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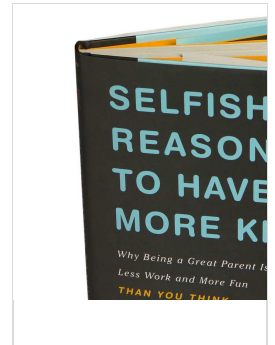
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RED DUST ROAD: An Autobiographical Journey

By Jackie Kay

Atlas, 288 pp., \$24

Scottish poet Jackie Kay could have written a bitter, conflicted memoir. It can't have been easy growing up black in a very white country, and further isolated from the mainstream by virtue of adoptive parents who were committed Communists. In "Red Dust Road," Kay describes facing racism, homophobia, and self-doubt, yet this is one of the sunniest, most joyful books that can be imagined. Part of the credit goes to Kay herself, a writer of great honesty and abundant charm, and part goes to her parents. The Kays, a white couple who adopted her as a newborn, are still in love after 50-some years, and their daughter captures perfectly both their sweet coupledness and their salty Scottish speech.



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The book hinges on Kay's seeking, finding, and reckoning with her birth parents. They, too, are peas in a pod; they both come from small towns (hers in the Scottish Highlands, his in eastern Nigeria), found religion later in life, and were unable or unwilling to tell their families about Kay, even after she has reunited with them. "Everyone involved in adoption has an imaginary version of everyone else," she writes — her mother concocts an elaborate fantasy about her birth parents; her birth mother is disappointed her adoptive parents weren't taller and more glamorous — but confronting the reality of her birth parents, as vexing as both can be, leaves the author with an abiding sense of peace, happiness, and wholeness. "I can't imagine my life any other way than the way I've lived it," she proclaims, in a deeply satisfying, even inspirational resolution.

SELFISH REASONS TO HAVE MORE KIDS:

Why Being a Great Parent Is Less Work and More Fun Than You Think

By Bryan Caplan

Basic, 228 pp., \$24.99

Most of us have fewer children than would truly make us happy, says economist Bryan Caplan, either because we fear the negative environmental impact of bringing more into the world or because we hold ourselves to such high standards that parenting becomes grueling and unpleasant. Caplan, an economist at George Mason University and a fellow at the Cato Institute, says both impulses are misguided; more babies can be better for the earth, he argues, and for their parents, too.

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