

Nathan's Literature Analysis

The Seeds of Racial Disparity: What the First Generation of Adoptees Has Learned, And What It Can Teach - Nathan

In this article Jamie Kemp – one of among the many from the first generation of interracial, international adoptees – discusses the issues, lessons learned, and what her generation can teach future generations of adoptees. Kemp's generation was among the first of Korean children who were brought to America, adopted into Caucasian families. Later in the article, Kemp reflects back on how her generation of Korean adoptees was “truly a group of guinea pigs placed in a risky social experiment.” Suffice it to say, the amount of resources that were accessible to adoptees, even the families themselves, when it came to addressing issues of race, culture, and adoption, were practically non-existent. These issues can be, and often were, far too complex for families to sort out without professional guidance.

In her article Kemp raises an interesting point, “as much as her parents tried to convince [the children – both adopted and biological] that skin color didn't make a difference because we are in the ‘great melting pot’ of America,” she could never believe them. Contradicting evidence, she says, was all around her. Whether it was the ignorant questions (How come you speak English so well? Why don't you eat with chopsticks? How can those white people be your parents?), or just the fact that she was surrounded by whiteness (family, teachers, peers), the insecurities of not being “white” enough slowly grew to a crescendo. Reflecting back Kemp recognizes that “one of the barriers was what I recognize now as white privilege.” She says, “It is a privilege to not have to think about your race, not be stereotyped in public because of the way you look before you even open your mouth. That is a big difference between the experiences of people of color compared with Caucasians in this society. It's natural to take it all for granted... but, it's often difficult or impossible, for those who have never dealt with it, to understand the indignation of those who live with racial stereotyping and prejudice daily.”

The issue of adoption is filled with many complexities of race, culture, and identity. There has been an immense improvement with the amount of resources available to adoptees and the families with regards to addressing the issues of race, culture, and adoption. However, not every area has the readily accessible resources of the Korean Institute of Minnesota for example. Many adoptees, but not all, are adopted into predominantly white towns with little access to any resources (restaurants, culture camps, language institutes, etc.) pertaining to the country and culture from which they came.

So what were some of the suggestions Kemp had for future generations of adoptees and their families? Firstly, parents should not forget that their child is a person of color and may be judged for it. This is not to say, always remind them of the racial differences of family members. But as we have seen, over time and throughout history, racism exists and it is important to deal with it as a family instead of letting it divide your family. Recognizing a condition exists is completely different than believing the set of beliefs that such a condition is premised upon. Secondly, learn together about Korea, or the place your child is adopted from. Plan to make family trips together. Do not wait to send them alone when they are adults. Thirdly, do not wait for a problem to occur and then try to take care of it. Instead be “proactive” and not “reactive”. For adoptees Kemp advises that “although we all have had different ways of communicating things, maybe not in the way we wanted or expected, we must all remember how much our parents have contributed to get us to where we are today.”