

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BLACK SOCIAL WORKERS

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SEPTEMBER 1972

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BLACK SOCIAL WORKERS

POSITION STATEMENT ON TRANS-RACIAL ADOPTIONS

The National Association of Black Social Workers has taken 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.

Ethnicity is a way of life in these United States, and the world at large; a viable, sensitive, meaningful and legitimate societal construct. This is no less true, nor legitimate for Black people than for other ethnic groups. Ethnic identification is an old concept and entrenched practice in total society, but on some levels appears to be new as it moves from a negative into a positive light. Overt ethnic identification, especially for Blacks, was long suppressed by the social and political pressures speaking to total assimilation of all peoples in that great melting pot. We were made, by devious devices, to view ethnic identification as a self-defeating stance, prohibiting our acceptance into the mainstream. Black people are now developing an honest perception of this society; the myths of assimilation and of our inferiority stand bare under glaring light. We now proclaim our truth, substance, beauty and value as ourselves without apology or compromise. The affirmation of our ethnicity promotes our opposition to the trans-racial placements of Black children.

The family is the basic unit of society; one's first, most pervasive and only consistent culturing life experience. Humans develop their sense of values, identity, self concept, attitudes and basic perspective within the family group. Black children in white homes are cut off from the healthy development of themselves as Black people, which development is the normal expectation and only true humanistic goal.

Identity grows on the three levels of all human development: the physical, psychological and cultural and the nurturing of self. Identity is a prime function of the family. The incongruence of a white family performing this function for a Black child is easily recognized. The physical factor stands to maintain that child's difference from his family. There is

no chance of his resembling any relative. One's physical identity with his own is of great significance. Until quite recently adoption agencies went to great lengths to match children with adopting parents in an effort to reach as perfect a picture of resemblance as possible. The rationale for that policy was a positive; soundly rooted in the importance of family resemblance. Although we applaud the relaxation of the extreme nature of that procedure, we regard trans-racial adoption of Black children as another extreme movement, dangerous in it's exact opposite direction with the exact opposite quality - negative.

The historically established and cultivated psychological perceptions and social orientation of white America have developed from their social, political, educational and religious institutional systems. Consequently these are the environmental effects they have to transmit and their teachings are not consistent with the realities of the social system for the Black child. He assumes, then, their posture and frame of reference, different from and often antithetical to that of his ethnics which can only result in conflict and confusion when he does become aware of the social system in which he lives. Further internal conflict is inevitable by his minority status within his own family. Such status is normal in school, employment and some communities but in one's most intimate personal group such oddity status is neither normal or anticipated.

The socialization process for every child begins at birth and includes his cultural heritage as an important segment of the process. In our society, the developmental needs of Black children are significantly different from those of white children. Black children are taught, from an early age, highly sophisticated coping techniques to deal with racist practices perpetrated 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 distinctly black or white and characterized by white racism at every level. We repudiate the fallacious and fantasied reasoning of some that whites adopting Black children will alter that basic character.

We fully recognize the phenomenon of trans-racial adoption as an expedient for white folk, not as an altruistic humane concern for Black children. The supply of white children for adoption has all but vanished and adoption agencies, having always catered to middle class whites developed an answer to their desire for parenthood by motivating them to consider Black children. This has brought about a re-definition of some Black children. Those born of Black-White alliances are no longer Black as decreed by immutable law and social custom for centuries. They are now Black-White, inter racial, bi-racial, emphasizing the Whiteness as the adoptable quality; a further subtle, but vicious design to further diminish black and accentuate white. We resent this highhanded arrogance and are insulted by this further assignment of chattel status to Black people.

Citation of a few of the problem areas that have surfaced in our discussions with proponents of trans-racial adoption provides it's own basis for the moral imperative for cessation of the practice. Trans-racial adoption of Black children has frequently been accomplished at the expense of the parents having to sever all connections with their own families. Such estrangement leaves scars on those directly involved and unquestionably reaches beyond them, as a negative factor, to their children. This is most conflictual and disturbing when there are

biological children who are suddenly deprived of their loving relatives; a destructive situation for them and their Black sibling who happens to be the "cause of it all."

The bi-racial family cannot be anymore isolated from society than others. Society impacts upon all and is an inescapable reality of life. This has caused, for some, the need for re-assessment of the changes in place of residence and in their civic and social associations.

The visceral feeling underlying the "would you want your daughter to marry one syndrome" still pervades the socialization concerns of white parents. Despite pronouncements of the universality of children a Black boy's entry to adolescence prompts his white mother's panic state call for help as she ponders whom he will date. On another hand, it is testimony to the absence of a preponderance of Blacks in his social circle; a serious void in his psycho-social development creating a point of trauma in this crucial stage of his psycho-sexual development.

White parents of Black children seek out special help with their parenting; help with acquiring the normal and usually instinctual parental behaviors inherent in the cultural and psychological development of children. It is tantamount to having to be taught to do what comes naturally.

Special programming in learning to handle Black children's hair, learning Black culture, "trying to become Black", puts normal family activities in the form of special family projects to accommodate the odd member of the family. This is accentuated by the white parents who had to prepare their neighbors for their forthcoming Black child and those who hasten, even struggle, to make acquaintance with Black persons. These actions highlight the unnatural character of trans-racial adoption, giving rise to artificial conditions, logically lacking in substance. Superficialities convey nothing of worth and are more damaging than helpful.

We know there are numerous alternatives to the placement of Black children with white families and challenge all agencies and organizations to commit themselves to the basic concept of Black families for Black children. With such commitment all else finds its way to successful realization of that concept. Black families can be found when agencies alter their requirements, methods of approach, definition of suitable family and tackle the legal machinery to facilitate interstate placements. Additionally, the proposed commitment invokes the social work profession to a re-orientation to the Black family permitting sight of the strengths therein. Exploration for resources within a child's biological family can reveal possibilities for permanent planning. The extended family of grandparents, aunts, cousins etc. may well be viable resources if agencies will legitimize them; make them their area of initial exploration and work first to develop and cement their potential. This is valid and preferable even if financial assistance is necessary.

We denounce the assertions that Blacks will not adopt; we affirm the fact that Black people, in large number, can not maneuver the obstacle course of the traditional adoption process. This process has long been a screening out device. The emphasis on high income, educational achievement, residential status and other accoutrements of a white middle class life style eliminates Black applicants by the score.

The National Association of Black Social Workers asserts the conviction that children should not remain in foster homes or institutions when adoption can be a reality. We stand firmly, though, on conviction that a white home is not a suitable placement for Black children and contend it is totally unnecessary.