

Everyday Acts Against Racism: Raising Children in a Multiracial World

Maureen T. Reddy, Ed.
Seattle, WA: Seal Press, 1996

Reviewed by Nicole Willey

Maureen Reddy makes a distinction early in her introduction between “nonracist” mothering and “antiracist” mothering. When, in conversation, she cites one of her major goals in parenting as rearing “antiracist” children, another mother quickly agrees that she, of course, practices “nonracist” parenting. But the difference is key. Reddy exposes “nonracist” parents in their guilt of considering “nonracism” an end, a struggle already finished. The mothers and mothering Reddy focuses on in this collection are in the midst of struggle. They recognize that “everyday acts against racism” must be instilled in children, and are the only hope in eventually changing oppression.

Everyday Acts Against Racism teaches anyone engaged in mothering (this can include women and men, biological and adoptive mothers, and teachers/community workers who mother children) practices that, slowly but surely, change children (and mothers) into committed antiracism advocates. The contributors to this collection, mothers who are, admittedly, mostly women and mostly college professors (i.e. middle class), write eloquently their personal stories of mothering their own children in antiracist practices, teaching antiracist practices in their classrooms, and striving to make antiracist connections in their adult lives. This collection is also about the heroic that can be found in ordinary, everyday acts that each one of us is capable of practicing.

This is not to say that the authors always agree with each other. Some writers are completely anecdotal and compelling on a personal level, while others academically enmesh the personal and the political. Tones range from pessimism about the enduring nature of racial injustice, to a wholehearted belief in changing the world, one act at a time. Some mothers shelter their children from racism until they are old enough to understand it cognitively, others believe discussion about racism should start even before children can understand what the word might mean. Some advocate almost constant confrontation and conflict, while others see the necessity of choosing battles and retiring from the fight for at least a moment. What these mothers agree on, however, is the politicized space of mothering (in the home, in the community, in the classroom) the opportunity to raise antiracist humans. These essays also share the conviction that sexism and racism are connected and that they complicate each other in a myriad of ways. Feminist, antiracist mothering, then, becomes the goal for these individuals.

As a reader involved with mothering in the community and the classroom, though not inside my home (yet), this collection enthralled me. Theory has met practice in a triumphant and hopeful way in this book. No reader will agree with or find resonance with each essay, but the wide range of voices balances out any inconsistencies. This book is a call to arms for anyone concerned with racial injustice, the future of our children, the practice of teaching as a political act, and/or the importance of mothering. Invigorating and intensely personal, it is a book I will read again, assign to students, and recommend to everyone who is involved with children.

Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South

Schwartz, Marie Jenkins.
Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000

Reviewed by Roxanne Harde

Previous examinations of parenting and growing up enslaved have tended to be either fictive, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853), or autobiographical, such as Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) and Frederick Douglass's autobiography (1845). Historian Marie Jenkins Schwartz's thoroughly researched *Born in Bondage* moves beyond Stowe's well-intentioned novel and the personal narratives of Jacobs and Douglas to present the experiences of the average parent and child under slavery. Schwartz counters the widely held view of paternalistic slave owners as men who determined the life and welfare of human property in this examination of "the experiences of a bound but resilient people as they learned to negotiate between acts of submission and selfhood, between the world of commodity and community, as they grew to adulthood" (18). She makes her readers aware of the individuality of each slave, individuality the practice of slavery attempted to remove.

Schwartz argues her thesis through a chronological study that follows the life cycle of the enslaved from birth through youth to young adulthood and the formation of a family. While Schwartz draws heavily on archival material and the records of slaveholders, her chief sources are compilations of slave narratives, in particular the forty-one volume *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, compiled by George P. Rawick and published through the 1970s. She weaves her resources into a fluent narrative that makes immediate the concerns and personalities of the slaves she cites. For example, from the