how white supremacy hurts all of us, myself included, as I am, even if I was white, b) become interested in and advocate for the health and wellbeing of communities with which your trans-racial adoptee is connected biologically, racially, ethnically, ecologically, socially, and politically, and c) practice a continual working out of what it means to love our neighbors, in all of their diversity, as we acknowledge the intersectionality of their various privileged/marginalized identities.

Identities that have been constructed and bound within a white supremacist country. Including laws and policies (written or unwritten) that build or maintain inequity between racial groups, [individual](#) (internalized, interpersonal) and [systemic](#) (institutional, structural) racism, racial abuse ([microaggressions](#)), and other various forms of [racialized oppression](#).

Roberts goes on to write, “*Given the disproportionate impact of state intervention on Black families and its role in maintaining Black's unequal status, race must move to the center of public debate about changing the child welfare system. Only by focusing on group-based racial*

injustice can we understand the damage inflicted by the system and take the right steps to address it.” (p. 267)

If some or most adoption agencies needed to close in order for those captives to be set free, for new ways of child welfare to emerge, would you be ok with that?

J, thank you again for your reaching out and your willingness to lean into this dialogue, that we could be addressing these questions together. It's surely multifaceted with handfulls of inherent variables beyond our control, and would most likely involve redirecting billions of dollars to domains like health insurance and child care, but the ultimate fruit could be something beyond our imagination.

You can see the answers, and the fruit of the proposed ideas, are an ongoing work in progress. I'm so glad to be working that out with you in space like this though, and I look forward to that shared exploration and activism for seasons to come. That many children (and their God-given racialized expressions of glory) would be kept alive and mobilized for good purposes wherever they are in their journey.

Kindest regards,
Cam

RELATED RESOURCES

(to help us continue the dialogue, there are more of course, this is just a launchpad!)

Roberts, D. (2002). *Shattered bonds : The color of child welfare*. New York: Basic Books.

Wellman, D. (1977). *Portraits of white racism*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press.

<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/handbook-of-adoption/book228891>

<https://theforgotteninitiative.org/s8e4/> (podcast interview where I share more on this topic)

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/transracial-adoption-mental-health-w-cam-lee/id1403686245?i=1000488995299> (podcast interview where I speak on adoption reform)

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/june-web-only/myka-stauffer-rehoming-transracial-adopted-children.html>

<http://testif-i.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/adoption-myths-dorothy-roberts-1.pdf>

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/675697/what-white-parents-should-know-about-transracial-adoption-by-melissa-guida-richards/>

<https://www.societyofadoptionprofessionals.org/>

<https://adoptiontruth.org/>

<https://jaerankim.com/>

<https://www.hannahjmatthews.com/>

https://beacons.ai/decolonize_adoption

<https://www.growbeyondwords.com/bio/>

<https://www.drSusanBranco.com/>

<https://johnraible.wordpress.com/>

Cam graduated from University of Madison-Wisconsin with a BS in Psychology. He then served as the adoptee summer camp director for Holt International, before earning his Master's in Counseling Psychology. After earning his clinical licensure, he self published his memoir [This is Why I Was Adopted](#) as an interactive workbook for adoptees and families to explore grief, loss, restoration and hope. He earned his [Permanency & Adoption Competency Certificate](#) through the [Center for Adoption Support and Education](#), and is partnered as a vetted clinician both with [MNAadopt](#) and the post-masters directory curated by [Training for Adoption Competency](#). Cam is trained in [biblical counseling](#), certified in [non-violent crisis intervention](#) and is a member of the [American Psychological Association's Minority Fellowship Program](#).

Cam has written adoption-informed essays for [Christianity Today](#), [National Council for Adoption](#), [University Minnesota School of Social Work](#) (p. 19), and [Center for Adoption Support and Education](#). He has also been interviewed on [podcasts/radio/video shows](#) such as Empowered to Connect, The Cha Show, Let's Grab Coffee with University of Memphis professor SunAh Marie (WYXR 91.7), The Archibald Project, The Forgotten Initiative, and Asians for Mental Health with Dr. Jenny Wang ([access all interviews here](#)).

In addition to appearing on panels for [Angela Tucker \(This Adopted Life\)](#), Holt International, Catholic Charities, [Be The Bridge](#), [I Am Adoptee](#), [Expert Voices in Adoption Conference](#), and [Camp Choson](#), he has also taught and facilitated workshops and video trainings for churches, universities, and child-welfare organizations around the nation, including Children's Bureau, Replanted Ministries, Southeast Christian Church, Foster Love Project, Catalyst Foundation, United for Adoption, Korean American Adoptive Family Network, The Minnesota Society for Clinical Social Work, and Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System ([view full list and access presentations here](#)).

Services

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[Free General Resources & Discussion Guides](#)

[Visit the Shop for full resource catalog](#)
including the workbook for adoptees.



For questions, contact Cam
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