

# **Children, Race and Racism: How Race Awareness Develops**

By Louise Derman-Sparks, Carol Tanaka Higa, Bill Sparks

This article is based on a two-part study conducted in Southern California during 1978-80. In one part, pre-school, day-care and elementary workers recorded children's comments about racial identity and racism. In the other part, interviews were conducted with 60 parents of children ranging from three to twelve years of age and representing a range of racial and economic groups. (Interviewers were of the same racial or national identity as the persons they interviewed.)

The authors of this article implemented the study.

*"Why are there Black people?"*

*"Is Mexican my color?"*

*"Why am I called Black if my skin is brown?"*

*"Why does Ruben speak Spanish?"*

*"If I'm Black and white, and Tim is Black and white, how come he is darker than me?"*

*"Do Indians always run around wearing feathers?"*

*"Why is my skin called yellow? It's not yellow, it's tan."*

*"I didn't know that babies came out Black."*

Are young children curious about racial, physical and cultural characteristics? Are they aware of racism? The questions posed at the beginning of this article, together with hundreds of other questions collected from parents and teachers in a two-year study, indicate that children are very much aware of racial differences. Many are also aware of racism. However, to read the vast majority of texts on child development and early childhood education, one would never know it.<sup>1</sup> No mention at all is made in these texts of how young children develop an understanding of their own

and others' racial and cultural identities. The silence of these textbooks, which are used to train teachers, psychologists, social workers and other professionals, reflects and perpetuates a prevailing majority culture ideology - that children are "color-blind," *i.e.*, they are unaware of race and racism. This ideology further assumes that if adults don't talk with children about "it," children will grow up to be non- prejudiced adults. Denial and avoidance, then, appear to be the main techniques for dealing with one of the most pervasive and crucial problems of U.S. society.

The "color-blind" position is analogous to the ostrich's head-in-the-sand strategy. A considerable body of research demonstrates that children in the U.S. are aware, at a *very* early age, of physical and cultural differences among people, and they learn the prevailing social attitudes toward these differences whether or not they are in direct contact with people different from themselves.<sup>2</sup> For example, Mary Ellen Goodman, after making extensive observations of 100 Black and white children, ages three to five, reported not only that racial awareness was present, but that 25 per cent of the children in her sample were expressing strongly entrenched race-related values by the age of four.<sup>3</sup>

Much of the research has also explored the effects that individual and institutional racism in U.S. society have on children's self-concepts.<sup>4</sup> These studies demonstrate that Third World children's self-esteem can be seriously harmed, though some investigators make a distinction between a child's positive self-esteem fostered by family and community and a child's growing awareness of the racist attitudes and practices of the majority society.<sup>5</sup> White children are also dehumanized and damaged intellectually by racism. As Judy Katz states: "Racism and ethnocentrism envelop them so that they are unable to experience themselves and their culture *as [they are]*."<sup>6</sup> Alice Miel says of white suburban children: "We observed that [they] learn to be hypocritical about differences at a very early age. The prejudices of their

society were still very much with them, but they had had it drilled into them that it was 'not nice' to *express* such feelings."<sup>7</sup> Further, as Abraham F. Citron aptly summarizes the issue:

White-centeredness is not the reality of [the white child's] world, but he is under the illusion that it is. It is thus impossible for him to deal accurately or adequately with the universe of human and social relationships. ...Children who develop in this way are robbed of opportunities for emotional and intellectual growth, stunted in the basic development of the self, so that they cannot experience or accept humanity. This is a personality outcome in which it is quite possible to build into children a great feeling and compassion for animals\_and an unconscious fear and rejection of differing human beings. Such persons are by no means prepared to live and move with either appreciation or effectiveness in today's world.<sup>8</sup>

Constructing a positive and knowledgeable racial/ cultural identity is one of a Third World child's major developmental tasks in our racist society. This task is equally important but somewhat different for\_white children. Many white families do not articulate that they have a racial identity. As Judy Katz writes:

The superior attitude, "white is right," often leaves whites confused about their identity. ...Because United States culture is centered around white norms, white people rarely have to come to terms with that part of their identity. *White people do not see themselves as white.* This is a way of denying responsibility for perpetuating the racist system and being part of the problem. By

seeing oneself solely as an individual, one can disown one's racism. Lack of understanding of self owing to a poor sense of identity causes whites to develop a negative attitude toward minorities on both a conscious and an unconscious level.<sup>9</sup>

Basic to the construction of one's identity in U.S. society is learning how to deal with racism. For children of groups oppressed by racism, the task is learning to struggle against its impact. For white children, it is learning to be anti-racist.

The "color-blind" thesis is not only untrue; it has several pernicious aspects. At the least, this concept is counter-productive, because while parents, teachers and others are silent about racism, children are trying to make sense of their experiences. In addition, "color-blindness" is a perspective that implies that differences are bad because it focuses exclusively on the universality of humans. Further, the ideology of "color-blindness" permits people to deny the role of institutional racism. By asserting that racism is caused by acknowledging differences, rather than by a social system which exploits certain racial groups for economic profit, "color-blindness" actually supports the racist status quo. As Ann Beuf points out, the "color-blind" thesis implies that only family socialization influences a child's sense of self, and it thereby "allows whites and white institutions to escape the consequences of existing structural arrangements."<sup>10</sup> She continues:

On the other hand, parental training which contradicts ["color-blind" ideologies] can play a vital role in establishing positive racial attitudes in children. ... Our data with the children of activists suggests that a home in which the positive value of

[one's group] is stressed will produce children who feel positive about their group.<sup>11</sup>

Children will "naturally" grow up to be non-racist adults only when they live in a non-racist society. Until then, adults must guide children's anti-racist development. This will include the fostering of: 1) accurate knowledge and pride about one's racial/cultural identity; 2) accurate knowledge and appreciation of other racial groups; and 3) an understanding of how racism works and how to combat it.

The first step in this process is to accept the fact that a process is required. The second step is to understand how children think about racial issues at different stages in their development. Toward this end we spent two years gathering data from parents and teachers about the kind of questions and comments children pose at different age levels. We have used the framework suggested by Piaget's cognitive development theory in our analysis, as we believe it assists in making sense out of children's observations and experiences and enables us to facilitate their learning.

Piaget's theory - that children begin with intuitive concepts based on immediate experiences and gradually become capable of increasingly complex and logical thinking - need not be endorsed to agree that adults have a role to play in teaching children to be anti-racist. In order to play this role, adults must first be clear themselves as to the distinction between racism and racial identity. There *are* racial differences. We can see them. Children can see them. We do not wish to deny them. These differences *only* become racist when either inferior or superior value labels are placed upon them.

The concept of race is basically a social concept, in that the classifications of group membership have been decided by people within particular social systems. Racial (and national) identity includes a complex

interrelationship among cultural, historical, political and physical factors. Children must sort out these factors and learn how they interact. This is a rather bewildering task, complicated by the realities of *intra*-group variance and *inter*-group similarities. It is not surprising that this task takes many years, and in the process, children rethink and discard earlier ideas. While all children seem to experience the task of learning about identity and about racism, we found differences in the focus of their observations and questions. For children from oppressed racial/cultural groups, the order of concern seems to be: 1) questions about one's own identity; questions about racism and about whites; and 3) questions about other groups. For white children, the order seems to be: 1) questions about people of color; 2) comments which reflect stereotypic or negative attitudes; 3) questions about their own racial/cultural identity. In general, then, it appears that in dealing with white children, facilitating accurate knowledge about others and anti-racist attitudes have priority, with Third World children, facilitating accurate knowledge and pride in one's identity, as well as providing tools to combat the impact of racism on the individual, would have priority. This does not imply that Third World children do not learn stereotyped information and prejudice toward other groups; nor does it imply that white children do not need to learn about their own identity.

### **Three- to Five-Year-Olds**

Three- to five-year-olds in Western cultures exhibit certain systematic patterns of thought which Piaget calls "pre-operational." Their questions reveal how much they are aware of racial issues. Since the foundation for much later learning is laid during this period, we will consider this age group in detail. (Individual children may not "fit" exactly into the classifications we discuss, and different experiences will influence the specific questions they

may ask.) We found that preschoolers indicate most interest in physical characteristics of themselves and others; their second area of interest is cultural characteristics that are readily observable, such as language and dress. Many of their comments are in the form of matter-of-fact observations. Typical examples are:

D., four years old, coloring with brown crayon, said to himself:

"I'm brown, too. I'm about as brown as this crayon."

S., a Chicano five-year-old, said: "Hey, that record player speaks Spanish."

M., a three-year-old Japanese American, carpooled with a white mother. He said, "Your nose is different because it goes up."

A four-year-old asked, "Why am I white, Mommy?" (She had recently started going to an integrated preschool)

While young children are excellent observers, their experience of course is limited. When faced with a new experience, children will attempt to explain it in terms of a previous occurrence, even though it may not be applicable from an adult's perspective. (This approach Piaget describes as "egocentric," *i.e.*, the child's explanations make sense from the child's point of view, but may not be accurate from an adult's point of view.)

A two-and-a-half-year-old child with a Black father and a white mother, upon seeing some Black women in a restaurant, commented: "I didn't know women were Black."

When J. (white) was three, he watched Flip Wilson on TV. Later, seeing a Black man in a store he yelled out: "Hey, Mom, there's Flip Wilson." Upon seeing an interracial couple in church, a three-year-old said: "It's funny that the mommy and daddy are different. They should be the same."

A frequently reported question asked by white children about Black children: "Will the color come off in the bathtub?"

Since the act of identifying the salient attributes of group membership is one of the major tasks in understanding racial and national identity, many of the questions and comments reflect the ways in which young children make classifications. It is difficult for them to understand that people who look and act differently are part of the same group. Many Black parents, for example, reported that their children ask why people with different skin tones, including members of the same family, are all considered Black. Similarly, a three-year-old Chicana, upon entering bilingual preschool, asked her mother: "How come I'm not bilingual? I'm not a real Chicano then."

Around the age that children are beginning to figure out racial identity, they are also learning "colors." They have to learn to distinguish the meaning of the colors applied to objects and the social meaning of colors when applied to race. Parents of diverse racial/ cultural groups reported questions reflecting this dilemma:

Asian American children questioned the label "yellow" when they perceived their skin color as "tan." White children wanted to know why they were labeled "white" when their skin color was not equivalent to "whiteness" in other objects, and why interracial offspring of Black and white parents were not "gray."

Another aspect of learning to distinguish between general color and social color is illustrated by the following two examples:

When T. was between three and four, he often asked his mom what her favorite color was. When she said 'red' the first time,

he became mad and said then she didn't like him. T's mother was careful to say next time that brown was her favorite color.

White child: I'm going to get new pants.

Black child: What color?

White child: Not brown. I don't like brown.

Black child: Then you don't like me.

White child: Yes, I do. I just don't like my pants brown.

Conceptualizing how a person can be a member of two different groups at the same time is a puzzle to young children. For example:

At age three, P. asked, "Why is F. half Chicano and half Japanese?" Her mother said, "Half and half is whole." P. replied, "Is she a whole?"

I. (a white four-and-a-half-year-old): Are you Indian?

O.: Yes.

I.: Which part is Indian? (I. then takes both her arms and looks at them.) It must be this side, 'cause it's darker.

Another kind of multi-group membership is the relationship between racial identity and being an American. The following conversation between a Black child (four years old) and her Japanese American teacher illustrates the child's struggle to figure out this relationship:

Child: Hello, Chinese.

Teacher: I'm Japanese. What are you?

Child: I'm Black.

Teacher: Are you American?

Child: (Thinks awhile.) Yes.

Teacher: I am too.

Child: Are you Black?

Explaining what seem to be contradictions to the child can lead to greater understanding of the concept of multi-group membership.

Racial/cultural identity not only involves developing clarity about which attributes are salient, it also requires knowing whether these attributes remain constant. (Lawrence Kolberg, for instance, reports that children do not believe that their sex identity will be permanent until they have reached what Piaget calls the concrete operational stage – around ages five to seven in U.S. culture.)<sup>12</sup> We found children wondering if they could change physical characteristics or group membership. Sometimes the desire to change is motivated by identification with a friend.

After her teacher read T. (age four) a book about melanin and skin color, T. said she was going to eat a lot of melanin so her skin could be brown like D.'s.

Three-year-old A. said: "I don't want to be Chicano because I want to be Japanese like J. [a friend]. Maybe he can be born Chicano like me." Mother responded "No, he can't." "Okay," A. said, "then I'll pretend I'm Japanese."

Sometimes it is a response to a manifestation of racism:

One day C. asked us, "Do I have to be Black?" To the question of why he asked, he replied, "I want to be chief of paramedics." His favorite TV show at the time was *Emergency*, on which all the paramedics and fire fighters were white.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to clearly separate the influence of ethnocentric and racist attitudes heard or seen by young children in their contacts with parents, relatives, neighbors, other children, books, TV and movies from their lack of experience and egocentric thinking. It is also highly possible that what starts out as the latter can, with inappropriate handling, quickly become prejudice. Questions such as, "Is Black skin dirty?" and the following incidents exemplify this:

M., a five-year-old white boy, was playing with a neighbor, who, on discovering that some of his toys were missing, said that the Indians had taken them (a prevalent prejudice in that community). Later, M. discovered that some of his own toys were missing. He waved down a policewoman in the street and told her that the Indians had stolen his toys.

When D. (Black, age four) met a Native American man dressed in jeans and shirt, he refused to believe the man's ethnicity, because he wasn't wearing feathers and "Indian clothes," as the Native Americans on TV did.

Whatever the source, inaccurate stereotypic and caricatured images and information about racial/cultural groups are particularly harmful at this age. Having not yet fully formed clear concepts of themselves or others, preschoolers are still in the process of learning to determine what is authentic and what is not. Especially when children do not have many opportunities for feedback about their ideas through direct interaction with people different from themselves, caricatured images can form the basis of their thinking.

Young children tend to personalize their learning, and to focus on themselves or on others as individuals. While racial identity is based upon a concept of group, they have a difficult time understanding "groupness." The easiest way for them to grasp this is through the concept of "family," since that is an entity they experience. Thus, children can learn that they acquire their physical and cultural characteristics from their membership in a particular family, and their racial/cultural group can be explained as a bigger family.

Adults can help children of this age by making clear that this larger "family" relationship is permanent. Other guidance can include acknowledging a child's observations on racial/cultural identity, helping to sort out incorrect information and generalizations and giving corrective feedback about unfair and untrue depictions of people, expressions of prejudice or racial slurs. In addition, some children need support in dealing with their beginning awareness of racism against themselves. Because young children tend to interpret racist attitudes and behavior personally, they need help in understanding that expressions of racism are not their "fault," and that the adult world does not condone such behavior.

### **Five- to Eight-Year-Olds**

Children at this age are moving into a new period of cognitive development. They show greater interest in cultural characteristics work at integrating biological and cultural factors which define racial and national identity, as well as the interrelationship between group and country membership. The following examples illustrate issues five- to eight-year-olds grapple with:

M., a three-year-old, said that when another child at school asked her if she was Black, she answered, "I'm brown." M.'s

mother asked, "What's brown?" M. said, "That means I'm Chicana." Mother asked, "What's Chicana?" M.'s six-year-old sister answered, "A Chicana speaks Spanish, eat Mexican food, sings and dances. But I don't understand all the songs." Mother asked where she had heard all that. Answered the six-year-old, "A blonde kid said it."

Teacher: What are you?

Child (age seven): Chinese American.

Teacher: How do you know you are Chinese?

Child: Because I talk Chinese.

Teacher: Where were you born?

Child: In this country.

Teacher: What country is that?

Child: America.

Teacher: Does that mean you are American?

Child: Yes.

Teacher: Is everybody American?

Child: No. Some are Chinese and some are not.

Teacher: What does it mean to be Chinese?

Child: You talk Chinese and you eat Chinese food, but I don't like Chinese food.

Child (six-year-old Chicana): Mama, can you get a tan?

Mother: Yes.

Child: I thought only Americans get tan.

Mother: What Americans?

Child: White Americans.

This is the period when children's sense of individual identity evolves into group identity both cognitively and emotionally (Piaget describes this stage of development as "socio-centric"). Children become conscious of being part of a *group* different from other groups. They want to know more about their own group and have public expressions of their groupness, and they develop a sense of pride in their identity and identify with well-known role models.

At the same time, in a racist society, five- to eight-year-olds' awareness of racism against their group is heightened. And conversely, personal prejudice can become an integral aspect of a child's attitudes and behavior. It is important to note that we do not think it is the crystallization of group identity per se that is responsible for the development of prejudice, but the fact that it develops in a racist and prejudiced society. A common expression of personal racism at this age is racial name-calling, which children begin to use against others with intent to hurt. (Certain racial words are also used *within* a group as an expression of group identity.) The following are examples of children grappling with or reflecting racism:

A seven-year-old Black child said to her mother: "It's not right to have certain things put on a group of people, to pick on a person because he or she is Black. Blacks have soul."

Conversely, a white mother overheard a group of her seven-year-old's friends talking about how they were glad that they were not Black.

A Black seven-and-a-half-year-old was talking with a white friend of the same age, who said that slaves were bad because

they fought. The Black child responded, "They were fighting to be free."

A six-year-old Black boy asked, "How come there are no Black Supermen?"

The major task of five- to eight-year-olds is to build an extensive repertoire of accurate information, to deepen pride in their identity and to learn authentic information about others. With a solid background and growing ability to make judgments about reality, instead of accepting matters at face value, children can be helped to recognize stereotyping and other expressions of racism in their immediate world. Children at this period become increasingly peer oriented, and they develop a concept of "fairness" through their group games and activities. So, while prejudice can become a part of children's thinking at this age, it is also possible to utilize their emerging moral sense to help them perceive the "unfairness" of racism and to teach them tools for dealing with expressions of ethnocentrism and prejudice in their immediate world. An activist, anti-racist parent offered this example to demonstrate how sensitized a youngster can become.

When D. was about seven he began dancing one day to a record of Navajo music we have. All of a sudden he stopped himself, looked at us and said, "You know, I don't really know how they dance. I'm just making it up." Another day, he told us, after seeing a movie, "I know one way that movie was racist. It only had white people in it."

It is critical that children during this period be made aware that racism is not inevitable and is not an integral part of human nature. Through reading, talking with adult role models and other activities, they can learn that there are people who are working to end racism. They can also cultivate a sense of their personal strength to participate in this struggle.

## Nine- to Twelve-Year-Olds

Pre-adolescents deepen their understanding of the various factors defining racial/cultural identity, as the following conversation with a ten-year-old illustrates:

Child: I am Berkeleyan *and* an American *and* a Swedish *and* Irish...

Mother: Why?

Child: Because Berkeley is in America. That means I *have* to be both.

Mother: Are you more one than another?

Child: I'm more Irish than Swedish because more people were Irish in my family than Swedish, or they were more sooner (i.e., closer to his generation).

Mother: How do you think about yourself? Are you more white or Berkeleyan?

Child: I don't think about it because people are the same everywhere.

Mother: What about R. and S. (Chicano friends)? Are they more Chicano or Berkeleyan-American?

Child: I don't know. That's up to them (pause). It depends. Are they close Berkeley?

Mother: They live in Berkeley, grew up here just like you.

Child: They are both.

Children at this age begin to understand historical and geographic aspects of racial identity, as well as the concept of "ancestry," as this conversation with another ten-year-old illustrates:

Teacher: What's your nationality?

Child: Well, I was born here; my mother was born here; but my dad was born China.

Teacher: So what does that make you?

Child: Chinese American.

Teacher: How do you know you're Chinese American?

Child: Because I was born here and my ancestors came from China. My father is an Asian American because he was born in Hong Kong, and when he was eight or nine he flew to the U.S. He stayed and lived with some close friends he had been writing to from China. He paid his own rent. He kept looking at pictures from when he was in China. He remembered when he was picking fruits and vegetables. He told me and sometimes he even cried about it.

Feelings and knowledge centered on cultural values and personal struggle against racism become more complex. A deepening awareness of cultural/political values also occurs. For example:

After a discussion about Malcolm X, eleven-year-old R. stood up and said that his father once belonged to the Black Panthers, and that he still works for the community. R. later stated that the role of his culture was to help people.

Nine- to twelve-year-olds have the capacity for a deeper understanding of racism in its historical and social/institutional dimensions, as well as on a personal level. There are several important concepts that adults can teach children in order to provide them with additional tools for developing anti-racist thinking and behavior. First, help children understand the difference between the recognition of cultural patterns of behavior and stereotypes and caricatures of these patterns. Second, teach them to differentiate between "majority" and "minority" perspectives. The recognition that perspectives can be different will help children to avoid internalizing harmful majority beliefs. Ann Beuf provides an illustration of this:

In almost every home I visited older children expressed great pride in [their] Native American identity. They were not unaware of the disfavor in which their group was held. However, they simply did not accept the image of their group that was propagated by the majority culture. ...The linguistic format of many remarks in this regard took the form of: "Whites say..., but I say ..." Thus a young girl will say, 'Whites think we are dirty, but I know I'm clean.'<sup>13</sup>

Children in this age group can achieve what Piaget calls "reciprocity," *i.e.*, understanding the interaction between individuality and group membership and the concept that we are all simultaneously humans and members of specific sub-groups, meaning that we have both similar and different needs.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, pre-adolescents can be encouraged to increase considerably their skills for combating racism. They can engage in concrete social action projects directed toward changing a particular manifestation of institutional

racism in their community (e.g., biased textbooks in their school, racist programs on their local TV station, a toy store that sells only white dolls, a library that does not have enough books accurately depicting Third World people). The nine- to twelve-year-old period is a critical one. It is a time when racist attitudes and behavior can be consolidated; it is a time also when earlier inaccurate ideas can be challenged and changed.

### **Guidelines for Adults**

What can adults do to encourage anti-racist attitudes and healthy racial identities? First, let us recognize that we daily model attitudes and behavior, verbally and nonverbally, even if we are not conscious of doing so. Second, let us realize that we teach children both by commission and by omission. Third, let us be aware that the background or professional training of people who work with children has left many of these adults poorly prepared to deal with an emotionally difficult area. As noted earlier, many adults believe that if they don't talk about racial issues, then children "won't notice." There may also be the wish that if one doesn't say anything, then children won't ask.

Adults are generally extremely uncomfortable when children comment or ask directly about race and racism. They feel embarrassment, anxiety, anger, sadness, and confusion about what to say. As one educator and activist states: "One thing adults do - white, brown, Black, red and yellow - is to lie to children about racism."<sup>15</sup> Delaying tactics are also used. Sometimes this is done to protect children, but in most cases, adults are trying to protect themselves as well. Therefore, a significant factor in encouraging children's anti-racist development is to face one's own feelings, knowledge and behavior. A statement by James Baldwin is pertinent here: "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed

until it is faced." In addition, we cannot explain racial identity and racism to children unless we know something about both areas. Adults can help each other by sharing experiences, by working together in consciousness-raising and study groups.

### **Footnotes**

1. Two exceptions are *Child Psychology in Contemporary Society* by J. Dill (Holbrook Press, 1978) and *Enhancing Self-Concept in Early Childhood* by S. Samuels (Human Sciences Press, 1977).
2. See *Red Children in White America* by Ann Beuf (University of Philadelphia Press, 1977), *Prejudice and Your Child* by Kenneth Clark (Beacon Press, 1955), *Black Family and Black Identity: A Literature Review* by W. Cross (Cornell University, 1977), *Race Awareness in Young Children* by Mary Ellen Goodman (Collier Books, 1952), "How the Twig Is Bent" in *Toward the Elimination of Racism* by P. Katz (Pergamon Press, 1976), *The Short-Changed Children of Suburbia* by Alice Miel (Institute of Human Relations Press, The American Jewish Committee, 1976), *Children and Race* by David Milner (Penguin Books, 1975) and *They Learn What They Live* by H. Trager and M. Radke-Yarrow (Harper and Brothers, 1952).
3. Goodman, *op. cit.*
4. Beuf, Clark, Milner, *op. cit.*
5. Beuf, Cross, *op. cit.*
6. *White Awareness: Handbook for Anti-Racism Training* by Judy Katz (University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), page 12.
7. Miel, *op. cit.*, page 13.
8. Katz, J., *op. cit.*, pages 13-14.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Beuf, *op. cit.*, page 122.
11. Beuf, *op. cit.*, pages 119-121.

12. " A Cognitive Developmental Analysis of Children's Sex-Role Concepts and Attitudes" in *The Development of Sex Differences*, Macoby, ed. (Stanford University Press, 1966).

13. Beuf, *op. cit.*, page 86.

14. "The Development in Children of the Idea of the Homeland and of Relations with Other Countries" by Piaget in *International Social Science Bulletin, III, 3* (1951), pages 561-578.

15. Geraldine Wilson, personal communication.

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We would like readers' responses to the article featured in this issue. Do you think the authors are right to ask parents and teachers to initiate discussions of racial differences with very young children? Have you had experiences that would confirm or deny the thesis that children grow up to perpetuate racism because we as parents and teachers avoid talking about racial issues?

We would like to hear about your experiences and those of your friends and colleagues in this area. Ways in which adults can handle racist incidents, suggestions for family and classroom activities and information about resources would be most welcome. Please do share them with us.

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