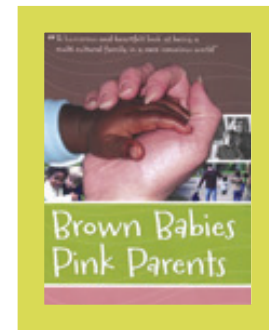


Book Review

Brown Babies, Pink Parents: A Practical Guide to Transracial Parenting

By Amy Ford



(lulu.com, 2010, \$14.95)

Reviewed by Shannon Riehle

Editor's Note: In the past, Pact's Point of View has rarely reviewed self-published books, operating from the belief that books vetted by traditional publishers receive more rigorous peer review, fact-checking, etc. However, Pact does follow and recommend a number of blogs, and many bloggers are now self-publishing their writing in book form as well as online. Given this trend, we may occasionally review self-published books that seem particularly relevant to our readers.

Despite its unfortunate title (which seems to imply an understanding of race that is neither honest nor sophisticated), this book lives up to its subtitle, providing transracial adoptive parents with helpful advice in an upbeat but realistic voice. A white woman who is the adoptive mother of three African American daughters, Amy Ford wanted to write a book that provides practical solutions to the day-to-day issues that come up when transracial parenting, and that is what she has done.

This short, accessible book provides an overview of issues that all new or prospective white parents raising children of color need to be thinking about. Ford covers building ties to your children's community of origin, the importance of role models, and being honest about one's own history around race and racism. Her tone is that of a friendly, helpful neighbor. Much of what Ford addresses in the book would relate to any white, transracial adoptive parent, but the chapters on skin and hair care

are specific to parenting African American children.

Ford repeatedly emphasizes that she, as a white mother, cannot teach her daughters how to feel good about themselves as black girls/women. They need African American role models. More than once, she states that she will have her daughters for a relatively short period, and then they need to be ready to step into their own place within the African American community, confident that they belong. She describes looking for spaces where her daughters can be in the majority, and dealing with the discomfort and self-consciousness that can arise for white parents. She talks about her oldest daughter's difficult transition from a pre-school that was predominantly black to a local public school that was majority white, and how they coped with that. She also addresses the nuts and bolts of skin and hair care and is adamant about their importance. Along the way, Ford is very honest about her own history and misconceptions around race, and admits her own parenting missteps.

Woven through these personal stories is information to help new parents grasp the larger picture and understand why these things are important. Ford discusses white privilege, best practices of transracial families and the importance of embracing everything about our children – both the ways in which they resemble us and the ways in which we are different. She brings in sources such as Peggy McIntosh's article "White Privilege: Un-

packing the Invisible Knapsack,” Willie Garrett’s article, “Seven Common Transracial Parenting Mistakes” and the Transracially Adopted Child’s Bill of Rights developed by Pact.

You must, she tells the reader, be willing to go to great lengths to advocate for your children. You must learn everything you can and recognize when you need help. But she says it in such a supportive way that it feels encouraging rather than daunting. Her tone communicates, “I’m doing it for my kids and you can do it for yours, too.”

This book is a starting place. Ford has created a good resource for new or prospective parents to begin exploring what it means to parent a child across racial lines. She touches on some weighty issues: Race matters. Love is not enough. You will have to work hard at this. At the same time, her honest, friendly delivery puts the message across in a way that will set parents at ease and allow them to hear it.

Shannon Riehle is a teacher. She and her partner are the parents of a beautiful African American son, adopted through foster care.