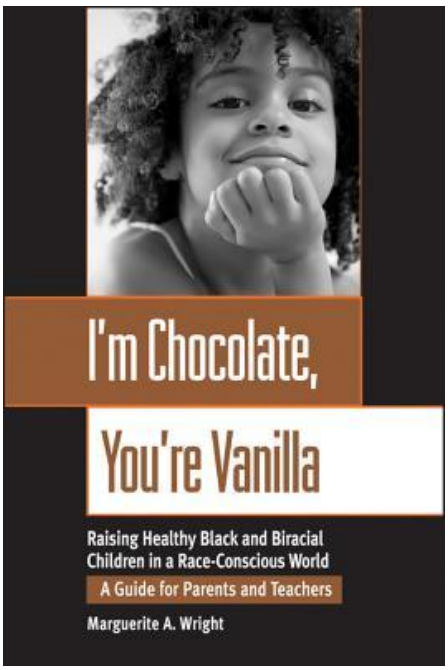

I'm Chocolate, You're Vanilla: Raising Healthy Black and Biracial Children in a Race-Conscious World

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This superb, rational, and highly readable volume answers a deeply felt need. Parents and educators alike have long struggled to understand what meanings race might have for the very young, and for ways to insure that every child grows up with a healthy sense of self. Marguerite Wright handles sensitive issues with consummate clarity, practicality, and hope. Here we have an indispensable guide that will doubtless prove a classic.
--Edward Zigler, sterling professor of psychology and director, Yale Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy

A child's concept of race is quite different from that of an adult. Young children perceive skin color as magical--even changeable--and unlike adults, are incapable of understanding adult predjudices surrounding race and racism. Just as children learn to walk and talk, they likewise come to understand race in a series of predictable stages.

Based on Marguerite A. Wright's research and clinical experience, I'm Chocolate, You're Vanilla teaches us that the color-blindness of early childhood can, and must, be taken advantage of in order to guide the positive development of a child's self-esteem.

Wright answers some fundamental questions about children and race including:
* What do children know and understand about the color of their skin?
* When do children understand the concept of race?
* Are there warning signs that a child is being adversely affected by racial prejudice?
* How can adults avoid instilling in children their own negative perceptions and prejudices?
* What can parents do to prepare their children to overcome the racism they are likely to encounter?
* How can schools lessen the impact of racism?
With wisdom and compassion, I'm Chocolate, You're Vanilla spells out how to educate black and biracial children about race, while preserving their innate resilience and optimism--the birthright of all children.

I'm Chocolate, You're Vanilla: Raising Healthy Black and Biracial Children in a Race-Conscious World Details

Date	:	Published May 22nd 2000 by Jossey-Bass (first published July 31st 1998)
ISBN	:	9780787952341
Author	:	Marguerite A. Wright
Format	:	Paperback 304 pages
Genre	:	Parenting, Adoption, Nonfiction, Race, Family

From Reader Review I'm Chocolate, You're Vanilla: Raising Healthy Black and Biracial Children in a Race-Conscious World for online ebook

R C says

Though it is already a few decades old, much of the information still (maybe sadly) continues to hear relevance. She has some opinions that I found surprising. I think some might consider her a "white apologist", nonetheless I found her insights and opinions to be thought provoking. The information on child development as it relates to race and identity was helpful.

Madeline says

Really? Recommending "mild" hair relaxers? The thinking is that braiding kids hair will teach them to hate their hair so the answer is chemically straightening it. I kept reading because I thought it may be one outdated piece of advice. Then I got to the section on children's books. Apparently parents who emphasize black books are drawing unnecessary attention to race (because having white protagonists doesn't send a message about race?). Also parents should avoid black books set in the "ghetto," inner city, or dysfunctional families? That is some nasty classism. This book is going in the garbage.

Monica Fastenau says

Read the full review here: http://newberyandbeyond.com/adult-non...

Ellyn says

This book discusses how children gradually learn about and come to understand the ideas of color and race, their own membership in a particular racial group, and individual and societal racism, from the preschool years through adolescence. It also makes suggestions for how parents and teachers can foster a healthy self-concept in children from racial and ethnic minorities and gives ideas for how to respond to racism among children and how to promote positive relationships among children of different races. It was published in 1998 and definitely felt a little bit outdated, but I gained some good insights. I most enjoyed the author's conversations with preschool children and her descriptions of their understanding of color as changeable, their lack of understanding of race and of the historical underpinnings of racism, their inherently positive views of themselves and others, and their tendency to view people as individuals. The book felt positive and hopeful as a whole, despite acknowledging many real challenges. The section about physical discipline and its cultural and historical roots was very interesting to me. I wish there was more information about how to discuss race and racism with white children. (P.S. Like other reviewers, I was really bugged by how the author kept referring to all Asians as "Chinese".)

Jessica says

This book came recommended from many lists of Ethiopian adoption books. She starts from the perspective of a young child and how they view the world up through highschool. My favorite parts of the book is where the author gives specific recommendations. I learned the most about what really young kids know and understand about race. She emphasizes repeatedly to allow kids to be kids for as long as possible. When they start asking questions is the best time to address various aspects of race. I like all the little "tests" you can give kids to kind of judge where they are in this process of acknowledging race. She also talks about various creative ways to talk to young children about race.

One panel of adults that had been adopted into transracial families had discussed what they wished their families had done differently. I thought about this various times as I read through the book. One of the panelists said they wished their family had told them about "the white advantage" in life. It seems from this author that perhaps this is important, but at the appropriate time.

Part of the book that stuck out for me was the concept of transformations that can happen in a lifetime where at one point, someone who is black may want to "act white" while other times he/she may want to be as far from "white" as possible. This seems important to remember as our child grows and learns more about themselves and their identity. I was also reminded of a documentary where a transracially adopted uncle wanted his transracially adopted nephew to act and embrase more black culture. It seems to me after reading this book that perhaps his nephew will get there, but in his own time.

She gives very little specific adoption advice, which is somewhat good. A lot of her advice is also just good parenting advice. Nurturing self-worth and self-esteem, dispelling myths about race, incorporating good role models into your child's life (especially of their same race), encouraging children to think positively about their skin and hair color. She also gives good advice about choosing schools and helping teachers build healthy race relations in classrooms.

I would recommend this book for any parent raising a child that is black or teachers/caregivers. The author is clearly knowledgeable and herself learned a lot through writing this book.

Havebooks Willread says

I started this book a year ago, then put it down for several months as I got bogged down in it. Once I picked it back up again, it moved much more quickly. Wright is a Black psychologist, so I appreciate her perspective, but the book was also written almost 20 years ago so isn't as current as other works are and what she says doesn't always agree with some of the Black voices I hear. It's nice to hear different opinions, however, so I thought it was worth reading.

This is not, by the way, a text for white people raising black children, as I initially thought from the title. It's about raising healthy black and biracial children, period, so was not intended to address adoption nuances.

Kate Finkelstein says

Bought this b/c I thought it was about transracial adoption. It is not - but it is insightful for understanding

how children start to understand and experience race. I have this on my parenting book shelf b/c it helps me with my son, but it's not really a parenting book. The tone is pretty scholarly.

I recommend for anyone who wants to understand children and their experiences of race better - and to understand how to discuss race with children.

Tonya says

This was the first full book I read about children and their view of race. I ended up only reading through the first half because once I got to the jr. high years and beyond, that just seems so far away I couldn't relate to it at all. it had a lot of good insight into the actual thought processes of young children and how adults can often aggravate racial issues on accident. I appreciated the author's detailed approach and also her humor. I have found a lot more recommendations for books on this subject, so I may change this one's rating once I have something to compare it to!

Meg says

I disagreed with most of the author's premises, though she is obviously a competent and thoughtful psychologist who really cares about kids and families. After each sentence of this book, I wanted to say "Yes, but..." The book overall lacked a nuanced insight into the ways individual and structural forces combine to produce inequalities and social problems. For example, she says that most of the time, if an African American child has low self-esteem, it's not because of societal racism, it's because s/he received negative racial messages from her/his own family (e.g. using "black" as an insult). This seemed like a strange claim to me. One of the ways racism gets passed on is that it's internalized by the targets. So it's not an either/or question. Maybe the actual equation is more like "Children whose families give them negative racial messages may be more vulnerable to societal racism, and the combination affects their self-esteem." The weird thing is that there were some places in the book where she did show a more nuanced understanding. But it wasn't applied overall.

I felt really ambivalent about her approach to young children - basically that it's better (1) to emphasize similarities over differences, and (2) to avoid teaching them about racism for as long as possible. My concern with #1 is that it can send the message that difference is bad. She calls the early childhood stages "racial innocence" - to my mind, romanticizing young children. Yes, learning about race (the social construct that divides and dehumanizes us) is unfortunate, but what about different cultures, different skin colors? Couldn't we see these as positive things to teach children about? (As a side note, her view of "racial innocence" conflicts with a study detailed in a really interesting sociology book called "The First R: How Children Learn Race and Racism", which shows that very young children have more understanding of racial terms than adults think.)

My concern with #2 is that it risks invalidating the child's experience. Wright says that often, even if an incident actually IS racist, you shouldn't let on to your young kids that it's about race - you should just act like it's someone being rude or unkind or silly. This seemed deceptive to me. I am really interested in figuring out age-appropriate ways to talk about issues of inequality, and it probably won't sound like talking to an adult about these issues. But I don't like the idea of pretending or putting up a false front to children.

A few things I liked about the book:
- The chapters on adolescence were much more congruent with my way of thinking (although I wanted more exploration about HOW to stand up to racism in constructive ways; I like her point that "Living a good life is the best revenge," but wish she could have looked at ways to challenge someone's racism while still staying in relationship to them - when they are your friend/ neighbor/ classmate/ etc.).
- I was interested in her research about how children conceptualize race (e.g. very young children using color or food words - peach, vanilla, chocolate - to describe others) and how their understanding of race develops over time.
- The section on corporal punishment was of great interest to me, as I work with a lot of parents who use corporal punishment - it gave me a lot of food for thought.

Mike says

I'm *way* behind on my reviews of books, which makes it difficult to write in detail. However my broad impressions were:

- An excellent book on a very important subject: how to raise healthy children (especially black and biracial, though the principles can be applied to other situations) in a racist American society -- both as parents and as educators.
- Though the book is written in the American context it is broadly applicable as far as it relates to developmental stages and broad principles.
- Her main point for early childhood is that we blame society but we need to look closer to home. In the early years children are influenced by their family and closest caregivers, not by broader society, and we are to blame far more often than we think -- often because of misguided attempts to protect or "harden" children for the world we think they need to face.
- She also emphasizes that we need to understand the level at which the children are. Far too often we project adult understandings onto children's words and actions, in ways which are unhealthy for the child.

I found the book fascinating and helpful in many ways, especially in it's outlining of early childhood development of racial awareness (when children begin to notice color, race, racism, etc.). This is where the book is at it's best and most helpful, because it is also where the author is most knowledgeable. The later parts of the book (about adolescents in particular) feel more like her opinions, which, however valid they may be (and I certainly agree with many of them), do not carry the same weight as her heavily researched and evidence based chapters on early childhood. Some readers may struggle with this because the author holds quite *strong* opinions on many of her points.

Tom Elliott says

As a white parent of a black three-year-old, the title of this book led me to believe that I was the audience. But that seemed to only be true in a peripheral sense, as the author really seemed to be targeting black parents in the interest of breaking some old cultural habits. In that sense, I had a small window into many of the obstacles that many (maybe most) black children face, particularly given the decayed public education system in the U.S. The biggest value in the book for me may have been the anecdotal examples from her

clinical experience.

Sarah says

As a white person preparing to adopt black children, I'm reading all kinds of books about race. Interesting, provocative, challenging, enlightening books. This isn't really one of those books.

Published in 1998, it does feel a tiny bit dated, as some reviewers have mentioned. The bigger problems I see are the constant contradictions and confusing thesis. "Race totally doesn't matter to kids! Even when they say it does! Except sometimes, when it does. And it's not a big deal! No different from your shoe size (actual quote)! Except that we need to understand how different we are culturally."

Another example from the book: (paraphrasing) "Kids don't care what color skin Santa has. Their parents are making WAY too big a deal out of being politically correct. Any kid sees a guy in a big red suit and knows it's Santa." This is on the SAME PAGE as an anecdote about a 5-year-old boy seeing a black Santa at the mall and saying, "That's not Santa! He's brown!"

I think that the author has great intentions, and is probably a lovely person with whom I'd have a nice time at lunch. Although, I did find it problematic that, in a book subtitled "Raising Healthy...Children in a Race-Conscious World" she kept referring to all Asian people as "Chinese".

In conclusion, the lesson I'll take away from this book is that little tiny kids, like preschool and kindergarten age, are developmentally incapable of understanding the concept of race. So when they say things like, "I wish I were white" or "Why is he so brown", they aren't participating in the larger cultural baggage of those statements. And that's a worthwhile thing to learn.

Angel says

Interesting book, but not really what I was looking for. The title sounded like I (a white lady raising a mixed child) would be the target audience, but I was not. Not bad, just wasn't on target for me.

Kate says

There's nothing wrong with this book exactly, but there are others that cover the same material in a more compelling and modern way. Also, it didn't answer my current question, which is how to better teach racial sensitivity to white kids, since most of the kids I teach are white, and I really want them to grow up not to be jerks. I'm going to a workshop with Ms. Wright soon, and I'm really looking forward to hearing any updates she might want to offer.

Leyla says

I am reading this in preparation for adopting an African-American into a Caucasian/Middle-Eastern family.

The author is very direct and clear in her mission to improve the self-image and lives of African-American children. The book wasn't written specifically for adoptive parents, but I find it helpful. I have a background in Education, but this subject was never raised in any of my classes. I find fault with the LSU Education Department and Grad school for that because the student populations I worked with in the East Baton Rouge School District were primarily African-American. This should have been a required text for new teachers.

I'm finding out useful information about what young children understand about race at different ages. I like that Wright, who is African-American herself, gives specific advice about racism and the things that adults have problems with that do not harm children (Santa being white is an example). I've learned that it is my reaction to negative comments and racism that will teach my children the most about the subject.
