

UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS WITH A BLACK MAN

BOOK DIGEST

PART 3: WE

LOVE WINS

The Interracial Family

QUESTION

“I AM A WHITE MAN WHO IS MARRIED TO A BLACK WOMAN, AND WE HAVE TWO BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN. BEING A WHITE MAN, I CANNOT BEGIN TO KNOW THE PRESSURES OF BEING BLACK IN AMERICA. AS A FATHER OF INTERRACIAL CHILDREN, I FEAR THAT I CANNOT ADEQUATELY PREPARE THEM FOR THE FUTURE. HOW CAN I EXPLAIN TO MY SON AND DAUGHTER THAT LIFE COULD BE HARDER FOR THEM THAN IT WAS FOR ME?”

*“My journey of love can’t be any different because of the color of someone’s skin.
And people can’t judge me for picking someone who doesn’t look like me.
I feel like they expect me to pick someone who looks just like me, but that’s not fair.
They should want me to fall in love with whoever it is that I vibe with—Rachel Lindsay”*

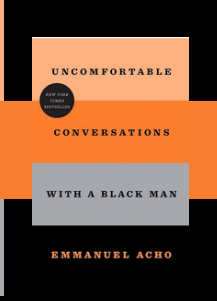
After interviewing two interracial couples on his show, Emmanuel Acho was asked by one of his viewers if he felt betrayed, as a black man, when seeing a black woman with a white man. And his answer was that he feels unsettled, curious, about what happened there.

In this chapter we transition from focusing on the divide between white and black people and into looking into what connects everyone: interracial families and relationships.

He shares:

“This last part is called “We”, because now that we’ve addressed some of our differences of experience and gaps in (white) understanding—there’s also so much room for black and white Americans to work together, to understand and empathize with each other’s humanity.

*“As a reminder, “I don’t see color” is not an okay thing to say,
because to say we’re all exactly the same is to gloss over history and presence of inequality.”*



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LET'S REWIND

Two anti-abolitionist journalists published a parody pamphlet, pretending to endorse white and black people having children together, in December 1863. It was called: “Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro.”

Black people at the time were both seen as inferior and exotic. Which led a large number of white men especially to have intimate relationships with black women. This is how it came to be the “one-drop rule” stating that a baby’s race would be determined by its mother. That prevented slaveowners from having to free their offspring when the mother was an enslaved woman.

Marriage between white and black people was officially outlawed in 1883 by *Pace v. Alabama*. The couple was sentenced to two years in prison. It took eighty years before the issue would be revisited by the Supreme Court, who ruled in 1964 in favor of an interracial couple in Florida (*McLaughlin v. Florida*). The coup de grace came in 1967 (*Loving v. Virginia*), when so-called anti-miscegenation laws were ruled as unconstitutional, when a couple appealed Virginia’s rejection of their marriage:

“Under our Constitution, the freedom to marry, or not marry, a person of another race resides with the individual, and cannot be infringed by the state—Chief Justice Earl Warren.”

It means that black people received their civil and voting rights BEFORE being allowed to legally marry white people.

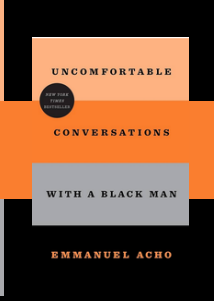
Emmanuel Acho then reviews the subject of transracial adoption.

The Adoption of Children Act was passed in Massachusetts in 1851 and stated it as a legal operation based on a child’s welfare, requiring parents to be “fit and proper”. The concept of “matching” was also introduced, with the goal of ensuring that families of adoption “matched” families made naturally. He writes:

“Matching required that adoptive parents be married heterosexual couples who looked, felt and behaved as if they’d conceived other people’s children themselves. Whatever that meant, there weren’t many kids of different races being adopted by white families.”

Transracial adoption stirred up opposition, in particular within black organizations.

And another parameter to take into consideration is whether the adoption is open or closed, the former at least maintaining some link with the child’s personal heritage.



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LET'S GET UNCOMFORTABLE

There's a complicated history surrounding interracial relationships in the U.S..

One concern that our author voices is that historically white people don't love black people, so even beyond the white person involved with a black person, their white families might not support the union. Emmanuel Acho also tends to wonder why the black person did not find a mate within their black community.

Since he's not the only one with feelings sparked by those circumstances, he believes that those feelings must be not only acknowledged but also talked through all together. He writes:

"We have to talk about it if we are going to make progress toward real equality, toward a place where racism isn't defining so much of our world. (...) We need to ask ourselves, how much of what we feel has been handed down to us from our parents and families, our friends, from history?"

Things we all tend to avoid those questions, they probably matter even more than we think.

He adds:

"Here's my realest opinion: I believe a person should be able to love who they love. I believe that love wins. I believe a family can look however it looks and still be a family."

He also believes all of this needs to be handled with care.

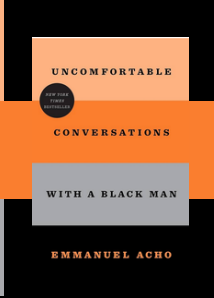
Both people involved in the relationship should really investigate the reason they're a part of it. Both parties should also make sure they're not "fetishized, exoticized, or tokenized." The white privilege must be named and understood. The potential implications within each other's family/friend/religious circles should be explored.

He also invites everyone to remember that two different cultures and/or value systems might need to be considered. And that it is not the role of the black partner to educate the white one on the history of racism and black culture. He also highlights that:

"Preconceived assumptions are prejudice, and you don't want to be prejudiced against your partner."

He warns white people again that:

"To be color blind would be to ignore many of the things that make them particular."



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And knowing about their culture of origin is even more crucial when talking about a black child being adopted by non-black parents. It's important to get curious about the movies that are central to black culture, such as *The Wiz*, *Malcolm X*, *Love & Basketball*, *Black Panther*. And a black hair salon should be a regular stop.

He adds:

“And remember that not only does a black child need to know about their black culture, they need to know about their black history. You can’t shield your child from the world for all of their life. Eventually, they are going to be in a world that isn’t color blind.”

TALK IT, WALK IT

Our author invites us to ground in the history of interracial relationships in the U.S., starting with the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings.

He shares resources about transracial adoption:

- *Black, White & Us*: a documentary
- mashupamericans.com
- adoptuskids.org

He ends this chapter reflecting on a piano analogy. He writes:

“The beautiful thing about the piano is that you got white keys and you got black keys. And the only way to make the most beautiful, magnificent, and poetic noise is with both sets of keys working in tandem. (...) But integrate the white and black keys together, and that is when the piano makes a joyful noise.”

For Emmanuel Acho, this “WE” is all about **allowing the world to make a joyful noise.**