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## **Review of *Loving across the color line: A White Adoptive Mother Learns About Race*. Sharon E. Rush. Review by Jill Duerr Berrick**

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behavior during the Defense of Marriage Act proceedings. Mark Rom discusses the ways that gay men and lesbians were able to trump medical and legal experts while seizing control of the public response to AIDS. Francine D'Amico analyzes the politics surrounding sexuality and the military services.

The last section describes the relative effectiveness of the movement across local, state, and national political arenas. James Button and his colleagues show that although over 100 cities and counties have anti-discrimination laws, the laws are not always forcefully implemented. Donald Haider-Markel offers hope to advocates of conventional political activity by describing the ways that lesbians and gays have influenced state politics as elected officials, lobbyists and activists. Colton Campbell and Roger Davidson show that although an unprepared congress used a special commission to deal with AIDS, it met the challenge of gay marriage through open dialogue and debate. Sarah Brewer and here colleagues review the work of the Supreme Court emphasizing its general reluctance to enter into the fray. Clyde Wilcox and Robin Wolpert finish up by tracing public opinion on gay and lesbian issues.

John F. Longres  
University of Washington

Sharon E. Rush, *Loving across the color line*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000. \$23.95 hardcover.

The new millennium is upon us and race relations may be as powerful a force in American society as they were a century ago. The nature and tenor of the debate surrounding race has changed, but the U.S. remains a profoundly racist society and much remains to be done in order to attain equality of opportunity and experience for all citizens—African American and White. Sharon Rush adds to America's discussion about race using a personal account of her life as a White mother raising an African American, adopted daughter. The book adds another dimension to our thinking about race in part because of the personal nature of the story and in part because many of the incidents of racism are seen through the eyes of a young girl. The innocence of the little girl's questions and her significant dismay at others' behavior is

by far the most powerful aspect of the book and stays with the reader long after it is placed aside.

In writing *Living across the color line*, Rush attempts to contribute to the effort toward racial equality in America. She does so using herself and her personal experiences as an example. Although the book might have value for many adult audiences, it is written primarily for a White, liberal, "goodwill" audience. By "goodwill," Rush refers to those Whites who do not intend to be prejudiced nor racist in their thoughts or actions; those who already believe in racial equality. These individuals, she posits, are committed to racial equality but nonetheless may unwittingly contribute to continued inequality either by their unwillingness to see their own White privilege, or by discounting the role of race in many social and political events.

The book is divided into two main sections. The first part of the book (chapters 1–6) includes a variety of personal anecdotes from Rush's experiences as a mother of an African American child. Each chapter contains one or more stories of racism, sexism and injustice and how each instance was perceived and managed by the little girl and her mother. By sharing these personal accounts with others, Rush clearly hopes that her experience as a liberal, White of "goodwill" will have resonance with others of "goodwill" so that they can develop a deeper appreciation of the profound impact and prevalence of racism for people of color. In the second section of the book (chapters 7–8) Rush offers some insights, based on her earlier experience, which might help to bridge the "color line" and improve race relations in the U.S.

The book's strength comes through in the first section, when the young girl's reflections on race are highlighted. Through her eyes, we see how children view race ("If black is so special, then why isn't it in the rainbow?" [p. 164]), how they perceive others' views on race ("Why do Whites hate something with feelings when there are so many other black things to hate?" [p. 164]), and how children of color understand the rules of American society ("You have to be White to get that award." [p. 164]). The girl's comments speak more strongly and powerfully than any commentary provided by the mother and are sufficient to communicate that children—even very young children—experience racism early on. Children recognize that American society sometimes places a

different and higher value on white skin tone than black, and that both children and adults can be particularly cruel for no other reason but for the color of one's skin.

The mother's experiences of racism occur not only because she hears of them through her daughter, but also because she is White and her child is African American. This allows strangers to say with impunity things that they might not otherwise disclose if they understood the little girl to be her daughter. For example, we learn of the stranger in the airport who comments aloud that the six-year-old Black girl might have stolen her purse, or the ambulance driver who wonders if the young child is a drug addict. Rush sees what many parents of adopted children, foster children, and biological mixed-race children encounter and her developing sensibility suggests that a quick and direct response may be the best in such situations.

Although the topic of transracial adoption is not the centerpiece of the book, Rush raises the topic on several occasions throughout. Given her experience—one that is fraught with challenges, yet also elicits strong emotions of devotion—Rush's reflections on transracial adoptions are inconsistent and contradictory. She acknowledges that African American children are heavily over-represented in the foster care system; that they wait longer for adoptive placements than children of other ethnic or racial groups; that while they wait they often experience placement instability; that the outcomes from foster care may be more deleterious to child well-being than outcomes from adoption; and that there may be more African American children needing adoptive homes than there are African American parents willing and able to care for them. She writes:

"I have to believe my daughter is better off with a permanent placement with a White mother who tries to instill in her a positive self-image, including being a Black girl, than she would be in the foster care system where she probably would not know a stable family life at all." (p. 93).

In her conclusions she also suggests that one of the only avenues available to our nation to bridge the "color line" is to experience widespread "transformative love"—a concept of caring that goes well beyond empathy and that may only be experienced through

the intensity of love brought on by an intimate relationship. Yet in spite of her experience, her knowledge of the problems associated with foster care, and her proscriptions for national change, she goes on to say: "However, my experiences convince me that transracial adoptions should be last resorts." (p. 93). If the conundrum of race relations is likely to be resolved primarily through "transformative love," and such love can only be experienced through intimacy, then narrowing opportunities for transracial adoptions will do little to forward her stated goal.

Rush's book is important for those who work with children. It reminds us of the special efforts that should be made early in life to teach children of all racial and ethnic groups about equality of experience and opportunity. It also raises an awareness of the impact of racism, even among the young. Awareness is a start; "transformative love" may be helpful along the way; we have a long way to go before our nation crosses over.

Jill Duerr Berrick

University of California at Berkeley

Rita Caccamo, *Back to Middletown: Three Generations of Sociological Reflections*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000. \$45.00 hardcover.

In his introduction to this book, Arthur Vidich states that, although Robert and Helen Lynd wished to approach Muncie, Indiana (the location of their classic community study Middletown) as ethnologists would enter an undiscovered tribe, they could not really carry it off. They were "embedded" in the culture of the people they were studying. So Rita Caccamo, an Italian sociologist, could finally bring a true outsider's perspective, presumably seeing things the Lynds could not.

Would it were so. Caccamo wrote her book in the Center for Middletown Studies at Ball State University, but she could have done most of it without leaving Rome. If Caccamo ever set foot outside, ever bought groceries, sipped a latte', attended a football game, pumped gas, ordered a burger, or watched *The Simpsons* in Muncie, alone or in the company of the natives, we are none the wiser for it.