

Choosing Family: A Memoir of Queer Motherhood and Black Resistance

Francesca T. Royster

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Memorable and fluid, professor Francesca T. Royster's memoir *Choosing Family* blends her family's history with her story of adopting an infant girl, juxtaposing personal life with political life and allowing each to illuminate the other.

Royster fell in love with Annie, a fellow academic in Chicago. Royster was Black; Annie was white. Deciding to adopt an infant, they engaged in deep reflections on their personal ancestry and their understandings of the meaning of family. Royster notes the commonalities between queer and Black families, including their "resistant joy, pleasure, and pride."

The memoir's narrative thread remains strong through shifts in time. Tension between the desire to mother and the adoption's uncertainty creates gentle but compelling suspense. Royster's connections to her ancestors are conveyed in rich, vibrant detail, bringing even the dead to life as distinct individuals with lasting cultural and biological legacies for Royster and her family.

The writing is pleasurable, accessible, and often poetic, employing graceful images to illustrate the family's identities. A queer family's spirit, for example, is "fluid in the shape of its membership and the permeability of its borders," while a popular song acts on the heart "like a secret code, like the cracks of hidden crystals." Subjects often found in theoretical discourse are embedded in real-life examples. The internalization of homophobia, for example, is discussed in the context of the Pulse nightclub shooting. Still, despite its attention to dynamics of privilege and oppression in race, gender, and sexual orientation, the book avoids discussing the economic power dynamics of middle-class, college-educated people adopting the children of women living in poverty, detracting from its otherwise inclusive ethic.

In the lyrical memoir *Choosing Family*, the personal and political unite in a queer, interracial couple's celebration of choosing to adopt an infant.

MICHELE SHARPE (January / February 2023)

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