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Sunday  **Advertiser**

Tuesday

MAGAZINE

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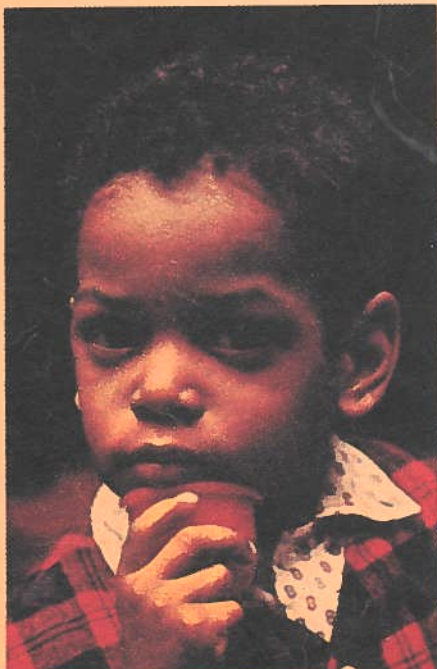
THE BLACK WORKER & THE
AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT
PART THREE



CHILDREN WITHOUT HOMES: THE ADOPTION PROBLEM/PAGE 6



■ Lavella, 5, is called "Cookie" for obvious reasons. She and her lively foster brother Bernard, 8, are both in the same home at present.



■ Darrel, 3½, is plain and simply "all boy."

Children Without Homes

The Adoption Problem

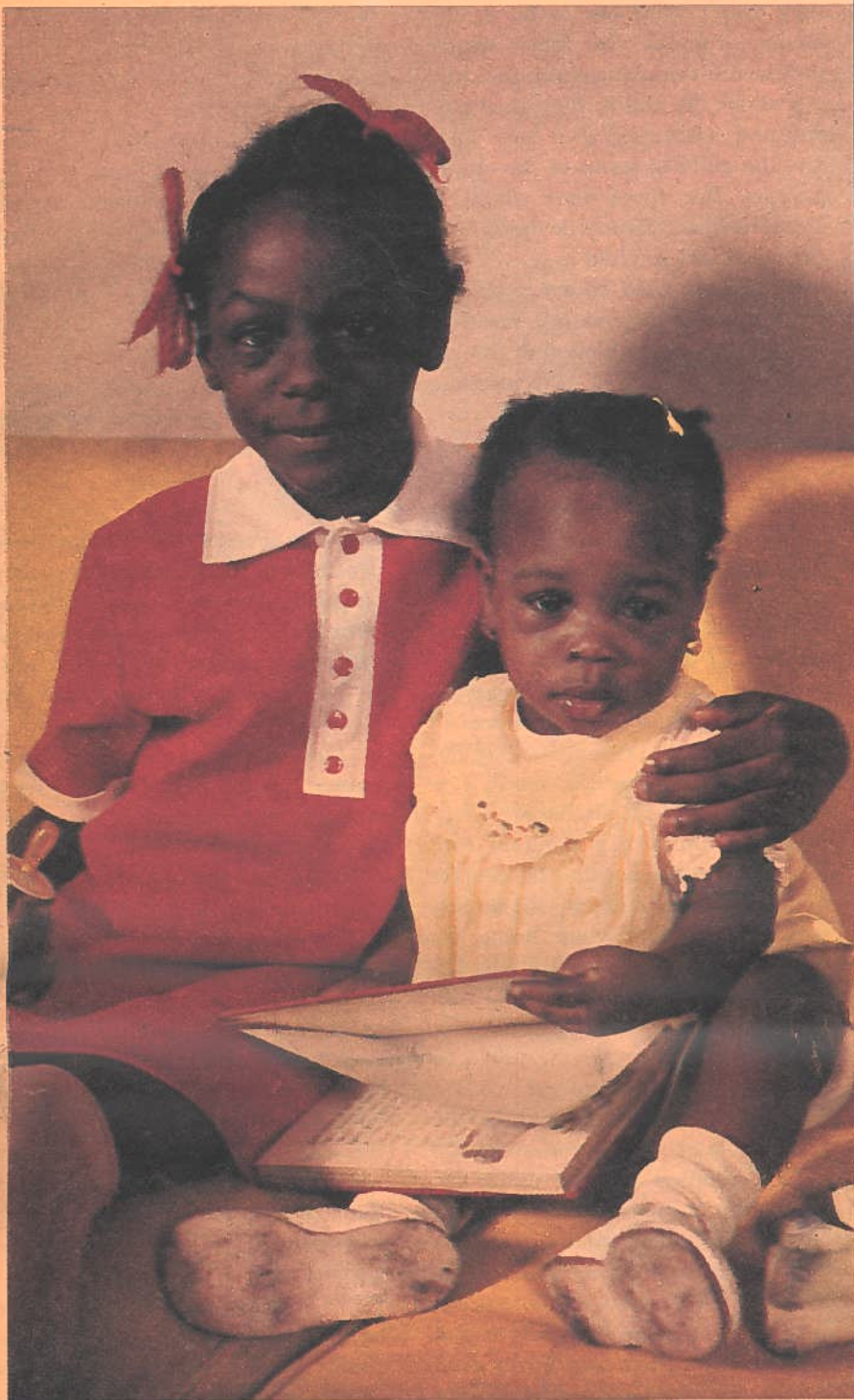
by Gene Grove

"Maybe we should redefine parenthood in terms of the nurture of a child rather than in biological, or even legal, terms... And we have to change the image of a hard-to-place child into that of another desirable human being."

Reports from Congressional critics and concerned citizens alike cite evidence that the United States is on its way to becoming a computer-technocracy in which each citizen is indexed for everything from his credit rating to his patriotism and in which every statistical fact from the number of wall telephones in Terre Haute, Indiana, to the incidence of Dutch Elm disease in Aroostock

County, Maine, is instantly available. And yet we are a nation in which no final, definitive information is at hand on the number of children who are awaiting adoption; one of the most frightful—and largely unrecognized—social problems of our time.

The federal government has estimated that there are at least 60,000 children who need adoptive parents and that 40,000 of them are Black. These figures are extremely unrealistic because once the children pass the age of two or three or are placed in a permanent foster home or institution they no longer are considered adoptable. The Child Welfare League of America, which does remarkably well considering that it must depend upon the vagaries of more than 400 adoption agencies scattered across the land, has estimated that there are at least twice that many Black



■ Antoinette, 6, immediately assumed the "big sister" role when little 13-month-old Lachan came into the room.

the government's standards and that there are at least another 110,000 children of all races not being counted because they are older or mentally, physically or emotionally handicapped.

But this much is certain: it is as impossible to overestimate the chances of a blue-eyed, blonde baby girl being adopted as it is to underestimate the chances of an eight-year-old Black boy. The difference is not in their sexes but in their ages and their races. Normal White infants are in such short supply for adoption today that they literally are being bootlegged in many parts of the country for prices ranging into several thousands of dollars. Black

place, meanwhile, continue to fill to overflowing the institutions and foster homes of the nation.

In the seven years in which TUESDAY has been presenting an annual report on adoptions, we have discovered emerging concepts, new methods of approaching the problem, innovative and enlightened ways of finding homes for the hard-to-place child—and yet the tragedy of children condemned to life without a home or parents continues to grow. "These children *aren't* hard to place," says Mrs. Joyce Forsythe, a founder of the Council on Adoptable Children in Ann Arbor, Mich. "The homes aren't scarce if the right approach is taken." And Clayton



■ Three-year-old Gavin is active, alert and more than a handful.

All children shown on these pages are available for adoption from the Spence-Chapin Adoption Service, 6 East 94th Street, New York, N.Y. 10028.

Hagen, supervisor of the adoption unit of the Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota, insists that "it's not so much the problem, but the lack of dreams that holds us back from what we must do."

There are those, like Mrs. Forsythe and Mr. Hagen, who have plenty of dreams, and there are enough examples scattered around the country to back up their tireless optimism. However, Joseph H. Reid, executive director of the Child Welfare League, estimates that only about one-third of the nation's 427 adoption agencies even apply what the League considers up-to-date standards—which means that all the liberalization of adoption laws and practices in recent years still mean little to two-thirds of the country's agencies. Too many still placidly accept as fact the idea that children who vary from the community norm won't be adopted, too many regard their wards as hostages and force couples to prove that they're "worthy" to be parents, too many have become entranced with red tape and perpetuate it rather than eradicate it. That such barriers can be broken has been proved time and time again: Mrs. Forsythe's council, for instance, helped prod the Michigan Department of Social Services into a searching self-examination when the council, working in but a single county, was instrumental in the placement of one-third of all children adopted in the entire state in 1967.

From the start of this series in December, 1965, TUESDAY has heard glowing reports of the work done by Hagen and his Lutheran Social Services. At a time when the number of

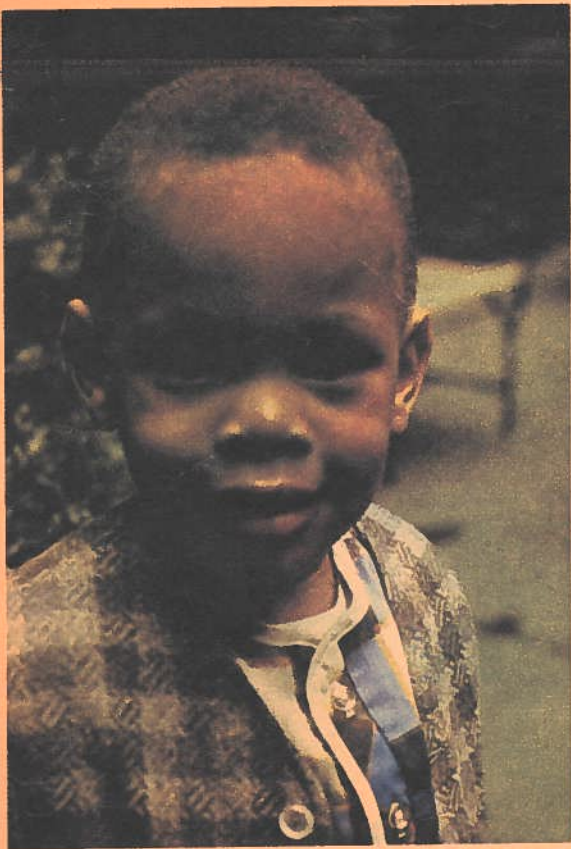


■ Jimmy, 6, has adjusted to his leg braces and crutches and is a happy, lively child in search of adoptive parents.

Black children being adopted throughout the country is remaining static, the agency has been doubling the number of Black children adopted through it for the past five years: 16 in 1967, 31 in 1968, 64 in 1969, 119 last year and more this year, and that in a city only about seven percent Black and a state less than two percent Black. Even more remarkable, nearly 40 percent of the 1,023 children it placed last year were other than normal White infants—Blacks, Indians, Korean orphans, older children and children with serious medical problems. Intrigued, we visited Hagen this year.

He is a man modest in appearance, approaching middle age, somewhat slight, white-haired, and with a sort of Midwestern shyness about him. But this shyness disappears in the animation with which he talks of children and parenthood or darts about his spacious, modern building

(Please turn to next page)



■ Conrad, 2, is a busy youngster, into "everything."

CHILDREN (continued)

near downtown Minneapolis, here conveying some of his enthusiasm to a young caseworker, there bantering with a beaming, rotund, middle-aged and middle-class White woman who has, inexplicably to anyone unfamiliar with Hagen's missionary zeal, adopted three Korean orphans.

"Unfortunately," he says, somewhat mournfully, "our culture has not been conducive to regarding adoptive parenthood as real parenthood. Adoption has been seen as a possibility after one has failed to have 'one's own.' A couple which considered adoption wanted a child like one they could have had. And the agency practice of limiting adoption to infertile couples and matching the couple and the child reflected these cultural attitudes... and, to some extent, institutionalized their feelings.

"We must redefine the meaning of parenthood. Even if you are a biological parent, as I am, every day you find your own child growing away from you, finding himself. He is not an extension of yourself but a separate human being. What then is a mother? What is a father? Maybe we should redefine parenthood in terms of the nurture of a child rather than in biological, or even legal, terms. If your child happens to be sick or in his teens does that make you any less his parent than when he was a healthy infant?"

"And we have to change the image of a hard-to-place child into that of another desirable human being. We must remove the lines—racial, physical, religious, political, whatever—which prevent people from



■ Brian, 8½, has a winning smile and an even disposition.

adopting. After all, the child you may be going to adopt probably hasn't been conceived yet. Do you hope his mother will get unhappily pregnant so you may have the child? And if you don't, do you feel that the child must be born to you for you to call the child son or daughter?

"What I'm trying to do is to get people to think through their values."

Values and their definition are the first problems in the adoption of any child and especially of Black children. By the standards of too many, a child is "hard-to-place" if he or she deviates from the norm set by society in another time, a time of different needs, different aspirations and less knowledge. A half-century ago, it was expected that children without parents would grow up in institutions if they were not taken in by relatives. Adoptive parents were couples financially secure, socially stable, God-fearing, unable to have children of their own. The adoptive couples wanted babies as young as possible and in their own genetic image—a sort of surrogate reproduction—and if they were proper folk they expected the biological parents to be healthy, intelligent, hard-working people who had participated in only one act of intercourse and would be ashamed of it the remainder of their lives.

If that unhealthy stereotype has gone now, and it has, its memory remains in the subconscious of many potential parents and even in that of some social workers. When Hagen arrived at Lutheran Social Services 10 years ago, he says, "It was a church-oriented institution and most of our parents wanted kids in their own images, the traditional thinking. Or, if they were willing to take a Black child—if they were White—it might be all right if the mother were

a Black coed from the university, but they didn't want her to be a high school drop-out. In other words, they weren't thinking about the child but about the child's biological parents and about their own egos. They saw the child in terms of the child's parents. But there were all these children whose parents deviated from the norm and you had to try to place them. So we tried to get people to think through their values. We tried to get people to think they should take care of a child who needs a home, instead of... [thinking] their home needs a child."

Still, many potential parents insist on infants and will refuse an older child. Most still want children of their own race who share as many of their physical characteristics as possible. Most would reject out-of-hand the idea of a child with a physical, mental or emotional handicap. And, despite dramatic steps forward in liberalizing state laws, agency regulations and local custom, many case workers still would discourage adoption by couples of a different race from the child, adoption by couples middle-aged or older, by single persons or by persons whose home, income or presumed stability falls below what the worker deems fit. Still, progressive agencies across the country increasingly are seeing all these categories as new resources.

Adoption is not unusual in the United States. There are some 2.5 million adopted children under the age of 18 in the country today. In the last year for which there are reasonably accurate figures, 1969, some 171,000 children were adopted, nearly half of them by relatives. But only 19,000 of them were Black. And despite the magnitude of the problem, the number of adoptions remains relatively static or is turning downward slightly throughout the country, both for adoptions as a whole and for adoptions of Black children. The picture for Black babies, however, is not as bleak as it might be. Of 184,000 non-white babies born out of wedlock in 1968, says the National Urban League, some 165,000, or 90 percent, were informally adopted or retained in existing families. And the United States Children's Bureau concedes that "there are more unofficial adoptions in Black communities than official adoptions through agencies." Mrs. Sydney Delaney Duncan, co-director of Homes for Black Children in Detroit, says that "down through the years, Black people have been taking care of children not their own,

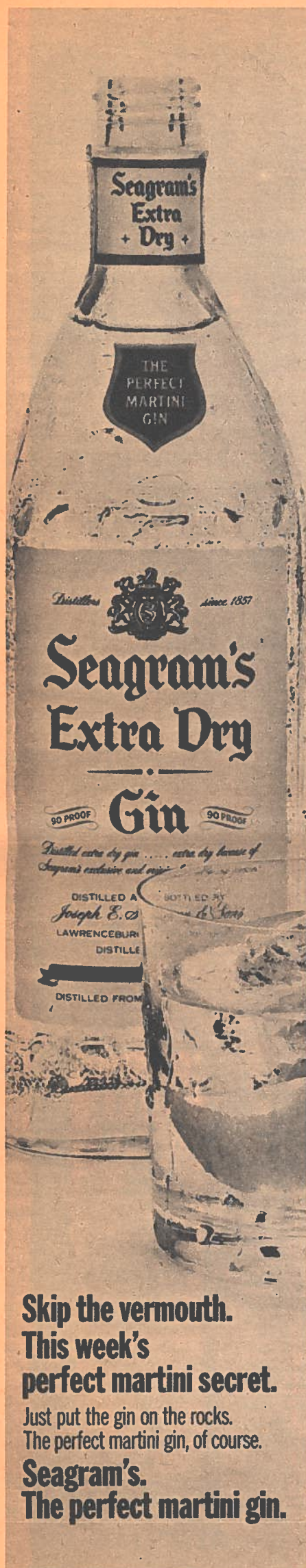
but not legally. Blacks have traditionally been reluctant to get involved with the legal structure and, too, the adoption agencies have set standards that were too strict."

Hagen's enthusiasm and his ferocious desire to find a home for every child have led him and some others, notably Betty Schultz of the Lutheran Child and Family Service in Chicago, to take a new approach to adoption, one which has a name, the "enabling approach." It could not properly be called radical because it consists of ideas which have had some currency among professionals in the field, but it carries them to their rational end and formulates them. In essence the approach concentrates on *enabling families to adopt by giving them help and information about adoption* rather than the reverse, examining them to see if they are fit to be parents. The approach does away with much of investigation—of family savings, income, home, habits, religion and the other social work-making formulae—and substitutes an attitude that is more educational toward, rather than judgmental of, the potential parents.

The traditionalists scoff at, when they do not openly denounce, such an approach and claim that it leads to an outrageous number of unsuccessful adoptions. "Last year," says Hagen in rebuttal, "we had 19-kids who had to be transferred before the adoptions were final, compared with 1,023 successful adoptions, but there are people who question that two percent more than they are curious about the other 98 percent. If we limited ourselves, as some agencies do, to White infants, we could bat 100 percent every year, but 40 percent of our kids are what other people would regard as hard-to-place. Too many agencies are working for society, The Establishment, and not for the child, and when you start doing that the first rule is: 'Protect yourself.'"

There are many reasons why normal White children are adopted readily while Black children languish, reasons why there is an under-supply of one and an oversupply of the other. Some of these reasons follow, if you will, from the varying effects of the increased availability of birth control devices, the liberalized abortion laws in New York and California, and the precipitous increase in the number of unmarried women who, with changing social mores, want to keep their babies. "Five years ago," says Isabel Williamson, of Montreal's Catholic

(Please turn to page 14)



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CHILDREN WITHOUT HOMES (continued from page 8)

Family and Children's Service, "only 15 to 20 percent kept their babies and now 50 percent insist on it." Birth control and abortion affect the number of Black babies less for reasons, for instance, of money and available information, while unmarried Black women traditionally have been more likely than Whites to keep their children. At the same time, an increasing number of Whites are asking for adoption for very different reasons: some have been impressed by the population explosion and, after having one or two children, want to adopt others, and there are White couples as well who in other years might have been barred from adoption and who now are taking advantage of liberalized laws.

So agencies throughout the country have been faced with the paradox of mounting waiting lists for White babies and mounting numbers of Black children awaiting adoptive homes.

Despite his pioneering efforts, for instance, the waiting list for White babies at Hagen's agency trebled, from 500 to 1,500 between 1968 and 1970, and he expects it to pass 2,000 this month. Some agencies have two-year waiting lists and others have cut off their lists. Hagen has been reluctant to cut off his own list or to control it by limiting it to infertile couples or some other requirement because, he says, "this again conveys

application for adoption is that there really is not a surplus of adoptive families but rather a surplus of children needing adoption. For our agency to limit intake of adoptive couples at the same time children wait would seem to be contrary to the values we should continue to convey to others and to express ourselves. But perhaps the main reason we're reluctant to limit adoptive couples by arbitrary limitation is that the couples that have been most willing and able to consider children of other races and with physical handicaps have been those that already have had the experience of raising children. It is just this group that would be cut off if we attempt to control the number of families waiting for Caucasian infants."

And that is the nub of Hagen's problem and the reason his success in finding parents for Black, Indian and Korean children is so remarkable. The Black population of his city is seven percent. Lutheran Social Services, despite Hagen's reputation, is not an agency to which Blacks normally would turn. Yet he has Black children and he feels obliged to find homes for them; and he does. As a result, of the 119 Black children he found parents for last year, 95 percent went to White homes. There are those who sincerely do not believe in trans-racial adoptions. Detroit's Homes for Black Children, for in-

apolis. Allen Coates, a spokesman for the National Association of Black Social Workers, thinks trans-racial adoption is "a cruel trick to play on a child."

Still trans-racial adoption is becoming increasingly a fact of life and, pertinent to the problem of Black children waiting for homes, an important factor in providing homes. A recent survey of the nation's adoption agencies showed that of some 6,500 Black children adopted, more than 35 percent were placed in White homes, up from 23 percent only two years ago.

Hagen believes sincerely in trans-racial adoption as one of the tools which must be used to find homes for Black children, although he might cavil at having it put just that way. He believes in trans-racial adoption not simply as a tool or a second-best solution if there are no Black parents available for Black children but as a way of life complete and defensible on its own, equally-good rather than second-best. His agency, he says, is not concerned with a child's racial background because "we believe that each child is an individual of infinite worth. We are just as concerned that a blue-eyed, blonde little girl get a home where she will be valued as a person. And we believe another child's racial background should not prevent him from having the same.

"People wonder," Hagen con-



KEITH ROBINSON

This is Keith who appeared on our December 1969 cover and who was adopted the following May by Mr. and Mrs. David Robinson of Brooklyn, N.Y. Now three years old, Keith has settled into being the typical boy. He loves cars, careens through the house and goes to baseball games with his father who plays for a Housing Authority team. His mother says he has adjusted very well and is attached to his four-year-old sister, Stacy, who he goes to see the minute he awakens each morning. Both Keith and Stacy attend St. Mark's nursery school in Brooklyn.



the idea that adoption is primarily for those that are unable to produce children: that is, second-best or last resort. This would be unfortunate, as the attitude of the larger society towards adoption is also important in a child's feeling about the world he lives in and his sense of acceptance by society cannot depend only on the particular parents he has.

"Another reason we have been reluctant to artificially control ap-

stance, does not accept applications from White couples and believes, Mrs. Duncan says, that "there are enough resources within the Black community." She has proved her point: her agency was begun after the city's 13 agencies placed only 93 Black children in 1967 while placing 1,331 Whites. Within eight months of its founding, Homes for Black Children placed 100, but then Detroit is a much different city from Minne-

tinues, "how it will be to be parents to a child of another race. But how will it be for the child to have parents of another race than himself, and possibly grow up in a community of another race? There is, of course, the negative answer that it will be better than not having a home at all, with no good feeling of the past or hope for the future and feeling separated from society. However, we believe the answer can be
 (Please turn to page 30)

more positive. We believe if we act on our basic belief about the rights of an individual and what one person can do for another, the child will have a positive experience. The real question then, it seems to us, is: "Can you give another individual a feeling of being a person of worth and value, and help him, in turn, to value and respond to others?" If one can do this, perhaps this is all we need to know now. If the child has a good concept of himself, he can then meet all we fear he will encounter and not be overcome. If he does not have a good concept of himself, any problem may be too much."

Hagen is well aware of and concerned about the identity problem of a child who is Black and is cared for by White parents, but at the same time he questions the whole assumption that trans-racial adoptions should be made as a second-best choice, only when there are no Black parents available for a Black child. "We are finally coming to understand," he says, "that we live in a racist society. However, we have not always used the term racist correctly. Racism has come to mean exploiting someone of another race, but that is a result of racism, unfortunately a

common result. But the word racism itself means that we see people first in terms of their race and sometimes *only* in terms of their race. This becomes our identity. Because we see ourselves in terms of our own race, we may not even be aware of or consider people of another race. This is why some people are racist and don't realize it.

"With these traditions and attitudes towards race, interracial adoption naturally causes uncertainty among many people. But if we see a child as an individual first, this does not mean that his race is minimized. If the adoptive parent sees himself as a real parent, this doesn't mean that the fact that the child was born to other persons is denied or minimized. Seeing people as individuals only means that their race and biological background are seen as factors which make up their unique individuality. When race is not seen as identity but as a *factor* in identity, we can more appropriately talk about a person's race. Then, all of the information and knowledge and understanding of racial background adds to the description of the person and his understanding and feelings about himself."

Whether one agrees with him or

not, Hagen has been remarkably successful in finding homes for Black children and has expanded his horizons to provide homes in Minnesota for hundreds of Korean orphans and additional hundreds of American Indian children. Other agencies know of him and lean on him. Of the 1,023 children placed by Lutheran Social Services last year, 116 were referred to it from 16 other states and Canada and nearly half the referrals, 52, were Black.

And he's not through. Musing idly in his office, Hagen came up with a visionary's plan for placing in an adoptive home every hard-to-place child in the country. "Look," he said, "if there are as figures show, 40,000 unadoptable children in the country—the number, as statistics sometimes are, may be a lie and there may be twice as many—and if there are 1,000 agencies and each one placed only 40 children, the problem would be solved in a year." There are plenty of agencies in the United States which do not place a *total* of 40 children of any sort in a year but, were the plan put into action, it would seem certain that Clayton Hagen would be willing to take up someone else's slack. ■

To Give a Child a Home...

Adoption standards, because they are set by a given state or city, vary widely. Persons interested in becoming adoptive parents can write to their state's Dept. of Welfare for referral to a local agency, or write for information to the Child Welfare League of America, 44 East 23rd St., New York, N.Y. 10010.

Prospective parents must be prepared to submit to the evaluation of such areas as their home and finances, the stability of their marriage and the reasons for wanting to adopt a child. This is an effort by the agency to determine their suitability as parents. Opportunities for "special" adoptions (interreligious, interracial, single parent, subsidized adoptions, etc.) are dependent upon local practice and laws.

Just as badly needed are foster homes, and many couples who feel they cannot afford the expense of another child have taken eagerly to foster parenthood. Foster parents are paid for the feeding, clothing and caring of the child but must, of course, be prepared to surrender the child if an adoptive home is found.



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