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# RACE

A blog looking at the changing face of race around our region, created in cooperation with Pacific Science Center, the University of Washington Department of Communication and the City of Seattle Race and Justice Initiative

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## Race project | Race matters to an adopted child

Posted by Ashley Stewart



Angela Tucker speaks to other adopted children at African Caribbean Heritage Camp in Denver, Colo. (Photo courtesy Bryan Tucker)

Angela Tucker doesn't look like her parents.

She's still deciding what that means to her.

"My identity is really confusing and mixed and changes over the years," the 28-year-old African-American woman said.

“As a child, I wanted to be white; I wanted my hair to blow in the wind. In college, I remember trying to be more black; trying to find clothes that seemed more cultural or ethnic.”



Bryan and Angela Tucker. (Photo courtesy Bryan Tucker)

Tucker, who lives in Fremont, grew up with white parents.

She was a baby when she was adopted out of Tennessee foster care and into the Bellingham home where she would grow up.

And she was 26 when she started to look for her birth parents.

Tucker’s husband Bryan, 29, followed her **two year search from Seattle to Chattanooga** in the documentary “Closure.”

She found them, but faced cultural barriers.

“I felt like I didn’t fit in,” Tucker said.

Tucker’s birth relatives joked about how she grew up, that she married a white man and received “white people’s education.”

“They said things like ‘you have material things, but we have family,’” Tucker said.

It can take years before a child is adopted out of foster care.

To reduce that time, Congress in 1994 passed the Multiethnic Placement Act, keeping agencies from refusing or delaying adoption placement based on race.

It can be difficult for adoptive parents to understand what race will mean to a child, and the act doesn’t offer much for the transition.

**Amara Parenting and Adoption Services** tries to help.

“For the most part, people involved in adoption reflect the community they are in, where it doesn’t [occur] is in the foster care arena,” said Carol Mikkelsen, director of programs and administration at the agency.

“The number of African American or Native American kids in foster care is disproportionate to that [of the community], so you will find more trans-racial adoptions.”

Amara requires all adoptive parents to take trans-racial adoption workshops to understand how race will shape the identity of the child and their families through.

“An adopted child’s identity is heightened from childhood through death and it’s something they will return to again and again because they’re not with their birth parents,” Mikkelsen said.

Race is just one aspect of that identity, Mikkelsen said, but it’s the visible aspect.

“It’s a part of a child’s identity and it will become part of the parent’s identity,” she said. “Each experience affects who they are; each piece of information they have and each piece that’s missing about who they are supposed to be.”

Tucker’s parents helped guide her through these questions by allowing her to ask them.

“Knowing that I have these questions, fears and sadness and that I can’t make sense of my own story, even though they didn’t have the answers, they would recognize how hard it is to not know who you are,” she said.

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