

The  
Adoption  
History  
Project

Timeline ✨

People &  
Organizations ✨

Adoption Studies/  
Adoption Science ✨

Topics in  
Adoption History ✨

Further Reading ✨

Document  
Archives ✨

Site Index ✨

PLEASE POST  
**WANTED**  
Homes For Orphan Children

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) |  
[Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Timeline of Adoption History

[1851-1900](#) | 
 [1901-1919](#) | 
 [1920-1946](#) | 
 [1946-1964](#) | 
 [1965- present](#)

### Adoption History in Brief

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>1851</b>      | Massachusetts passed the first modern adoption law, recognizing adoption as a social and legal operation based on <b>child welfare</b> rather than adult interests. Historians consider the <b>1851 Adoption of Children Act</b> an important turning point because it directed judges to ensure that adoption decrees were "fit and proper." How this determination was to be made was left entirely to judicial discretion. |
| <b>1854</b>      | New York Children's Aid Society, under the direction of reformer <b>Charles Loring Brace</b> , launched the <b>orphan trains</b> .  |
| <b>1868</b>      | Massachusetts Board of State Charities began paying for children to board in private family homes: in 1869, an agent was appointed to visit children in their homes. This was the beginning of <b>placing-out</b> , a movement to care for children in families rather than institutions.   |
| <b>1872</b>      | New York State Charities Aid Association was organized. It was one of the first organizations in the country to establish a specialized child-placement program, in 1898. By 1922, homes for more than 3300 children had been found. The first major <b>outcome study</b> , <i>How Foster Children Turn Out</i> (1924), was based on the work of this agency.   |
| <b>1891</b>      | Michigan was the first state to require that "the [the judge] shall be satisfied as to the good moral character, and the ability to support and educate such child, and of the suitability of the home, or the person or persons adopting such child."  |
| <b>1898</b>      | The Catholic Home Bureau was organized in New York by the St. Vincent De Paul Society. It was the first Catholic agency to place children in homes rather than orphanages, a model soon followed in other cities.   |
| <b>1904</b>      | The first <b>social work</b> school, the New York School of Applied Philanthropy, opened its doors.   |
| <b>1909</b>      | First White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children declared that poverty alone should not be grounds for removing children from families. When children required placement for other reasons, however, they were to be placed in family homes, "the highest and finest product of civilization"; <b>Sigmund Freud</b> published " <b>Family Romances</b> ."   |
| <b>1910-1930</b> | The <b>first specialized adoption agencies</b> were founded, including the Spence Alumni Society, the Free Synagogue Child Adoption Committee, the Alice Chapin Nursery (all in New York) and the Cradle in Evanston, Illinois.   |

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| <b>1911</b>      | Dr. <b>Arnold Gesell</b> founded the Juvenile Psycho Clinic (later the Clinic of Child Development) at Yale.   |
| <b>1912</b>      | Congress created the <b>U.S. Children's Bureau</b> in the Department of Labor "to investigate and report on all matters pertaining to the welfare of children and child life among all classes of our people"; Julia Lathrop was appointed as its first chief, the first woman to head a federal agency.   |
| <b>1912-1921</b> | <b>Baby farming</b> , commercial maternity homes, and adoption ad investigations took place in Boston, New York, Baltimore, Chicago, and other cities.   |
| <b>1915</b>      | Bureau for Exchange of Information Among Child-Helping Organizations founded (renamed <b>Child Welfare League of America</b> in 1921); <b>Abraham Flexner</b> declared social work "hardly eligible" for professional status.  |
| <b>1916</b>      | Lewis Terman's revision of the Binet scale popularized the intelligence quotient, or I.Q. Worries about the " <b>feeble-minded</b> " mentality of children available for adoption, and trends toward measuring their mental potential as one part of the adoption process, usually with mental tests, grew out of the <b>eugenics</b> movement in the early part of the century.   |
| <b>1917</b>      | <b>Minnesota</b> passed first law mandating social investigation of all adoptions (including <b>home studies</b> ) and providing for the <b>confidentiality</b> of adoption records.   |
| <b>1919</b>      | The Russell Sage Foundation published the first professional child-placing manual; <b>U.S. Children's Bureau</b> set <b>minimum standards</b> for child-placing; <b>Jessie Taft</b> authored an early manifesto for therapeutic adoption, " <b>Relation of Personality Study to Child Placing.</b> "   |
| <b>1919-1929</b> | The first empirical <b>field studies</b> of adoption gathered basic information about how many adoptions were taking place, of whom, and by whom.  |
| <b>1921</b>      | <b>Child Welfare League of America</b> formally renamed and organized. The League adopted a <b>Constitution</b> that defined standard-setting as one of the organization's core purposes; American Association of Social Workers founded.  |
| <b>1924</b>      | First major <b>outcome study</b> , <i>How Foster Children Turn Out</i> , published.  |
| <b>1934</b>      | The state of Iowa began administering mental tests to all children placed for adoption in hopes of preventing the unwitting adoption of retarded children (called " <b>feeble-minded</b> " at the time). This policy inspired <b>nature-nurture studies</b> at the Iowa Child Welfare Station that eventually served to challenge hereditarian orthodoxies and promote policies of early family placement.                                     |
| <b>1935</b>      | Social Security Act included provision for aid to dependent children, crippled children's programs, and child welfare, which eventually led to a dramatic expansion of <b>foster care</b> ; American Youth Congress issued "The Declaration of the Rights of American Youth"; <b>Justine Wise Polier</b> was appointed to head the Domestic Relations Court of Manhattan. She became an important early critic of <b>matching</b> in adoption. |
| <b>1937-1938</b> | First <b>Child Welfare League of America</b> initiative that distinguished <b>minimum standards</b> for permanent (adoptive) and temporary (foster) placements.  |
| <b>1939</b>      | Valentine P. Wasson published <i>The Chosen Baby</i> , a landmark in the literature on <b>telling</b> children about their adopted status.   |
| <b>1944</b>      | In <i>Prince v. Massachusetts</i> , a case involving Jehovah's Witnesses, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the state's power as <i>parens patriae</i> to restrict parental control in order to guard "the general interest in youth's well being."  |
| <b>1948</b>      | The first recorded <b>transracial adoption</b> of an African-American child by white parents took place in   |

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
|                  | Minnesota.   |
| <b>1949</b>      | New York was the first state to pass a law against black market adoptions, which proved unenforceable in practice.   |
| <b>1953</b>      | Uniform Adoption Act first proposed. Few states ever adopted it; <b>Jean Paton</b> founded Orphan Voyage, the first adoptee <b>search</b> support network.   |
| <b>1953-1954</b> | Child Welfare League of America conducted nationwide survey of adoption agency practices.  |
| <b>1953-1958</b> | The first nationally coordinated effort to locate adoptive homes for <b>African American children</b> , the National Urban League Foster Care and Adoptions Project.   |
| <b>1954</b>      | Helen Doss published <i>The Family Nobody Wanted</i> ; Jean Paton published <i>The Adopted Break Silence</i> , the first book to offer a variety of first-person <b>adoption narratives</b> and promote the notion that adoptees had a distinctive identity.   |
| <b>1955</b>      | <b>Child Welfare League of America</b> national conference on adoption in Chicago announced that the era of <b>special needs adoption</b> had arrived; Congressional inquiry into interstate and black market adoptions, chaired by Senator Estes Kefauver (D-TN), suggested that poor adoption practices created juvenile delinquency; Proposed federal law on black market adoptions introduced by Senators Kefauver (D-TN) and Edward Thye (R-MN), but it never passed Congress; National Association of Social Workers founded, consolidating a number of other <b>social work</b> organizations; <b>Bertha and Harry Holt</b> adopted eight Korean War orphans after a special act of Congress allowed them to do so; <b>Pearl S. Buck</b> accused social workers and religious institutions of sustaining the black market and preventing the adoption of children in order to preserve their jobs; Adopt-A-Child founded by the National Urban League and fourteen New York agencies to promote <b>African-American adoptions</b> . |
| <b>1957</b>      | International Conference on Intercountry Adoptions issued report on problems of <b>international adoptions</b> ; U.S. adoption agencies sponsored legislation to prohibit or control <b>proxy adoptions</b> .  |
| <b>1958</b>      | <b>Child Welfare League of America</b> published <i>Standards of Adoption Service</i> (revised in 1968, 1973, 1978, 1988, 2000); <b>Indian Adoption Project</b> began.   |
| <b>1959</b>      | UN Assembly adopted Declaration of the Rights of the Child, endorsed in 1960 by Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth.   |
| <b>1961</b>      | The Immigration and Nationality Act incorporated, for the first time, provisions for the <b>international</b> adoption of foreign-born children by U.S. citizens.  |
| <b>1960</b>      | Psychiatrist <b>Marshall Schechter</b> published a study claiming that adopted children were 100 times more likely than their non-adopted counterparts to show up in clinical populations. This sparked a vigorous debate about whether adoptive kinship was itself a risk factor for mental disturbance and illness and inspired a new round of studies into the <b>psychopathology</b> of adoption.  |
| <b>1962-1965</b> | Special conference on child abuse, led by Katherine Oettinger, chief of the Children's Bureau, generated proposals for new laws requiring doctors to notify law enforcement and most states adopted such legislation.  |
| <b>1963</b>      | National Institute of Child Health and Human Development established as part of the National Institutes of Health; <b>U.S. Children's Bureau</b> moved from Social Security Administration to Welfare Administration.  |
| <b>1964</b>      | H. David Kirk published <i>Shared Fate: A Theory of Adoption and Mental Health</i> , the first book to make adoption a serious issue in the sociological literature on family life and mental health.  |

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <b>1965</b> | The Los Angeles County Bureau of Adoptions launched the first organized program of <b>single parent adoptions</b> in order to locate homes for hard-to-place children with <b>special needs</b> .   |
| <b>1966</b> | The National Adoption Resource Exchange, later renamed the Adoption Resource Exchange of North America (ARENA), was established as an outgrowth of the <b>Indian Adoption Project</b> .   |
| <b>1969</b> | President Nixon created the Office of Child Development in HEW to coordinate and administer Head Start and <b>U.S. Children's Bureau</b> functions.   |
| <b>1970</b> | Adoptions reached their century-long <b>statistical</b> peak at approximately 175,000 per year. Almost 80 percent of the total were arranged by agencies.   |
| <b>1971</b> | Florence Fisher founded the Adoptees Liberty Movement Association "to abolish the existing practice of <b>sealed records</b> " and advocate for "opening of records to any adopted person over eighteen who wants, for any reason, to see them."  |
| <b>1972</b> | <b>National Association of Black Social Workers</b> opposed <b>transracial adoptions</b> ; <i>Stanley v. Illinois</i> substantially increased the rights of unwed fathers in adoption by requiring informed consent and proof of parental unfitness prior to termination of parental rights.  |
| <b>1973</b> | <i>Roe v. Wade</i> legalized abortion; <i>Beyond the Best Interests of the Child</i> articulated the influential concept of "psychological parent," which prioritized continuity of nurture and speedy and permanent decisions in legal proceedings related to child placement and adoption.  |
| <b>1976</b> | <b>Concerned United Birthparents</b> founded  |
| <b>1978</b> | <b>Indian Child Welfare Act</b> passed by Congress; American Adoption Congress founded  |
| <b>1980</b> | <b>Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act</b> offered significant funding to states that supported subsidy programs for <b>special needs adoptions</b> and devoted resources to family preservation, reunification, and the prevention of abuse, neglect, and child removal.   |
| <b>1989</b> | <b>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child</b>   |
| <b>1993</b> | <b>Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect to Intercountry Adoption</b>  |
| <b>1994</b> | Multiethnic Placement Act was the first federal law to concern itself with race in adoption. It prohibited agencies receiving federal funds from denying <b>transracial adoptions</b> on the sole basis of race, but permitted the use of race as one factor, among others, in foster and adoptive placements. A 1996 revision to this law, the Inter-Ethnic Adoption Amendment, made it impermissible to employ race at all. |
| <b>1996</b> | <b>Bastard Nation</b> founded. Its <b>mission statement</b> promoted "the full human and civil rights of adult adoptees," including access to <b>sealed records</b> .   |
| <b>1997</b> | Adoption and Safe Families Act stressed permanency planning for children and represented a policy shift away from family reunification and toward adoption.   |
| <b>1998</b> | Oregon voters passed <b>Ballot Measure 58</b> , allowing adult adoptees access to original birth certificates. This legal blow to <b>confidentiality and sealed records</b> was stalled by legal challenges to the measure's constitutionality, which eventually failed. The measure has been in effect in Oregon since June 2000.  |
| <b>2000</b> | The <b>Child Citizenship Act of 2000</b> allowed foreign-born adoptees to become automatic American citizens when they entered the United States, eliminating the legal burden of naturalization for <b>international adoptions</b> ; <b>Census 2000</b> included "adopted son/daughter" as a kinship category for the first time in U.S. history.  |

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## People & Organizations

| People   | Organizations  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Viola Wertheim Bernard</b> / Social Psychiatrist</li> <li>■ <b>Charles Loring Brace</b> / Nineteenth-Century Child-Saver</li> <li>■ <b>Pearl S. Buck</b> / Novelist and Humanitarian</li> <li>■ <b>Anna Freud</b> / Child Analyst</li> <li>■ <b>Sigmund Freud</b> / Architect of Psychoanalysis</li> <li>■ <b>Arnold Gesell</b> / Developmental Psychologist</li> <li>■ <b>Bertha and Harry Holt</b> / Pioneers of International Adoption</li> <li>■ <b>Justine Wise Polier</b> / Judge and Child Welfare Advocate</li> <li>■ <b>Jessie Taft</b> / Social Work Leader</li> <li>■ <b>Sophie van Senden Theis</b> / America's First Adoption Professional</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Bastard Nation</b> / Militant Defender of Adoptee Rights</li> <li>■ <b>Child Welfare League of America</b> / Federation of Private and Public Agencies Serving Children</li> <li>■ <b>Concerned United Birthparents</b> / Support and Advocacy on Behalf of Family Preservation</li> <li>■ <b>U.S. Children's Bureau</b> / Federal Child Welfare Agency</li> </ul> |

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



- [Timeline](#)
- [People & Organizations](#)
- [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)
- [Topics in Adoption History](#)
- [Further Reading](#)
- [Document Archives](#)
- [Site Index](#)

## Adoption Studies/Adoption Science

During the twentieth century, child adoption was reimagined in scientific terms, as a social experiment and human laboratory that could produce knowledge as well as help children. Researchers were persuaded that adoption could answer basic scientific questions about development, nature and nurture, and family norms. Professionals and parents were persuaded that scientific research would improve family-making by minimizing risks and maximizing safety. Adoption has been the subject of four major types of empirical research: [field studies](#), [outcome studies](#), [nature-nurture studies](#), and [psychopathology studies](#). Chronological lists of studies can be found by clicking on the preceding links. Descriptions of particular studies, and excerpts from them, can be found by using the links in the table below.



[Further reading about Adoption Studies and Adoption Science](#)

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
|                        |   |
| <b>Field Studies</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <a href="#">Ida Parker, <i>Fit and Proper?</i>, 1927</a></li> <li>■ <a href="#">Helen Lucile Pearson, "Child Adoption in Indiana," 1925</a></li> </ul>   |
| <b>Outcome Studies</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <a href="#">Catherine S. Amatruda and Joseph V. Baldwin, "Current Adoption Practices," 1951</a></li> <li>■ <a href="#">David Fanshel, <i>Far from the Reservation</i>, 1972</a></li> <li>■ <a href="#">Benson Jaffee and David Fanshel, <i>How They Fared in Adoption</i>, 1970</a></li> <li>■ <a href="#">Ruth W. Lawton and J. Prentice Murphy, "A Study of Results of a Child-Placing Society," 1915</a></li> <li>■ <a href="#">Sophie van Senden Theis, <i>How Foster Children Turn Out</i>, 1924</a></li> </ul> |

|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
|                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Margaret A. Valk, "Adjustment of Korean-American Children in Their American Adoptive Homes," 1957</li><li>■ Helen Witmer et al, <i>Independent Adoptions: A Follow-up Study</i>, 1963</li></ul> |
| <b>Nature-Nurture Studies</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Margaret Cobb, "The Mentality of Dependent Children," 1922</li></ul>  |
| <b>Psychopathology Studies</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Harry F. Harlow, Monkey Love Experiments</li><li>■ Marshall D. Schechter, "Observations on Adopted Children," 1960</li></ul>  |
|                                |   |

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Topics in Adoption History

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ <b>Adoption History in Brief</b></li><li>■ Adoption Narratives</li><li>■ Adoption Statistics</li><li>■ African-American Adoptions</li><li>■ Baby Farming</li><li>■ Birth Parents</li><li>■ Child Welfare</li><li>■ Confidentiality and Sealed Records</li><li>■ Eugenics</li><li>■ <i>The Family Nobody Wanted, 1954</i></li><li>■ "Feeble-Minded" Children</li><li>■ Field Studies</li><li>■ First Specialized Adoption Agencies</li><li>■ Fostering and Foster Care</li><li>■ Home Studies</li><li>■ Illegitimacy</li><li>■ Indian Adoption Project</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)</li><li>■ Infertility</li><li>■ International Adoptions</li><li>■ Matching</li><li>■ Minimum Standards</li><li>■ Nature-Nurture Studies</li><li>■ Orphan Trains</li><li>■ Outcome Studies</li><li>■ Placing-Out</li><li>■ Proxy Adoptions</li><li>■ Psychopathology Studies</li><li>■ Search and Reunion</li><li>■ <i>Shared Fate: A Theory of Adoption and Mental Health, 1964</i></li><li>■ Single Parent Adoptions</li><li>■ Social Work</li><li>■ Special Needs Adoptions</li><li>■ Telling</li><li>■ Transracial Adoptions</li></ul> |
|---|---|

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Further Reading

[A-B](#) | [C-E](#) | [F-I](#) | [J-N](#) | [O-R](#) | [S-T](#) | [U-Z](#)

I have selected a few additional primary and secondary sources to encourage further reading about the people and subjects explored on this site. Because a great deal has been written recently about adoption by legal scholars, policy analysts, social scientists, adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents, I have listed sources that are especially useful in thinking about adoption historically that may not appear in many excellent bibliographies emphasizing only the recent past.

[A-B](#)

### Adoption History, General Sources

Lori Askeland, ed., *Children and Youth in Adoption, Orphanages, and Foster Care: A Historical Handbook and Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006).

Julie Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own: Adoption and the Changing Culture of Motherhood, 1851-1950* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

Naomi Cahn and Joan Heifetz Hollinger, eds., *Families by Law: An Adoption Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

E. Wayne Carp, ed., *Adoption in America: Historical Perspectives* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

E. Wayne Carp, *Family Matters: Secrecy and Disclosure in the History of Adoption* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

Barbara Melosh, *Strangers and Kin: The American Way of Adoption* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

Kathy Shepherd Stolley and Vern L. Bullough, eds. *The Praeger Handbook of Adoption*, 2 vols. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006).

Veronica Strong-Boag, *Finding Families, Finding Ourselves: English Canada Encounters Adoption from the Nineteenth Century to the 1990s* (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), chap. 6.

### Adoption Narratives

Barbara Melosh, "Adoption Stories: Autobiographical Narrative and the Politics of Identity," in *Adoption in America: Historical Perspectives*, ed. E. Wayne Carp (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 218-245.

Susan G. Miles, *Adoption Literature for Children and Young Adults: An Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991).

Claudia Nelson, *Little Strangers: Portrayals of Adoption and Foster Care in America, 1850-1929* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

Marianne Novy, ed., *Imagining Adoption: Essays on Literature and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

Marianne Novy, *Reading Adoption: Family and Difference in Fiction and Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

Susan Wadia-Ells, ed., *The Adoption Reader: Birth Mothers, Adoptive Mothers and Adopted Daughters Tell Their Stories* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1995).

### **Adoption Statistics**

Anjani Chandra et al., "Adoption, Adoption Seeking, and Relinquishment for Adoption in the United States," *Advance Data from Vital and Health Statistics of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Center for Health Statistics*, no. 306 (May 11, 1999).

Victor E. Flango and Mary M. Caskey, "Adoptions, 2000-2001," *Adoption Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (2005):23-43.

Kathy S. Stolley, "Statistics on Adoption in the United States," *The Future of Children* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1993):26-42.

### **Adoption Studies/Adoption Science**

Bernadine Barr, "Spare Children, 1900-1945: Inmates of Orphanages as Subjects of Research in Medicine and in the Social Sciences in America" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1992).

John Bowlby, *Maternal Care and Mental Health: A report prepared on behalf of the World Health Organization as a contribution to the United Nations programme for the welfare of homeless children* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1952).

Hamilton Cravens, *Before Head Start: The Iowa Station and America's Children* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

Diane Eyer, *Mother-Infant Bonding: A Scientific Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

Julia Grant, *Raising Baby by the Book: The Education of American Mothers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

Harry F. Harlow, "Love in Infant Monkeys," *Scientific American* 200, no. 6 (June 1959):68-74.

Leon J. Kamin, "Studies of Adopted Children," in *The Science and Politics of I.Q.* (Potomac, MD: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1974), 111-134.

David M. Levy, "Primary Affect Hunger," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 94 (November 1937):643-652.

Alice Boardman Smuts, *Science in the Service of Children, 1893-1935* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

René A. Spitz, "Hospitalism: An Inquiry into the Genesis of Psychiatric Conditions in Early Childhood,"

*Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 1 (1945):53-74.

### **African-American Adoptions**

Andrew Billingsley and Jeanne M. Giovannoni, *Children of the Storm: Black Children and American Child Welfare* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972).

Child Welfare League of America, "Child Care Facilities for Dependent and Neglected Negro Children in Three Cities: New York City, Philadelphia, Cleveland" (New York: Child Welfare League of America, March 1945).

David Fanshel, *A Study in Negro Adoption* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1957).

Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997).

Dorothy Roberts, *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

Carol B. Stack, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1974).

### **Baby Farming**

Sherri Broder, *Tramps, Unfit Mothers, and Neglected Children: Negotiating the Family in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

George Walker, *The Traffic in Babies: An Analysis of the Conditions Discovered During an Investigation Conducted in the Year 1914* (Baltimore: The Norman, Remington Co., 1918).

Viviana A. Zelizer, "From Baby Farms to Baby M," *Society* 25 (March/April 1988):23-28.

### **Bastard Nation**

E. Wayne Carp, *Adoption Politics: Bastard Nation & Ballot Initiative 58* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

### **Viola Wertheim Bernard**

Viola W. Bernard, "Adoption," in *The Encyclopedia of Mental Health*, vol. 1, ed. Albert Deutsch (Franklin Watts, Inc., New York, 1963), 70-108.

Viola W. Bernard, "Adoption," in *American Handbook of Psychiatry*, vol. 1, ed. Silvano Arieti (Basic Books, New York, 1974), 513-534.

Viola W. Bernard, "First Sight of the Child by Prospective Parents as a Crucial Phase in Adoption," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 15 (April 1945):230-237.

Viola W. Bernard, "Psychiatric Consultation With Special Reference to Adoption Practice," *Casework Papers* (1954):70-83.

Nicholas P. Christy, "Viola Wertheim Bernard 1907-1998," *P & S (magazine of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University)* (Spring 2000):4-5.

### **Birth Parents**

E. Wayne Carp, "Professional Social Workers, Adoption, and the Problem of Illegitimacy, 1915-1945," *Journal of Policy History* 6 (1994):161-184.

Ann Fessler, *The Girls Who Went Away: The Hidden History of Women Who Surrendered Children for Adoption in*

*the Decades before Roe V. Wade* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

Merry Bloch Jones, *Birthmothers: Women Who Relinquish Babies for Adoption Tell Their Stories* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1993).

Marion E. Kenworthy, "The Mental Hygiene Aspects of Illegitimacy," *Mental Hygiene* 5, no. 3 (July 1921):499-508.

Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Rose V. Wade* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

Leontine Young, *Out of Wedlock: A Study of the Problems of the Unmarried Mother and Her Child* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1954).

### **Charles Loring Brace**

Bruce Bellingham, "Waifs and Strays: Child Abandonment, Foster Care, and Families in Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York," in *The Uses of Charity: The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis*, ed. Peter Mandler (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 123-160.

Clay Gish, "Rescuing the 'Waifs and Strays' of the City: The Western Emigration Program of the Children's Aid Society," *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 1 (Fall 1999):121-141.

Stephen O'Connor, *Orphan Trains: The Story of Charles Loring Brace and the Children He Saved and Failed* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

### **Pearl S. Buck**

Pearl S. Buck, *Children for Adoption* (New York: Random House, 1964).

Pearl S. Buck, *My Several Worlds* (New York: John Day Company, 1954).

Pearl S. Buck, "Should White Parents Adopt Brown Babies?," *Ebony*, June 1958, 26-30.

Pearl S. Buck, "Welcome House," *Reader's Digest*, July 1958, 47-50.

Peter Conn, *Pearl S. Buck: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), chap. 4.

## **C-E**

### **Child Welfare**

LeRoy Ashby, *Endangered Children: Dependency, Neglect, and Abuse in American History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997).

Children's Defense Fund, *The State of America's Children Yearbook* (Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 2003).

Joseph Goldstein, Anna Freud, and Albert J. Solnit, *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child* (New York: Free Press, 1973).

Mary Ann Mason, *From Father's Property to Children's Rights: The History of Child Custody in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

Eve P. Smith and Lisa A. Merkel-Holguín, eds., *A History of Child Welfare* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1996).

### **Child Welfare League of America**

Child Welfare League of America, *Standards for Adoption Service* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1958).

Child Welfare League of America, *Standards of Excellence for Adoption Services*, revised ed. (Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America, 2000).

### **Concerned United Birthparents**

Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

Judith S. Modell, *Kinship With Strangers: Adoption and Interpretations of Kinship in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

Rickie Solinger, *Beggars and Choosers: How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion, and Welfare in the United States* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).

Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe V. Wade* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

### **Confidentiality and Sealed Records**

Janine M. Baer, *Growing in the Dark: Adoption Secrecy and Its Consequences* (Xlibris Corporation, 2004).

E. Wayne Carp, *Family Matters: Secrecy and Disclosure in the History of Adoption* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

Elizabeth J. Samuels, "The Idea of Adoption: An Inquiry Into the History of Adult Adoptee Access to Birth Records," *Rutgers Law Review* (Winter 2001): 367-436.

Arthur D. Sorosky, Annette Baran, and Reuben Pannor, *The Adoption Triangle: Sealed or Opened Records: How They Affect Adoptees, Birth Parents, and Adoptive Parents* (San Antonio: Corona Publishing, 1978).

Katarina Wegar, *Adoption, Identity and Kinship: The Debate over Sealed Birth Records* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

### **Eugenics**

Henry H. Goddard, "The Basis for State Policy," *Survey* 27 (March 2, 1912): 852-1856.

Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics From the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

Edward J. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

### **"Feeble-Minded" Children**

James W. Trent, *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

Leila Zenderland, *Measuring Minds: Henry Herbert Goddard and the Origins of American Intelligence Testing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

### **First Specialized Adoption Agencies**

A.S. Chapman, "Homes for Babies, Babies for Homes," *Hygiea*, December 1932, 1106-1109.

Neil M. Clark, "Filling Empty Arms," *American Magazine*, September 1930, 24-25, 82-90.

Laura Crozer, "Clearing House for Babies," *Illustrated World* 24, no. 6 (February 1916): 763-764.

Charles Gilmore Kerley, "The Adoption of Children," *Outlook* 112, no. 2 (January 12, 1916): 104-107.

Milton MacKaye, "The Cradle," *Saturday Evening Post*, April 9 1938, 12-13, 95-100.

Paula F. Pfeffer, "Homeless Children, Childless Homes," *Chicago History* 16 (Spring 1987): 51-65.

Peter Romanofsky, "Professional Versus Volunteers: A Case Study of Adoption Workers in the 1920's," *Journal of Voluntary Action Research* 2 (April 1973): 95-101.

### **Fostering and Foster Care**

Elizabeth Bartholet, *Nobody's Children: Abuse and Neglect, Foster Drift, and the Adoption Alternative* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999).

Nina Bernstein, *The Lost Children of Wilder: The Epic Struggle to Change Foster Care* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2001).

Dorothy Roberts, *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

Nanette Schorr, "Foster Care and the Politics of Compassion," in *Family Matters: Readings on Family Lives and the Law*, ed. Martha Minow (The New Press, New York, 1993), 117-124.

### **Anna Freud**

Anna Freud, *The Writings of Anna Freud* vols. 1-8 (New York: International Universities Press, 1967-1981).

Uwe Henrik Peters, *Anna Freud: A Life Dedicated to Children* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985).

Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Anna Freud: A Biography* (New York: Summit Books, 1988).

### **Sigmund Freud**

Mari Jo Buhle, *Feminism and Its Discontents: A Century of Struggle with Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, ed. James Strachey, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961).

Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, ed. James Strachey, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1964).

Nathan G. Hale, *Freud and the Americans: The Beginnings of Psychoanalysis in the United States, 1876-1917* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

Nathan G. Hale, Jr., *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in America: Freud and the Americans, 1917-1985* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

### **Arnold Gesell**

Arnold Gesell, *The Mental Growth of the Pre-School Child: A Psychological Outline of Normal Development from Birth to the Sixth Year, Including a System of Developmental Diagnosis* (New York: Macmillan, 1926).

Arnold Gesell in *A History of Psychology in Autobiography*, vol. 4, ed. Edwin G. Boring, et al. (Worcester, MA: Clark University Press, 1952), 123-142.

Arnold Gesell, *Infancy and Human Growth* (New York: Macmillan, 1928).

Arnold Gesell, "Reducing the Risks of Child Adoption," *Child Welfare League of America Bulletin* 6 (May 15, 1927): 1-2.

Benjamin Harris, "Arnold Lucius Gesell," in *American National Biography*, ed. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes (New York: Oxford University Press, under the auspices of the American Council of Learned Societies, 1999), 877-878.

Ellen Herman, "Families Made by Science: Arnold Gesell and the Technologies of Modern Child Adoption," *Isis* 92 (December 2001): 684-715.

Ann Hulbert, *Raising America: Experts, Parents, and a Century of Advice About Children* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), chap. 6.

### **Harry Harlow**

Deborah Blum, *Love at Goon Park: Harry Harlow and the Science of Affection* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2002).

Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), chap. 9.

Harry F. Harlow, "The Nature of Love," *American Psychologist* 13 (1958): 673-685.

Harry F. Harlow and Margaret Kuenne Harlow, "Social Deprivation in Monkeys," *Scientific American* 207 (November 1962): 136-146.

Harry F. Harlow and Robert R. Zimmermann, "Affectional Responses in the Infant Monkey," *Science* 130 (August 21, 1959): 421-432.

### **Home Studies**

Howard G. Aronson, "The Problem of Rejection of Adoptive Applicants," *Child Welfare* 39 (October 1960): 21-26.

Mary S. Doran and Bertha C. Reynolds, *The Selection of Foster Homes for Children: Principles and Methods Followed by the Boston Children's Aid Society With Illustrative Cases* (New York: School of Social Work, 1919).

Helen Fradkin, *The Adoption Home Study* (Trenton, NJ: Bureau of Children's Services, 1963).

Raymond Mondloh, "Changing Practice in the Adoption Home Study," *Child Welfare* 48 (March 1969):148-156.

Charlotte Towle, "The Evaluation of Homes in Preparation for Child Placement," *Mental Hygiene* 11 (July 1927):460-481.

### **Illegitimacy**

E. Wayne Carp, "Professional Social Workers, Adoption, and the Problem of Illegitimacy, 1915-1945," *Journal of Policy History* 6 (1994):161-184.

Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

Marion E. Kenworthy, "The Mental Hygiene Aspects of Illegitimacy," *Mental Hygiene* 5 (July 1921):499-508.

Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

Maud Morlock, "Wanted: A Square Deal for the Baby Born Out of Wedlock," *Child* 10 (May 1946):167-169.

U.S. Children's Bureau, *Children of Illegitimate Birth and Measures for Their Protection* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1926).

### **Indian Adoption Project and the Indian Child Welfare Act**

Sherman Alexie, *Indian Killer* (New York: Warner Books, 1996).

Robert Benson, ed., *Children of the Dragonfly: Native American Voices on Child Custody and Education* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001).

Joan Heifetz Hollinger, "Beyond the Best Interests of the Tribe: The Indian Child Welfare Act and the Adoption of Indian Children," *University of Detroit Law Review* 66 (1989):451-501.

Marilyn Irvin Holt, *Indian Orphanages* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

Sondra Jones, "'Redeeming' the Indian: The Enslavement of Indian Children in New Mexico and Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 67 (1999):220-241.

Barbara Kingsolver, *Pigs in Heaven* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993).

Arnold Lyslo, "Adoptive Placement of American Indian Children With Non-Indian Families," in *Readings in Adoption*, ed. I. Evelyn Smith (New York: Philosophical Library, 1963), 231-236.

Steven Unger, ed., *The Destruction of American Indian Families* (New York: Association on American Indian Affairs, 1977).

### **Infertility**

Jill Bialosky and Helen Schulman, eds., *Wanting a Child: Twenty-Two Writers on Their Difficult But Mostly Successful Quests for Parenthood in a High-Tech Age* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998).

Margaret Marsh and Wanda Ronner, *The Empty Cradle: Infertility in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

Arlene Skolnick, "Solomon's Children: The New Biologism, Psychological Parenthood, Attachment Theory, and the Best Interests Standard," in Mary Ann Mason, Arlene Skolnick, and Stephen D. Sugarman, eds., *All Our Families:*

*New Policies for a New Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 236-255.

Elaine Tyler May, *Barren in the Promised Land: Childless Americans and the Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

### **International Adoptions**

Howard Alstein and Rita Simon, *Intercountry Adoption: A Multinational Perspective* (New York: Praeger, 1990).

Elizabeth Bartholet, *Family Bonds: Adoption and the Politics of Parenting* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993).

Laura Briggs, "Mother, Child, Race, Nation: The Visual Iconography of Rescue and the Politics of Transnational and Transracial Adoption," *Gender & History* 15 (2003): 179-200.

Kirsten Lovelock, "Intercountry Adoption as a Migratory Practice: A Comparative Analysis of Intercountry Adoption and Immigration Policy and Practice in the United States, Canada and New Zealand in the Post WWII Period," *International Migration Review* 34, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 907-949.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes, "Theft of Life," *Society* 27, no. 6 (September/October 1990): 57-62.

Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinyere Oparah, and SunYung Shin, eds., *Outsiders Within: Racial Crossings and Adoption Politics* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006).

## **J-N**

### **H. David Kirk, author of *Shared Fate***

H. David Kirk, *Adoptive Kinship: A Modern Institution in Need of Reform* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1981).

H. David Kirk, *Looking Back, Looking Forward: An Adoptive Father's Sociological Testament* (Indianapolis, IN: Perspective Press, 1995).

B.J. Tansey, ed., *Exploring Adoptive Family Life: The Collected Adoption Papers of H. David Kirk* (Port Angeles, Washington: Ben-Simon Publications, 1988).

### **Matching**

Nina Bernstein, *The Lost Children of Wilder: The Epic Struggle to Change Foster Care* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2001).

Ellen Herman, "The Difference Difference Makes: Justine Wise Polier and Religious Matching in Twentieth-Century Child Adoption," *Religion and American Culture* 10 (Winter 2000): 57-98.

Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Judith Modell and Naomi Dambacher, "Making a 'Real' Family: Matching and Cultural Biologism in American Adoption," *Adoption Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1997): 3-33.

### **Minimum Standards**

Ellen Herman, "The Paradoxical Rationalization of Modern Adoption," *Journal of Social History* 36 (Winter 2002): 339-385.

Mazie Hough, "'To Conserve the Best of the Old': The Impact of Professionalization on Adoption in Maine," *Maine History* 40 (Fall 2001): 190-218.

Alexandra Minna Stern and Howard Markel, eds., *Formative Years: Children's Health in the United States, 1880-*

2000 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

U.S. Children's Bureau, *Standards of Child Welfare: A Report of the Children's Bureau Conferences, U.S. Children's Bureau Conference Series No. 1*, Bureau Publication No. 60 (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1919).

U.S. Children's Bureau, *Minimum Standards for Child Welfare: Adopted by the Washington and Regional Conferences on Child Welfare, 1919*, Conference Series No. 2, Bureau Publication No. 62 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1919).

## O-R

### Orphan Trains

Bruce Bellingham, "Waifs and Strays: Child Abandonment, Foster Care, and Families in Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York," in *The Uses of Charity: The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis*, ed. Peter Mandler (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 123-160.

Annette Riley Fry, "The Children's Migration," *American Heritage* (1974): 4-10, 79-81.

Marilyn Irvin Holt, *The Orphan Trains: Placing Out in America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

Stephen O'Connor, *Orphan Trains: The Story of Charles Loring Brace and the Children He Saved and Failed* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

### Placing-Out

Kenneth Cmiel, *A Home of Another Kind: One Chicago Orphanage and the Tangle of Child Welfare* (Chicago, 1995)

Matthew A. Crenson, *Building the Invisible Orphanage: The Prehistory of the American Welfare System* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

Tim Hacsí, "From Indenture to Family Foster Care: A Brief History of Child Placing," in *A History of Child Welfare*, ed. Eve P. Smith and Lisa A. Merkel-Holguín (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1996), 155-173.

U.S. Children's Bureau, *The Work of Child-Placing Agencies*, Part I. A Special Study of Ten Agencies Caring for Dependent Children by Catharine P. Hewins and L. Josephine Webster; Part II. Health Supervision of Children Placed in Foster Homes by Mary L. Evans, Bureau Publication No. 171 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1927).

### Justine Wise Polier

Joyce Antler, *The Journey Home: Jewish Women and the American Century* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), chap. 6.

Ellen Herman, "The Difference Difference Makes: Justine Wise Polier and Religious Matching in Twentieth-Century Child Adoption," *Religion and American Culture* 10 (Winter 2000): 57-98.

Rachel Nash, "Justine Wise Polier: The Conscience of the Juvenile Court" (senior honors thesis, Harvard College, 1998).

Justine Wise Polier, "Adoption and Law," *Pediatrics* 20 (August 1957): 372-377.

Justine Wise Polier, *Juvenile Justice in Double Jeopardy: The Distanced Community and Vengeful Retribution* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1989).

Justine Wise Polier, "Religion and Child-Care Services," *Social Service Review* 30 (June 1956): 132-135.

## S-T

### Search and Reunion

Florence Fisher, *The Search for Anna Fisher* (New York: Arthur Fields Books, 1973).

Joyce Maguire Pavao, *The Family of Adoption* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998).

Arthur D. Sorosky, Annette Baran, and Reuben Pannor, *The Adoption Triangle: Sealed or Opened Records: How They Affect Adoptees, Birth Parents, and Adoptive Parents* (San Antonio: Corona Publishing, 1978).

### Single Parent Adoptions

Juliet Horne, "Single Adopters in the U.S.," *Adoption & Fostering* 8 (1984): 40-41.

Robert Klose, *Adopting Alyosha: A Single Man Finds a Son in Russia* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1998).

Hope Marindin, *The Handbook for Single Adoptive Parents*, rev. ed. (Chevy Chase, MD: Committee for Single Adoptive Parents, 1997).

Jane Mattes, *Single Mothers by Choice: A Guidebook for Single Women Who Are Considering or Have Chosen Motherhood* (New York: Times Books, 1994).

Naomi Miller, *Single Parents by Choice: A Growing Trend in Family Life* (New York: Insight Books, 1992).

Loretta Renn, "The Single Woman as Foster Mother," in *Studies of Children*, ed. Gladys Meyer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), 59-95.

"Should a single person adopt a child? *Good Housekeeping* 169 (August 1969): 12, 14, 16.

### Social Work

John H. Ehrenreich, *The Altruistic Imagination: A History of Social Work and Social Policy in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

Miriam Van Waters, "The New Morality and the Social Worker," *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work* (Chicago, 1929), 65-79.

Daniel Walkowitz, *Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

### Special Needs Adoptions

Florence G. Brown, "Adoption of Children With Special Needs" (New York: Child Welfare League of America, March 1958).

Alfred Kadushin, "A Study of Adoptive Parents of Hard-to-Place Children," *Social Casework* 43 (May 1962): 227-233.

Michael Schapiro, *A Study of Adoption Practice*, Volume III: Adoption of Children With Special Needs (New York:

Child Welfare League of America, 1956).

### **Jessie Taft**

James Livingston, *Pragmatism, Feminism and Democracy: Rethinking the Politics of American History* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 66-76.

Virginia P. Robinson, ed., *Jessie Taft: Therapist and Social Work Educator, A Professional Biography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962).

Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), chap 5.

Charlene Haddock Seigfried, "Introduction to Jessie Taft, 'The Woman Movement from the Point of View of Social Consciousness'," *Hypatia* 8, no. 2 (Spring 1993):215-218.

Jessie Taft, "The Need for Psychological Interpretation in the Placement of Dependent Children," *Child Welfare League of America Bulletin* No. 6 (April 1922).

Jessie Taft, "A Changing Psychology in Child Welfare," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 151 (September 1930):121-129.

Jessie Taft, ed., *The Role of the Baby in the Placement Process* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania School of Social Work, 1946).

Jessie Taft, ed., *Social Case Work With Children: Studies in Structure and Process* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania School of Social Work, 1940).

### **Sophie van Senden Theis**

Frances Lockridge and Sophie van S. Theis, *Adopting a Child* (New York: Greenberg, 1947).

Sophie van S. Theis, "The Passing of the Orphanage," *New York Times Magazine*, January 18 1953, 16.

Sophie van S. Theis, "Some Aspects of Good Adoptive Practices," *Child Welfare* 19 (November 1940):1-3.

### **Transracial Adoptions**

David C. Anderson, *Children of Special Value: Interracial Adoption in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971).

Elizabeth Bartholet, "Where Do Black Children Belong? The Politics of Race Matching in Adoption," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 139 (1991):1163-1256.

J. Douglas Bates, *Gift Children: A Story of Race, Family, and Adoption in a Divided America* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1993).

Laura Briggs, "Mother, Child, Race, Nation: The Visual Iconography of Rescue and the Politics of Transnational and Transracial Adoption," *Gender & History* 15 (2003):179-200.

Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Quarry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

Hawley Fogg-Davis, *The Ethics of Transracial Adoption* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

Lucille J. Grow and Deborah Shapiro, *Black Children—White Parents: A Study of Transracial Adoption* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1974).

Joan Heifetz Hollinger, *A Guide to the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 as Amended by the Interethnic Adoption Provisions of 1996* (Washington, DC: ABA Center on Children and the Law, 1998).

Ruth-Arlene W. Howe, "Transracial Adoption (TRA): Old Prejudices and Discrimination Float Under a New Halo," *Boston University Public Interest Law Journal* 6 (Winter 1997): 409-472.

Randall Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003), chaps. 9-12.

Joyce A Ladner, *Mixed Families: Adopting Across Racial Boundaries* (Garden City: Anchor Press, Doubleday, 1977).

John Neufeld, *Edgar Allan* (New York: S.G. Phillips, 1968).

Joe Rigert, *All Together: An Unusual American Family* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

Barbara Katz Rothman, *Weaving a Family: Untangling Race and Adoption* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).

Rita James Simon and Howard Alstein, *Transracial Adoption* (New York: Wiley, 1977).

Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinyere Oparah, and SunYung Shin, eds., *Outsiders Within: Racial Crossings and Adoption Politics* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006).

## U-Z

### U.S. Children's Bureau

Kriste Lindenmeyer, *"A Right to Childhood": The U.S. Children's Bureau and Child Welfare, 1912-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

Molly Ladd-Taylor, ed., *Raising a Baby the Government Way: Mothers' Letters to the Children's Bureau, 1915-1932* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986).

Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

U.S. Children's Bureau, *Foster-Home Care for Dependent Children*, Bureau Publication No. 136 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1926).

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman

# The Adoption History Project


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Document Archives

[A-C](#) | [D-F](#) | [G-I](#) | [J-L](#) | [M-P](#) | [Q-R](#) | [S-T](#) | [U-Z](#)

Sources are the raw materials that historians use to write history. This site offers a range of primary sources—published and unpublished documents as well as images—that begin to fill in the picture of adoption's past, illuminating topics, people, organizations, and studies that shaped adoption theory and practice during the twentieth century. Visitors interested in the location of unpublished sources can find these in a list of [archival sources](#).

Individual documents are listed alphabetically by author below. In a few cases, they are listed by title. They can all be reached through other sections of the site, but they are also presented together here for those with a special interest in the documentary record itself. A selection of additional sources—not excerpted on the site itself—can be found in [Further Reading](#).

### A-C

[Adopt-A-Child, Confidential Report, December 19, 1955](#)

[Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980](#)

[An Agency Considers Its Policies on Infertility, 1943](#)

[Agency for International Development, Operation Babylift Report, 1975](#)

[Agency Philosophy and Policy Regarding the "Telling" of Adoption, 1966](#)

[ALMA et al v. Lefkowitz et al, 1977](#)

[Catherine S. Amatruda and Joseph V. Baldwin, "Current Adoption Practices," 1951](#)

[Carole J. Anderson, "Child Abuse & Adoption," 1991](#)

[Anonymous, "An Adopted Mother Speaks," 1922](#)

[Anonymous, "How It Feels to Have Been an Adopted Child," 1920](#)

[Bernadine Barr, "Estimates of Numbers of Children in Institutions, Foster Family Care, and Adoptive Homes, 1910-1960"](#)

[Bastard Nation, Mission Statement, 1996](#)

[Bastard Nation, "Open Records: Why It's an Issue," 1999](#)

Bastard Nation, "Why It's Great to Be a Bastard"

E. L. Beckwith to Grace Abbott, June 21, 1931

Viola W. Bernard, "Adoption as a Model for Community/Social Child Psychiatry," 1998

Viola W. Bernard, "Application of Psychoanalytic Concepts to Adoption Agency Practice," 1953

Viola W. Bernard, Can an Adopted Child Replace a Dead Child? 1961

Viola W. Bernard, A Probable Case of Psychogenic Infertility, 1942

Viola W. Bernard, Review of a Manuscript About the Incidence of Psychiatric Problems in Adoptees, 1986

Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York & Twenty Years' Work Among Them*, 1872

Ethel E. Branham, The Los Angeles County Bureau of Adoptions Reflects on Its Transracial Adoption Program, 1964

Ethel Branham, "One Parent Adoptions," 1970

Charles E. Brown, "Agency Seeks Homes for Negro Kids, Single Persons May Adopt," 1966

Pearl Buck, "The Children Waiting: The Shocking Scandal of Adoption," 1955

Pearl Buck, "I Am the Better Woman for Having My Two Black Children," 1972

Edmond J. Butler, "Standards of Child Placing and Supervision," 1919

Miss Elizabeth Campbell to Bessie Irvin, April 4, 1956

The Case of Alice R., 1927

The Case of Michael B, 1965

The Case of Miss M, 1944-1945

Henry Dwight Chapin, "Family vs. Institution," 1926

Child Citizenship Act of 2000

Child Welfare League of America, "Adoptions: A Statement of the Problem," 1937

Child Welfare League of America, "Adoption Terminology," 1980s

Child Welfare League of America, Constitution, 1921

Child Welfare League of America, "Definition of Child Welfare," 1957

Child Welfare League of America Memo, "Description of Children Who Were Referred For Adoptive Placement and Considered Difficult to Place," 1955

Child Welfare League of America, "Minimum Safeguards in Adoption," 1938

Child Welfare League of America, "Proposal for Analysis of the Sealed Adoption Record Issue," 1973

Child Welfare League of America, Rating Sheet for Prospective Parents, 1962

Child Welfare League of America Special Bulletin, "A Study of Board Rates," January 1942

Child Welfare League of America, *Standards for Adoption Service*, 1958

Child Welfare League of America, *Standards for Foster Family Care Service*, 1959

Children's Home Society of Florida, Home Investigation Report Form, 1910s

"Children's Story Needs an Ending . . . Adoption Could Make It So!" 1956

Florence Clothier, "The Psychology of the Adopted Child," 1943

Florence Clothier to Mary Ruth Colby on "Permanent Love Objects," January 14, 1941

Margaret Cobb, "The Mentality of Dependent Children," 1922

Concerned United Birthparents, "Separated By Adoption? What Is CUB?"

Confidential Medical Report on Fertility Status of Prospective Adoptive Couple, early 1940s

Reverend S.S. Cummings, New England Home for Little Wanderers' Orphan Train

## D-F

Neva R. Deardorff, The Children's Commission of Pennsylvania Studies Adoption, 1925

Department of Defense Position Regarding Children Born Out of Wedlock, 1971

Helene Deutsch, "Adoptive Mothers," 1945

Discussion of the Role of Anthropology in Transracial Adoptions, 1956

Kathleen d'Olier, "Case Work with the Unmarried Father," 1937

Annie Hamilton Donnell, "The Adopted," 1906

Helen Doss, *The Family Nobody Wanted*, 1954

Helen Doss, "Our International Family," 1949

Gloria Emerson, "Operation Babylift," 1975

David Fanshel, *Far From the Reservation*, 1972

Marshall Field, Child Welfare League of America President, Address to National Conference on Adoptions, 1955

Clarence Fischer, "Homes For Black Children," 1970

Abraham Flexner, "Is Social Work a Profession?" 1915

Earnest Fowler to Mrs. Squires, Washington City Orphan Asylum, November 1, 1910

Helen Fradkin, "Outline for Adoption Studies," 1954

Richard Frank, "What the Adoption Worker Should Know About Infertility," 1956

Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham, *Infants Without Families*, 1944

Sigmund Freud, "Family Romances," 1909

Harriet Fricke, "Interracial Adoption: The Little Revolution," 1965

## G-I

---

Arnold Gesell, "Child Adoptions in Connecticut," 1939

Arnold Gesell, "Pre-School Children Deprived of Parental Care," 1923

Arnold Gesell, "Psychoclinical Guidance in Child Adoption," 1926

Henry H. Goddard, "Wanted: A Child to Adopt," 1911

*Petition of Goldman*, 1954

Joseph Goldstein, Anna Freud, and Albert J. Solnit, *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child*, 1973

Arthur Alden Guild, "Baby Farms in Chicago," 1917

Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, 1993

Agnes K. Hanna, "The Interrelationship Between Illegitimacy and Adoption," 1937

Frederick Hanson and John Rock, "The Effect of Adoption on Fertility and Other Reproductive Functions," 1950

Harry F. Harlow, "Love in Infant Monkeys," 1959

Reverend Hastings H. Hart, "Placing Out Children in the West," 1884

Rollin Hartt to Helen Sumner, May 10, 1915

Harry Holt's 'Dear Friends' letter, 1955

Mrs. Harry Holt, *The Seed from the East*, 1956

"Homes Needed For 10,000 Brown Orphans," 1948

How Do Adult Adoptees Feel About Illegitimacy? 1968

How Should Agencies Handle the Rejection of Adoption Applicants? 1950

Dorothy Hutchinson, "Factors to Consider in Family Study," late 1940s

Indian Adoption Project Evaluation, 1958 through 1967

Indian Child Welfare Act, 1978

International Social Service Memo, "Home Study Material for Intercountry Adoption Applications," 1957

International Social Service Memo, "Telephone Calls Concerning Adoption," 1957

International Social Service, "Proxy Adoptions," 1954-1956

Rael Jean Isaac, "What the Agency Looks For," 1965

---

**J-L**

Benson Jaffee and David Fanshel, *How They Fared in Adoption*, 1970

Ann Johnston, "Our Negro Daughter," 1960

Alfred Kadushin, "Single-Parent Adoptions: An Overview and Some Relevant Research" 1970

Randall Kennedy, "Orphans of Separatism: The Painful Politics of Transracial Adoption," 1994

H. David Kirk, *Shared Fate: A Theory of Adoption and Mental Health*, 1964

Joan Lawrence, "The Truth Hurt Our Adopted Daughter," 1963

Ruth W. Lawton and J. Prentice Murphy, "A Study of Results of a Child-Placing Society," 1915

Elizabeth A. Lee to Katharine F. Lenroot, August 6, 1931

Katharine F. Lenroot, "Case Work with Unmarried Parents and Their Children," 1925

Katharine F. Lenroot to Eleanor Roosevelt on The Cradle, March 4, 1944

Letters from Adults and Children to the U.S. Children's Bureau, 1918-1943

Letters from Prospective Adopters to Arnold Gesell, 1939-1950

Louise Wise Services, Different Eligibility Requirements for Different Children, 1961

Louise Wise Services, "Our Indian Program," 1960

Louise Wise Services, Placement Contract, early 1960s

Louise Wise Services, Press Release Announcing Recruitment of White Parents for Black Children, 1963

Louise Wise Services, Sealed Records in Adoption, 1975

Charlotte Lowe, "Intelligence and Social Background of the Unmarried Mother," 1927

Arnold Lyslo, "Impressions on Meeting the Harry Holt Plane," 1958

Arnold Lyslo, "Suggested Criteria to Evaluate Families to Adopt American Indian Children Through the Indian Adoption Project," 1962

## M-P

Massachusetts Adoption of Children Act, 1851

Penelope L. Maza, "Adoption Trends: 1944-1975"

Muriel McCrea, "The Mix-Match Controversy," 1967

Lewis Meriam to Hastings Hart, July 28, 1915

Minnesota Adoption Law, 1917

Maud Morlock, "Determination and Establishment of Paternity," 1940

National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, "The Adoption Home Study Process," 2004

National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, "Single Parent Adoption: What You Need to Know" (1994)

National Association of Black Social Workers, "Position Statement on Trans-Racial Adoption," September 1972

National Committee for Adoption, "About Adoption and Privacy of Records," 1982

National Council for Adoption, "Protecting the Option of Privacy in Adoption"

Navajo Tribal Council, "Tribal Policy on Adoption of Navajo Orphans and Abandoned or Neglected Children," 1960

Peter B. Neubauer, "The One-Parent Child and His Oedipal Development," 1960

New York Coalition for Families, "*Beyond the Best Interests of the Child* Is Being Used to Legitimize the Destruction of Poor Black and Hispanic Families," mid-1970s

New York State Charities Aid Association, Records of Foster Home Investigations, 1910s

*New York Times* ad about "Operation Babylift," 1975

North American Center on Adoption, Position Papers—Search (Opening Sealed Records), 1975

Phan Ngoc-Quoi to Miriam Lewis, International Social Service Case Consultant, April 27, 1966

Opportunity, National Survey of Black Children Adopted in 1972

Oregon Ballot Measure 58, 1998

Ida Parker, *Fit and Proper?*, 1927

Jean M. Paton, *The Adopted Break Silence*, 1954

Jean M. Paton, *Orphan Voyage*, 1968

Helen Lucile Pearson, "Child Adoption in Indiana," 1925

Susan Pettiss to Rosalind Giles, February 8, 1957

Placing Children of Unknown Background and the Problem of Matching, 1951

Justine Wise Polier, "Attitudes and Contradictions in Our Culture," 1960

Justine Wise Polier, "A Memorandum Concerning Child Adoption Across Religions Lines," 1955

Justine Wise Polier to Riki Kosut, October 13, 1978

Paul Popenoe, "The Foster Child," 1929

Carol S. Prentice, *An Adopted Child Looks at Adoption*, 1940

*Purinton v. Jamrock*, 1907

## Q-R

The "R" Family Case (Catholic Charities), 1941

Sheldon Reed, Dight Institute for Human Genetics to R.T. Wilbur, Des Moines, Iowa Division of Child Welfare, November 26, 1957

Sheldon C. Reed, "Skin Color," 1955

Sheldon Reed and Esther B. Nordlie, "Genetic Counseling: For Children of Mixed Racial Ancestry," 1961

Joseph Reid to Paul Smith, September 15, 1955

Loretta Renn, "The Single Woman as a Foster Mother," 1948

Report on the First International Conference on Transracial Adoption, 1969

Chauncey Richardson to Washington City Orphan Asylum, March 12, 1912

Virginia Robinson, "Analysis of Processes in the Records of Family Case Working Agencies," 1921

**S-T**

Sample Letter to Families Applying for Infants Where the Woman is Over 40 Years of Age, early 1940s

Michael Schapiro, *A Study of Adoption Practice, Adoption of Children With Special Needs*, 1956

Marshall D. Schechter, "Observations on Adopted Children," 1960

Joan F. Shireman and Penny R. Johnson, "Single Persons as Adoptive Parents," 1976

Slingerland, *Child-Placing in Families*, 1919 [on "Feeble-Minded" Children]

Slingerland, *Child-Placing in Families*, 1919 [on Matching]

*Smith v. OFFER* (Organization of Foster Families for Equality and Reform), 1977

from the Archives of Spence-Chapin Adoption Service, 1916

Benjamin Spock, "Adopting a Child," 1946

*Stanley v. Illinois*, 1972

Statement on the Immorality of Bringing South Vietnamese Orphans to the United States, April 4, 1975

Albert H. Stoneman, "Adoption of Illegitimate Children: The Peril of Ignorance," 1926

Jessie Taft, Children's Aid Society of Pennsylvania, Annual Report, 1921

Jessie Taft, "Early Conditioning of Personality in the Pre-School Child," 1925

Jessie Taft, "The Re-Education of a Psychoneurotic Girl," 1925

Jessie Taft, "Relation of Personality Study to Child Placing," 1919

Jessie Taft, "The Woman Movement from the Point of View of Social Consciousness," 1916

Sophie van Senden Theis, *How Foster Children Turn Out*, 1924

Sophie van Senden Theis and Constance Goodrich, *The Child in the Foster Home*, 1921

Kitte Turmell, "How We Told Our Adopted Children," 1950

Two Adoption Home Studies, 1949 and 1950

**U-Z**

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989

U.S. Census Bureau, "Census 2000 Special Reports, Adopted Children and Stepchildren: 2000"

U.S. Children's Bureau, *Adoption Laws in the United States*, 1925

U.S. Children's Bureau, "The Confidential Nature of Birth Records," 1949

U.S. Children's Bureau Memo, "Investigation of Adoptions, etc." 1915

U. S. Children's Bureau, Memo About Conditions at a Baby Farm, 1918

U.S. Children's Bureau, Research on the Dangers of Illegitimacy, 1917

Margaret A. Valk, "Adjustment of Korean- American Children in Their American Adoptive Homes," 1957

Martha Vansant, "The Life of the Adopted Child," 1933

*Matter of Vardinakis*, 1936

Valentina P. Wasson, *The Chosen Baby*, 1939

Amey Eaton Watson, "The Illegitimate Family," 1918

White House Conference Subcommittee Discussion of "Adoption," 1959

Louise Waterman Wise, "Mothers in Name," 1920

Helen Witmer et al, *Independent Adoptions: A Follow-Up Study*, 1963

A World War II Soldier Seeks Information About His Background, 1943

Leontine Young, "Personality Patterns in Unmarried Mothers," 1945-1947

A Young Man in Search of His Parents, 1913

Joseph L. Zarefsky, "Children Acquire New Parents," 1946

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



- [Timeline](#)
- [People & Organizations](#)
- [Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
- [Topics in Adoption History](#)
- [Further Reading](#)
- [Document Archives](#)
- [Site Index](#)

## Site Index

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <p><b>The Adoption History Project</b></p>       | <p><a href="#">Home Page</a></p>   |  |
| <p><b>Timeline</b></p>                           | <p><a href="#">Timeline of Adoption History</a></p>  |  |
| <p><b>People &amp; Organizations</b></p>         | <p><a href="#">Bastard Nation</a></p> <p><a href="#">Viola Wertheim Bernard</a></p> <p><a href="#">Charles Loring Brace</a></p> <p><a href="#">Pearl S. Buck</a></p> <p><a href="#">Child Welfare League of America</a></p> <p><a href="#">Concerned United Birthparents</a></p> <p><a href="#">Anna Freud</a></p> <p><a href="#">Sigmund Freud</a></p> <p><a href="#">Arnold Gesell</a></p> <p><a href="#">Bertha and Harry Holt</a></p> <p><a href="#">Justine Wise Polier</a></p> <p><a href="#">Jessie Taft</a></p> <p><a href="#">Sophie van Senden Theis</a></p> <p><a href="#">U.S. Children's Bureau</a></p> |  |
| <p><b>Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science</b></p> | <p><b>Field Studies</b></p>  | <p><a href="#">Neva R. Deardorff, The Children's Commission of Pennsylvania Studies Adoption, 1925</a></p> <p><a href="#">Ida Parker, <i>Fit and Proper?</i> 1927</a></p> <p><a href="#">Helen Lucile Pearson, "Child Adoption in Indiana," 1925</a></p> |

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
|  | <p><b>Outcome Studies</b></p>  | <p>Catherine S. Amatruda and Joseph V. Baldwin, "Current Adoption Practices," 1951</p> <p>David Fanshel, <i>Far from the Reservation</i>, 1972</p> <p>Benson Jaffee and David Fanshel, <i>How They Fared in Adoption</i>, 1970</p> <p>Ruth W. Lawton and J. Prentice Murphy, "A Study of Results of a Child-Placing Society," 1915</p> <p>Sophie van Senden Theis, <i>How Foster Children Turn Out</i>, 1924</p> <p>Margaret A. Valk, "Adjustment of Korean-American Children in Their American Adoptive Homes," 1957</p> <p>Helen Witmer, et al, <i>Independent Adoptions: A Follow-Up Study</i>, 1963</p> |
|  | <p><b>Nature/Nurture Studies</b></p>   | <p>Margaret Cobb, "The Mentality of Dependent Children," 1922</p>   |
|  | <p><b>Psychopathology Studies</b></p>  | <p>Harry F. Harlow, Monkey Love Experiments</p> <p>Marshall D. Schechter, "Observations on Adopted Children," 1960</p>  |
| <p><b>Topics in Adoption History</b></p> | <p>Adoption History in Brief</p> <p>Adoption Narratives</p> <p>Adoption Statistics</p> <p>African-American Adoptions</p> <p>Baby Farming</p> <p>Birth Parents</p> <p>Child Welfare</p> <p>Confidentiality and Sealed Records</p> <p>Eugenics</p> <p><i>The Family Nobody Wanted</i>, 1954</p> <p>"Feeble-Minded" Children</p> <p>Field Studies</p> <p>First Specialized Adoption Agencies</p> <p>Fostering and Foster Care</p> |   |

[Home Studies](#)

[Illegitimacy](#)

[Indian Adoption Project](#)

[Indian Child Welfare Act](#)

[Infertility](#)

[International Adoptions](#)

[Matching](#)

[Minimum Standards](#)

[Nature-Nurture Studies](#)

[Orphan Trains](#)

[Outcome Studies](#)

[Placing-Out](#)

[Proxy Adoptions](#)

[Psychopathology Studies](#)

[Search and Reunion](#)

*[Shared Fate: A Theory of Adoption and Mental Health, 1964](#)*

[Single Parent Adoptions](#)

[Social Work](#)

[Special Needs Adoptions](#)

[Telling](#)

[Transracial Adoptions](#)

**Further Reading**

**Document Archives**

[About the Project and the Author](#)

[Archival Sources](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:

**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact  
Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon



Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman

# The Adoption History Project



- [Timeline](#)
- [People & Organizations](#)
- [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)
- [Topics in Adoption History](#)
- [Further Reading](#)
- [Document Archives](#)
- [Site Index](#)

**Search the Site for Names, Topics, and Terms by Entering Text Below**

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman

# The Adoption History Project



[Timeline](#)

[People & Organizations](#)

[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#)

[Further Reading](#)

[Document Archives](#)

[Site Index](#)

## About The Adoption History Project

Adoption is a significant public and private issue. This site is based on the conviction that history is an indispensable resource for understanding the personal, political, legal, social, scientific, and human dimensions of this particular form of kinship. The Adoption History Project is devoted to making adoption history accessible and interesting to visitors who may not be aware that adoption has a history at all.

This site introduces the history of child adoption in the United States by profiling people, organizations, topics, and studies that shaped adoption during the twentieth century. I hope individuals with personal or professional ties to adoption who are curious about adoption's past will find the site relevant to their concerns. It is also intended for students and teachers interested in social welfare, the human sciences, and the history of children and families in the modern United States.

This site was created and is maintained by Ellen Herman in the Department of History at the University of Oregon. It was based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 0094318. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation. The site has also received funding from Project ECHO, [Center for History and New Media](#), George Mason University, and from the [Viola W. Bernard Foundation](#).

Grateful acknowledgment to Dan Gilfillan and Devan Wardwell (University of Oregon, Center for the Study of Women in Society, Wired Humanities Project) for initial design and technical assistance and two graduate students in the University of Oregon Department of History, Shannon Parrot and Beatrice McKenzie, who worked as research assistants between 2001 and 2003. Christine Sundt, Curator of Visual Resources for the University of Oregon Library System, provided helpful advice. During winter 2003, undergraduates in HIST 365 tested the unfinished site. Their enthusiasm, questions, and suggestions made the site far better than it would otherwise have been. Several colleagues also graciously previewed the site, including Barbara Altmann, Wayne Carp, John Carson, Grant

Conway, Dave Klaassen, Barbara Melosh, and Peggy Pascoe.

All of the text on this site was written by Ellen Herman and permission is required for its reproduction. Document excerpts and images have been drawn from a wide range of published and [archival sources](#). I am grateful for permission to use them here.

The Adoption History Project is a work-in-progress rather than a comprehensive resource. It will continue to develop in the future.

## About the Author, Ellen Herman

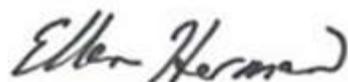


As a faculty member in the Department of History at the University of Oregon, I teach courses on the modern United States. My interests include social engineering, the human sciences, and therapeutic culture. I am the author of *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and *Psychiatry, Psychology, and Homosexuality* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1995).

I have published a number of articles and a book about adoption during the twentieth century. *Kinship by Design: A History of Adoption in the Modern United States* (University of Chicago Press, 2008). My research in the field of adoption history has been supported by fellowships at Harvard Law School, Radcliffe's Bunting Institute, and by a major grant from the National Science Foundation.

The members of my immediate family—Gabriel, José, and Lynn—are just three of the reasons for this website. They have provided daily confirmation that kinship is as accidental and miraculous as it is deliberately created.

For more information about me, please consult my [website](#).



[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)



The  
Adoption  
History  
Project

Timeline ✨

People &  
Organizations ✨

Adoption Studies/  
Adoption Science ✨

Topics in  
Adoption History ✨

Further Reading ✨

Document  
Archives ✨

Site Index ✨

PLEASE POST  
**WANTED**  
Homes For Orphan Children

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) |  
[Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Adoption History in Brief



Photographs of this foster brother and sister and their foster mother (above), and their “fine foster home” in Florida (pictured below) early in the twentieth century reinforced the close association between adoption and upward mobility. During the century, adoption invariably moved children from poorer families, communities, and nations to richer ones.

Since ancient times and in all human cultures, children have been transferred from adults who would not or could not be parents to adults who wanted them for love, labor, and property. Adoption’s close association with humanitarianism, upward mobility, and **infertility**, however, are uniquely modern phenomena. An especially prominent feature of modern adoption history has been **matching**: the idea that adoption substituted one family for another so carefully, systematically, and completely that natal kinship was rendered invisible and irrelevant. This notion was unusual in the history of family formation, especially because the most obvious thing about adoption has been that it is a different way to make a family. Practices that aimed to hide this difference ironically made modern adoption most distinctive.

In the United States, state legislatures began passing adoption laws in the nineteenth-century. The **Massachusetts Adoption of Children Act**, enacted in 1851, is widely considered the first “modern” adoption law. Adoption reform in other western industrial nations lagged. England, for example, did not pass adoption legislation until 1926. Observers have frequently attributed the acceptance of adoption in the United States to its compatibility with cherished national traditions, from immigration to democracy. According to this way of thinking, solidarities achieved on purpose are more powerful—and more quintessentially American—than solidarities ascribed to blood. Yet adoption has always had a symbolic importance that outstripped its statistical significance. Adoption has touched only a small minority of children and adults while telling stories about identity and belonging that include us all.

During the twentieth century, numbers of adoptions



This brochure for the National Home Finding Society, probably from the late 1910s or 1920s, linked child-placing with utopian progress. Adoption promised to “reduce divorces, banditry, murder, and control births, fill all the churches and do real missionary work at home and abroad, exchanging immigrants for Americans and stopping some of the road leading to war.”

increased dramatically in the United States. In 1900, formalizing adoptive kinship in a court was still very rare. By 1970, the numerical peak of twentieth-century adoption, 175,000 adoptions were finalized annually. “Stranger” or “non-relative” adoptions have predominated over time, and most people equate adoption with families in which parents and children lack genetic ties. Today, however, a majority of children are adopted by natal relatives and step-parents, a development that corresponds to the rise of divorce, remarriage, and long-term cohabitation.

Conservative estimates (which do not include informal adoptions) suggest that five million Americans alive today are adoptees, 2-4 percent of all families have adopted, and 2.5 percent of all children under 18 are adopted. Accurate **historical statistics** about twentieth-century adoption are, unfortunately, almost impossible to locate. A national reporting system existed for only thirty years (from 1945 to 1975) and even during this period, data was supplied by states and territories on a purely voluntary basis.

We do know that adoptive kinship is not typical. Families touched by adoption are significantly more racially diverse, better educated, and more affluent than families in general. We know this because in 2000, “adopted son/daughter” was included as a census category for the first time in U.S. history.

Since World War II, adoption has clearly globalized. From Germany in the 1940s and Korea in the 1950s to China and Guatemala today, countries that export children for adoption have been devastated by poverty, war, and genocide. Because growing numbers of adoptions are **transracial** and/or **international**, many of today’s adoptive families have literally made adoption more visible than it was in the past. But total numbers of adoptions have actually declined since 1970. In recent years, approximately 125,000 children have been adopted annually by strangers and relatives in the United States.

Modern adoption history has been marked by vigorous reforms dedicated to surrounding child placement with legal and scientific safeguards enforced by trained professionals working under the auspices of certified agencies. In 1917, for instance, **Minnesota** passed the first state law that required children and adults to be investigated and adoption records to be shielded from

public view. By midcentury, virtually all states in the country had revised their laws to incorporate such **minimum standards** as pre-placement inquiry, post-placement probation, and **confidentiality and sealed records**. At their best, these standards promoted **child welfare**. Yet they also reflected **eugenic** anxieties about the quality of adoptable children and served to make adult tastes and preferences more influential in adoption than children's needs.

Since 1950, a number of major shifts have occurred. First, "adoptability" expanded beyond "normal" children to include older, disabled, non-white, and other children with **special needs**. Since 1970, earlier reforms guaranteeing **confidentiality and sealed records** have been forcefully criticized and movements to encourage **search, reunion**, and "open adoption" have mobilized sympathy and support. The adoption closet has been replaced by an astonishing variety of adoption communities and communications. Adoption is visible in popular culture, grassroots organizations, politics, daily media, and on the internet.

Adoption history illustrates that public and private issues are inseparable. Ideas about blood and belonging, nature and nurture, needs and rights are not the exclusive products of individual choices and personal freedoms. They have been decisively shaped by law and public policy and cultural change, which in turn have altered Americans' ordinary lives and the families in which they live and love.



[Further reading about adoption history in general](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)



Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman

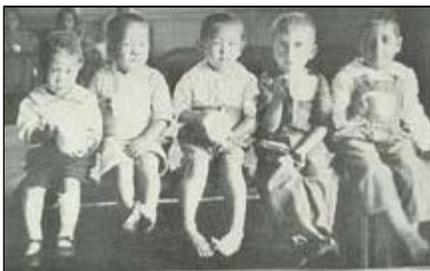
# The Adoption History Project


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Child Welfare



A Spanish muskrat trapper, his wife, and their adopted child, Delacroix Island, Saint Bernard Parish, Louisiana, 1941. The picture was taken by Marion Wolcott, a documentary photographer who contributed to a new genre of government-created images that were designed to mobilize public concern about social problems, including poverty and child welfare.



This photograph of "children from many races," taken during a [U.S. Children's Bureau](#) conference in Hawaii in the 1920s, suggests that child welfare was a concept capable of drawing government attention and resources to people of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds.

The modern belief that children are innocent and vulnerable human beings with special needs for care and protection during critical stages of physical and psychological development is the premise of child welfare. Ordinarily, parents are charged with providing care and protection to children, but when they do not or cannot, the responsibility for insuring child welfare rests with society at large. Child welfare as a collective, social obligation is the rationale behind modern adoption regulation.

Since 1851 and the passage of the [Massachusetts Adoption of Children Act](#), laws have promoted the idea that adoption is a process that should benefit children rather than meet adult needs. In contrast to ancient and premodern adoptions, which were often arranged to secure heirs for childless individuals or workers for households, the ideology of child welfare promises that adoption will offer children permanent love and belonging.

One summary of legal philosophy and reform in 1935 put it this way: "The modern adoption legislation reflects a growing emphasis on the necessity of a better understanding of the child's individual needs, so that he may be adopted into a home where he will be happy and develop properly." For advocates of adoption reform, child welfare meant the elevation of "human" values over such material considerations as labor and property. This was progress.



The single most important strategy for insuring child welfare was educating actual and potential mothers. This photograph depicts a "little mothers' class" during which high school students in the early 1920s received instruction in infant care.

## Document Excerpts

- [Massachusetts Adoption of Children Act, 1851](#)
- [U.S. Children's Bureau, \*Adoption Laws in the United States\*, 1925](#)
- [Child Welfare League of America, "Definition of Child Welfare," 1957](#)
- [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989](#)



[Further reading about Child Welfare](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Massachusetts Adoption of Children Act, 1851

BE it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives, in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

Sect. 1. Any inhabitant of this Commonwealth may petition the judge of probate, in the county wherein he or she may reside, for leave to adopt a child not his or her own by birth.

Sect. 2. If both or either of the parents of such child shall be living, they or the survivor of them, as the case may be, shall consent in writing to such adoption: if neither parent be living, such consent may be given by the legal guardian of such child; if there be no legal guardian, no father nor mother, the next of kin of such child within the State may give such consent; and if there be no such next of kin, the judge of probate may appoint some discreet and suitable person to act in the proceedings as the next friend of such child, and give or withhold such consent.

Sect. 3. If the child be of the age of fourteen years or upwards, the adoption shall not be made without his or her consent.

Sect. 4. No petition by a person having a lawful wife shall be allowed unless such wife shall join therein, and no woman having a lawful husband shall be competent to present and prosecute such petition.

Sect. 5. If, upon such petition, so presented and consented to as aforesaid, the judge of probate shall be satisfied of the identity and relations of the persons, and that the petitioner, or, in case of husband and wife, the petitioners, are of sufficient ability to bring up the child, and furnish suitable nurture and education, having reference to the degree and condition of its parents, and that it is fit and proper that such adoption should take effect, he shall make a decree setting forth the said facts, and ordering that, from and after the date of the decree, such child should be deemed and taken, to all legal intents and purposes, the child of the petitioner or petitioners.

Sect. 6. A child so adopted, as aforesaid, shall be deemed, for the purposes of inheritance and succession by such child, custody of the person and right of obedience by such parent or parents by adoption, and

all other legal consequences and incidents of the natural relation of parents and children, the same to all intents and purposes as if such child had been born in lawful wedlock of such parents or parent by adoption, saving only that such child shall not be deemed capable of taking property expressly limited to the heirs of the body or bodies of such petitioner or petitioners.

Sect. 7. The natural parent or parents of such child shall be deprived, by such decree of adoption, of all legal rights whatsoever as respects such child; and such child shall be freed from all legal obligations of maintenance and obedience, as respects such natural parent or parents.

Sect. 8. Any petitioner, or any child which is the subject of such a petition, by any next friend, may claim and prosecute an appeal to the supreme judicial court from such decree of the judge of probate, in like manner and with the like effect as such appeals may now be claimed and prosecuted in cases of wills, saying only that in no case shall any bond be required of, nor any costs awarded against, such child or its next friend so appealing.

Approved by the Governor, May 24, 1851.

Source: "An Act to provide for the Adoption of Children," *Acts and Resolves passed by the General Court of Massachusetts*, Chap. 324, (1851).

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Charles Loring Brace (1826-1890)



Charles Loring Brace

A minister and early **social work** pioneer, and perhaps the best known representative of nineteenth-century child rescue, Charles Loring Brace was founder of the New York Children's Aid Society in 1853 and author of *The Best Method of Disposing of Our Pauper and Vagrant Children* (1859). What was the best method? The **orphan trains** were Brace's answer. Between 1854 and 1930, as many as 200,000 children from New York and other Eastern cities were sent by train to midwestern and western states as well as Canada and Mexico. Brace was an evangelical reformer who wished to remove the children of poor Catholics from crowded urban and family environments and place them in Anglo-Protestant farming families in small towns and rural areas. Brace and his peers considered Catholic parents unworthy almost by definition, but the philosophy of child rescue also emphasized nurture over nature. Malleable and innocent children, if removed early enough from depraved parents, could escape the inferior culture inherent in their homes and communities and become upstanding citizens. Not surprisingly, an ideology that seemed benevolent and humanitarian to many Protestants earned Brace a reputation in Catholic communities as a child-stealer rather than a child-saver. As a result, sectarian groups developed their own social services and child-caring institutions, such as orphanages. In the late nineteenth century, the Catholic church built institutions at a furious pace, a sharp contrast with the trend toward **placing-out** children. By 1910, there were 322 infant asylums and orphanages serving almost 70,000 children annually.

**Children's Aid Society,**  
106 EAST 23D STREET, NEW YORK

The Society reserves the right to remove the child previous to legal adoption if at any time the circumstances of the home become such as in the judgment of the Agent are injurious to the child's future prospects.  
Children are not allowed to correspond with any friends or relatives without obtaining permission to do so from the Society.

---

NAME OF CHILD *Edward Hoyt* <sup>Nov</sup> *(born May 1<sup>st</sup> 1902)* AGE *8 yrs.*

TO LIVE WITH FAMILY OF

TOWN *Valley Falls* COUNTY *J. Irving Spence* STATE *Kan.*

DATED *Jan 13 1911* *J. W. Swan*  
PLACING AGENT

A calling card from an agent of the New York Children's Aid Society

## Document Excerpt

- Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years' Work Among Them*, 1872



Further reading about Charles Loring Brace

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact  
**Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

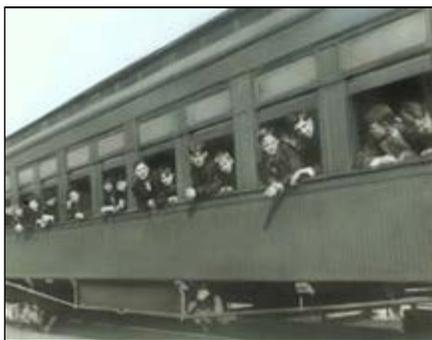
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman

# The Adoption History Project


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Orphan Trains



Going west on an orphan train, 1904



The orphan trains are among the most famous episodes in adoption history. Between 1854 and 1929, as many as 250,000 children from New York and other Eastern cities were sent by train to towns in midwestern and western states, as well as Canada and Mexico. Families interested in the orphans showed up to look them over when they were placed on display in local train stations, and placements were frequently made with little or no investigation or oversight.

This ambitious and controversial project in the relocation of a massive child population was emblematic of the move toward **placing-out**. Organized by the New York Children's Aid Society and directed by well known reformer **Charles Loring Brace**, the orphan trains were based on the theory that the innocent children of poor Catholic and Jewish immigrants could be rescued and Americanized if they were permanently removed from depraved urban surroundings and placed with upstanding Anglo-Protestant farming families. This evangelical humanitarianism echoed more than a century later, after World War II, when people like **Bertha and Harry Holt** made **international adoptions** more visible and common.

In spite of the trains' stated intention, they did not permanently separate most children, geographically or culturally, from their parents and communities of origin. Well into the twentieth century, impoverished but resourceful parents took advantage of the services of middle-class child-savers for their own purposes, including temporary caretaking during periods of economic crisis and apprenticeships that helped children enter the labor market. Reformers like Brace were determined to salvage the civic potential of poor immigrant children by placing them in culturally "worthy"

families while simultaneously reducing urban poverty and crime and supplying some of the workers that western development required. But poor parents had no intention of losing track of their children, and they usually did not, even in the case of very young children placed permanently for "adoption." Historians who have studied the records of the Children's Aid Society closely have concluded that the largest number of orphan train children were temporarily transferred or shared, not given up.

## Document Excerpts

- [Reverend Hastings H. Hart, "Placing Out Children in the West," 1884](#)
- [Reverend S.S. Cummings, New England Home for Little Wanderers' Orphan Train](#)



[Further reading about the Orphan Trains](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Placing-Out



Placing-out could be temporary or permanent. The child above was boarded out by the Boston Children's Aid Society because her mother was ill. The child below, "a happy adopted boy," was placed permanently by the Children's Aid Society of Pennsylvania.



The imposing facade of the New England Home for Little Wanderers in the 1910s. Placing-out in families was supposed to replace orphanage care, but residential

In the nineteenth century, child-caring institutions such as orphanages and infant asylums proliferated. By 1900, the ideology of institutional care was in decline. A new imperative to place children in families was signaled by the first White House Conference on Children in 1909, which championed home life as "the highest and finest product of civilization." It was not until the 1950s, however, that the number of children living in temporary foster families exceeded the number of children living in institutions, and it was not until the 1960s that the number of adoptive placements surpassed the number of institutional placements.

Early in the twentieth century, "placing-out" was the term that designated all non-institutional arrangements to care for dependent children. Placing-out could mean **baby farming**. It could mean boarding homes, in which agencies paid families to care for children, or working homes, where older children earned their keep. Traditional indentures were still used by orphanages in many states into the twentieth century and these were not unusual as a means of acquiring children for adoption. Indenture contracts secured children's services for a period of years in exchange for the provision of food, shelter, and basic education. At their age of release, typically 18, indentured children were given a fixed sum of money, a suit of clothing, or other material resources specified in advance. Free homes, where children received care without monetary compensation, was another placing-out method. Free homes approximated an adoption ideal founded on love rather than labor. Many children placed in free homes were never legally adopted, however, and in the early decades of the century, they were much less common than homes in which board was paid.

institutions endured well into the twentieth century.

Many Progressive-era reformers were influenced by **eugenics** and insisted on a policy of family preservation. They grudgingly accepted placing-out—especially when it amounted to adoption—as a last resort. They may have idealized families as the only acceptable place for children, but they preferred above all to keep children with their blood kin.

## Document Excerpts

- [Earnest Fowler to Mrs. Squires, Washington City Orphan Asylum, November 1, 1910](#)
- [Chauncey Richardson to Washington City Orphan Asylum, March 12, 1912](#)
- [Louise Wise Services, Placement Contract, early 1960s](#)



[Further reading about Placing-Out](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Outcome Studies

Outcome studies are a well-established research genre today, but early in the twentieth century, they were new. How did adopted children and adoptive families turn out five, ten, or twenty years after placement? By finding out what had happened to children and parents later in life, outcome studies offered a way to predict and control future adoptions by studying the results of adoptions arranged in the past.

These studies defined outcomes in many different ways, but all tried to correlate “inputs”—such as child's sex, age at adoption, natal family background, and adopters' characteristics—with measures of child development, parental satisfaction, and success (or failure) later in life. They aimed to reveal which variables, in which combinations, produced which outcomes. Which family-making practices and kinship configurations had good results? Which had bad results? Outcome studies embodied the conviction that systematic research was essential to improving the results of future adoptions for children and families.

The first major outcome study was conducted by [Sophie van Senden Theis](#) and the New York State Charities Aid Association. *How Foster Children Turn Out*, published in 1924, followed up on the cases of 910 children placed between 1898 and 1922.

### Chronological List of Outcome Studies

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1915 | <a href="#">Ruth W. Lawton and J. Prentice Murphy</a> , “A Study of Results of a Child-Placing Society” (paper presented at The National Conference of Charities and Correction, 1915), 164-174.              |
| 1916 | Mary Tinney, “An Interpretation of Three Thousand Placements by the New York Catholic Home Bureau” (paper presented at the Fourth National Conference of Catholic Charities, September 17-20, 1916), 181-198. |
| 1924 | <a href="#">Sophie van Senden Theis</a> , <i>How Foster Children Turn Out</i> , Publication No. 165 (New York: New York State Charities Aid Association, 1924).   |

- 1934 Lee M. Brooks, "Forty Foster Homes Look at Adoption," *Family* 15 (March 1934): 13-17
- 1937 Iris Ruggles Macrae, "An Analysis of Adoption Practices at the New England Home for Little Wanderers" (M.S. thesis, Simmons College, School of Social Work, 1937).
- 1942 Lucie K. Browning, "A Private Agency Looks at the End Results of Adoptions," *Child Welfare League of America Bulletin* 21 (January 1942): 3-5.
- 1950 Georgina D. Hotchkiss, "Adoptive Parents Talk About Their Children: A Follow-Up Study of Twenty-Four Children Adopted Through a Child Placing Agency" (M.S. thesis, Simmons College, 1950).
- 1950 Hazel S. Morrison, "Research Study in an Adoption Program," *Child Welfare* (July 1950): 7-9, 12-13.
- 1951 Ruth F. Brenner, *A Follow-Up Study of Adoptive Families* (New York: Child Adoption Research Committee, March 1951).
- 1951 Catherine S. Amatruda and Joseph V. Baldwin, "Current Adoption Practices," *Journal of Pediatrics* 38, no. 2 (February 1951): 208-212.
- 1951 Margarete Zur Nieden, "The Influence of Constitution and Environment Upon the Development of Adopted Children," *Journal of Psychology* 31 (1951): 91-95.
- 1952 Mary Elizabeth Fairweather, "Early Placement in Adoption," *Child Welfare* 31 (March 1952): 3-8.
- 1953 Abraham Joseph Simon, "Social Agency Adoption; A Psycho-Sociological Study in Prediction" (Ph.D. diss., Washington University, St. Louis, 1953).
- 1954 M.E. Edwards, "Failure and Success in the Adoption of Toddlers," *Case Conference* 1, no. 6 (November 1954): 3-8.
- 1955 Ruth Medway Davis and Polly Bouck, "Crucial Importance of Adoption Home Study," *Child Welfare* 34, no. 3 (March 1955): 20-21.
- 1956 Helen Fradkin and Dorothy Krugman, "A Program of Adoptive Placement for Infants Under 3 Months," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 26, no. 4 (July 1956): 577-590. 1957
- 1957 David Fanshel, *A Study in Negro Adoption* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1957).
- 1957 Margaret A. Valk, "Adjustment of Korean-American Children in Their American Adoptive Homes," *Casework Papers* (1957): 145-158.
- 1959 Donald Brieland, *An Experimental Study of the Selection of Adoptive Parents at Intake* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, May 1959).
- 1962 Child Welfare League of America, ed., *Quantitative Approaches to Parent Selection* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1962).
- 1962 Alfred Kadushin, "A Study of Adoptive Parents of Hard-to-Place Children," *Social Casework* 43 (May 1962): 227-233.

- 1963 [Helen L. Witmer et al, \*Independent Adoptions: A Follow-Up Study\*](#) (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1963).
- 1965 Child Welfare League of America, ed., *Perspectives on Adoption Research* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1965).
- 1970 [Benson Jaffee and David Fanshel, \*How They Fared in Adoption: A Follow-Up Study\*](#) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).
- 1972 [David Fanshel, \*Far From the Reservation: The Transracial Adoption of American Indian Children\*](#) (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1972).
- 1974 Lucille J. Grow and Deborah Shapiro, *Black Children—White Parents: A Study of Transracial Adoption* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1974).
- 1976 [Joan F. Shireman and Penny R. Johnson, "Single Persons as Adoptive Parents," \*Social Service Review\* 50](#) (March 1976): 103-116.
- 1977 Rita James Simon and Howard Alstein, *Transracial Adoption* (New York: Wiley, 1977).
- 1978 William Meezan, Sanford Katz, and Eva Manoff Russo, *Adoption Without Agencies: A Study of Independent Adoptions* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1978).

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Sophie van Senden Theis, *How Foster Children Turn Out*, 1924



Sophie van Senden Theis (left) bringing Martha to Jessie Taft (right). Also pictured are Bobby Ueland and Taft's adopted son, Everett

This investigation was the prototype and inspiration for adoption [outcome studies](#) in later years. Conducted in the early 1920s by [Sophie van Senden Theis](#), it followed up 910 children placed in homes by the New York State Charities Aid Association between 1898 and 1922. Up to that point, few inquiries had examined the results of either professional or amateur child-placing, and these had been small, scattered, and unsystematic. Homer Folks, the NYSCAA Secretary, described this research project as “the first serious effort, to collect, at first hand, on a considerable scale, the facts as to the careers of an unselected group of foster children.”

How did these foster children turn out? Using the straightforward standards of school success, self-support, and observance of law, Theis concluded that foster children turned out quite well. Seventy-seven percent were “capable,” 11 percent “harmless,” and 12 percent “incapable,” according to [statistical data](#) about the children’s family backgrounds, age at placement, health, education, and work experiences presented in 67 tables and six charts. In Theis’ view, and in the view of many later outcome researchers, good outcomes were synonymous with “social adjustment.” Children who turned out according to the prevailing expectations of parents and agencies were children who turned out well.

The study’s findings reinforced some existing views about [placing-out](#) while challenging others. A majority of the children (55.2%) had backgrounds that were characterized as “predominantly bad,” while another quarter (24.8%) were classified with histories that were “bad–unknown.” Facts like these confirmed the [eugenicist](#) position that available children were terrible risks. They were likely to be defective or “[feeble-minded](#)” children. Yet the study also

indicated that bad backgrounds did not predict bad outcomes. Since most children had bad backgrounds and also became “capable” adults, heredity could not be the determining factor.

The study undermined the view that older children were safer candidates for family life since more was already known about their development and character. Theis found that children placed after age five were more likely to experience multiple placements, less likely to do well or go far in school, and twice as likely to become “incapable” people. In contrast, children placed early in life experienced more security and belonging. They were also much more likely to be legally adopted by their parents. Progressive-era child welfare professionals were skeptical about severing ties between natal parents and children and did not encourage adoption. So it surprised the researchers to find that 30 percent of the study sample had been legally adopted. They also discovered that adoption was strongly correlated with measures of good outcome. This finding was all the more notable because one-third of the adoptees had never been told about their adoptions.

This study is a significant watershed in adoption history because it painted an empirical portrait of placed-out children and their families for the first time, while also establishing a statistical baseline for the proportions who did and did not make good. That statistical baseline indicated that placing-out had overwhelming positive outcomes. “Our study leads us to believe that there are tremendous latent powers within an individual awaiting development, and that under favorable conditions these powers may be developed and directed toward accomplishment.” Although outcome studies in the decades after 1924 were methodologically more sophisticated than *How Foster Children Turn Out*, they almost always reported basically similar conclusions. Most children and placements turned out well, while a small percentage did not.

## Document Excerpt

- Sophie van Senden Theis, *How Foster Children Turn Out*, 1924

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Social Work



Students at the country's first social work school, the New York School of Applied Philanthropy, c. 1910

Social work transformed help into a professional activity. Because social workers have been the rank and file workers in the world of adoption, endowing them with authority and expertise was a prerequisite for the professionalization of adoption. Making sure that family-formation would be overseen by professionals was an important part of making adoption modern.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, social work did not yet exist as a professional community. The first social work school in the country, the New York School of Applied Philanthropy (which later became Columbia's School of Social Work), opened its doors in 1904. In 1915, there were only five independent and two university-affiliated social work programs in the United States. In 1921, the American Association of Social Workers was founded and, in the 1920s, the Russell Sage and Commonwealth Foundations offered crucial financial support for institution-building in the new field. Yet amateur workers remained the backbone of many child welfare organizations long after formal training opportunities were established, and the shortage of social work personnel remained a chronic problem for agencies involved in child placement and adoption.

The first true professional in the world of adoption, [Sophie van Senden Theis](#), graduated from college in 1907. She never earned a social work degree. Other important figures in adoption history were members of the pioneering generation of social work educators, including [Jessie Taft](#) (University of Pennsylvania), Charlotte Towle (University of Chicago), and Dorothy Hutchinson (Columbia University). Social work was a female-dominated occupation from the start.

Social workers experienced gender troubles in their efforts to professionalize **child welfare**. Although a number of leaders in children's work were men—C.C. Carstens, Hastings Hart, and William Henry Slingerland among them—it was not always clear why women would need specialized training to do work that simply extended their natural, maternal responsibilities to other people's children. The first social work generation was also frustrated by the tradition of nineteenth-century "friendly visiting," which defined helping as the responsibility of all women with the means to do it. Social work was an expression of women's intuition and moral superiority, according to this way of thinking, not a professional job.

In order to professionalize, social workers set out to affiliate the work they did with science. In **placing-out**, this often took the form of psychiatric casework and **outcome studies**. By importing psychodynamic theories from medicine and embracing sophisticated research methods as their own, social workers hoped to turn ordinary care-taking tasks into authoritative, if not actually masculine, careers. Therapeutic perspectives on child placement and adoption grew out of this convergence between social work and science.

The progress of social work was geographically and culturally lopsided. It advanced most rapidly and effectively in cities in the east and north. Professionally staffed agencies were still rare or nonexistent in many parts of the country during the first half of the century. In these places, most adoptions were still independently arranged by relatives, doctors, midwives, lawyers, orphanage staff, and other baby brokers who operated according to rules of commerce and sentiment rather than a professional creed.

## Document Excerpts

- Abraham Flexner, "Is Social Work a Profession?" 1915
- Virginia Robinson, "Analysis of Processes in the Records of Family Case Working Agencies," 1921
- Katharine F. Lenroot, "Case Work with Unmarried Parents and Their Children," 1925



Further reading about Social Work

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

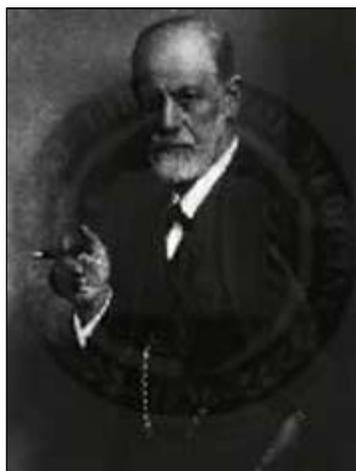
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)



Sigmund Freud



Freud's famous visit to Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, September 10, 1909

Sigmund Freud, the famous Viennese architect of psychoanalysis, had a significant influence on modern adoption theory and practice. So did his daughter **Anna Freud**, who carried on her father's legacy after his death in 1939 and became well known in her own right as a developmental researcher, a child analyst, and a theorist of "psychological parenthood."

Freudian ideas about unconscious desires, erotic instincts, and critical childhood stages in the formation of adult personality and behavior shaped the way that many parents and professionals thought about adoption, especially its special challenges and potential hazards. Early in the twentieth century, physicians, artists, and feminists were in the vanguard of Americans interested in psychoanalysis. Freud lectured at Clark University in 1909 and his translated writings made him a more popular figure in the United States than in any other country in the world. Freud always maintained that the American version of psychoanalysis was hopelessly naive and ridiculously optimistic—he called it a "gigantic mistake"—but Americans paid little attention. They embraced psychoanalysis as a practical means to cure a variety of ailments related to personal adjustment, sexual happiness, and family life. Adoption was just one example.

One starting point for Freud's approach to development was the belief that becoming an individual required escape, over the course of childhood, from the absolute power and love of parents. In order to accomplish this liberation, he argued, children invariably called upon fantasies—acted out in play and daydreams—and imagined that their "real" parents were much better, kinder, and more exalted than the imperfect people who were actually raising them. Freud called these comforting but entirely fabricated fairy tales the "**family romance**." The fictional stories that children told

themselves about their origins mattered because they linked Freudian theory directly to adoption.

Freud's prototypical "family romance"—the one he assumed virtually all children experienced and occasionally remembered—was an adoption scenario. This scenario was developmentally useful precisely because it remained imaginary. It allowed children to safely express ambivalence and anger toward their parents, all the while encouraging them to develop independent identities necessary to becoming a healthy adults.

What worked for most children, however, caused definite problems for children who actually were adopted. Adoptees who imagined another set of parents were not engaged in benign falsehood. They were facing up to reality. "There is a *real* element of mystery in the illegitimate child's background which makes such correction by reality either impossible or unconvincing," wrote social worker Mary Brisley in 1939. The convergence of fantasy and real life was the key issue for psychoanalytically inclined clinicians in **social work** and psychiatry whose interests included adoption. **Viola Bernard**, Florence Clothier, Leontine Young, and **Marshall Schechter** were just a few examples. Psychoanalytic ideas crowded the adoption world from World War II on. Erik Erikson's concepts of "identity" and "identity crisis" were among the most widely disseminated Freudian ideas, applicable to adolescent development and youth movements in general as well as adoption in particular.

Because the loss of natal parents was an all-too-real component of adoption, the family romances of adopted children pointed toward unanswered and sometimes unanswerable questions. Who were my **birth parents**? Why did they give me away? Was there something wrong with me? Such painful dilemmas were deeply implicated in the problematic self-images and flawed relationships that some adoptees manifested, and that came to the attention of clinicians. It is not surprising that parents and professionals who took the Freudian family romance seriously favored adoption policies and practices, such as matching, that tried to erase natal kinship, hence concealing the emotionally difficult truth that one set of parents had been lost and replaced with another.

Even at the height of enthusiasm about **confidentiality and sealed records**, the ritual of **telling** children about their adoptions acknowledged that adoptees were different than their non-adopted peers. Adoptees' family romances were

more like nightmares than daydreams, and they had the potential to produce deep sadness and distress. Knowing that they had indeed been given away, and feeling that their very selfhood was divided and incomplete, adoptees were at special risk for a range of **psychopathologies**. Freud's developmental theory implied that adoptees faced emotional challenges inseparable from the adoption process itself, hence anticipating and helping to bring into being more recent concerns with loss and attachment.

Psychoanalytic approaches to **birth parents** and adoptive parents also circulated widely in medicine, **social work**, clinical psychology, and the popular press. By midcentury, illegitimacy was widely perceived as the result of unhappy and destructive parent-child relationships that remained both unconscious and unresolved in adolescence and adulthood. Seen through this Freudian lens, adoptions of children born to unmarried women were no longer tragedies to be avoided, but constructive acts that transferred children to adoptive parents whose psychological (and other) qualifications were superior to those of their neurotic birth mothers. On the other hand, the **infertility** that logically motivated married couples to adopt was also suspected of having unconscious sources that might signal neurosis or worse.

All parties to adoption, in other words, shared some form of psychological dysfunction. After 1945, the goal of home studies and other therapeutic practices was increasingly to guarantee that professionals trained in psychoanalysis and other human sciences would play a crucial managerial role in the adoption process. Even **Jessie Taft**, a leading educator who disliked the orthodox Freudian emphasis on trauma—it “implies fear of life itself” she wrote in dismay—believed that skilled psychological interpretation and help belonged at the heart of adoption. With the skills to explore the emotional minefield that placement exposed, the psychological engineers who oversaw family-formation confirmed that adoption was abnormal while also promising to normalize it. Sigmund Freud's chief legacy, in adoption and elsewhere in American culture, was to multiply deviations and simultaneously insist on their cure.

## Document Excerpts

- Sigmund Freud, “Family Romances,” 1909
- Florence Clothier to Mary Ruth Colby on “Permanent Love Objects,” January 14, 1941

- Florence Clothier, "The Psychology of the Adopted Child," 1943
- The Case of Miss M, 1944-1945
- Helene Deutsch, "Adoptive Mothers," 1945
- Leontine Young, "Personality Patterns in Unmarried Mothers," 1945-1947
- Viola W. Bernard, "Application of Psychoanalytic Concepts to Adoption Agency Practice," 1953



Further reading by and about Sigmund Freud

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012

Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

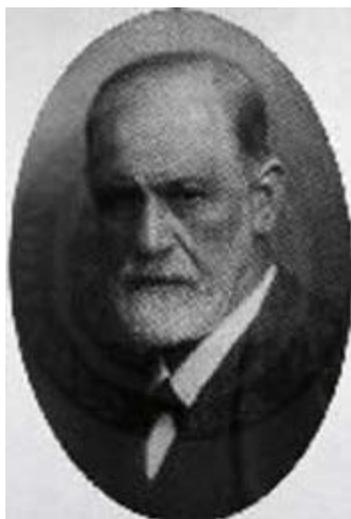
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Sigmund Freud, "Family Romances," 1909



Sigmund Freud

The freeing of an individual, as he grows up, from the authority of his parents is one of the most necessary though one of the most painful results brought about by the course of his development. It is quite essential that this liberation should occur and it may be presumed that it has been to some extent achieved by everyone who has reached a normal state. Indeed, the whole progress of society rests upon the opposition between successive generations. On the other hand, there is a class of neurotics whose condition is recognizably determined by their having failed in this task.

For a small child his parents are at first the only authority and the source of all belief. The child's most intense and most momentous wish during these early years is to be like his parents (that is, the parent of his own sex) and to be big like his father and mother. But as intellectual growth increases, the child cannot help discovering by degrees the category to which his parents belong. He gets to know other parents and compares them with his own, and so comes to doubt the incomparable and unique quality which has he attributed to them. . . .

There are only too many occasions on which a child is slighted, or at least feels he has been slighted, on which he feels he is not receiving the whole of his parents' love, and, most of all, on which he feels regrets at having to share it with his brothers and sisters. His sense that his own affection is not being fully reciprocated then finds a vent in the idea, which is often consciously recollected from early childhood, of being a step-child or an adopted child. . . .

The latter stage in the development of the neurotic's estrangement from his parents, begun in this manner, might be described as "the neurotic's family romance." It is seldom remembered consciously but can almost always be revealed by psycho-analysis. For a quite specific form of imaginative activity is

one of the essential characteristics of neurotics and also of all comparatively highly gifted people. This activity emerges first in children's play, and then, starting roughly from the period before puberty, takes over the topic of family relations. A characteristic example of this particular kind of phantasy is to be seen in the familiar day-dreams which persist far beyond puberty. . . .

At about the period I have mentioned, then, the child's imagination becomes engaged in the task of getting free from the parents of whom he now has such a low opinion and of replacing them by others, occupying, as a rule, a higher social station. . . .

If anyone is inclined to turn away in horror from this depravity of the childish heart or feels tempted, indeed, to dispute the possibility of such things, he should observe that these works of fiction, which seem so full of hostility, are none of them really so badly intended, and that they still preserve, under a slight disguise, the child's original affection for his parents. The faithlessness and ingratitude are only apparent. . . .

Indeed the whole effort at replacing the real father by a superior one is only an expression of the child's longing for the happy, vanished days when his father seemed to him the noblest and strongest of men and mother the dearest and loveliest of women. He is turning away from the father whom he knows to-day to the father in whom he believed in the earlier years of his childhood; and his phantasy is no more than the expression of a regret that those happy days have gone. . . .

Source: Sigmund Freud, *Collected Papers* 5, ed. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1959), 74-78.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman




[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## First Specialized Adoption Agencies



Florence Walrath, founder of The Cradle, with Hazel Ferguson, one of the agency's early Presidents



The Cradle, in Evanston, Illinois

The first specialized adoption agencies in the United States were founded between 1910 and 1930 by women best described as philanthropic amateurs who had grown up with the model of the nineteenth-century “friendly visitor,” the predecessor of the professional social worker. Louise Waterman Wise founded the Free Synagogue Child Adoption Committee (later renamed Louise Wise Services in her memory by her daughter [Justine Wise Polier](#)). Clara Spence founded the Spence Alumni Society. Alice Chapin founded the Alice Chapin Nursery, and Florence Walrath founded the Cradle. Most were married to wealthy and prominent men. (Steven Wise, for example, was a leading rabbi, zionist, and progressive reformer involved in founding the NAACP and the American Jewish Congress. Henry Dwight Chapin was a well-known New York pediatrician, founder of the Speedwell Society, and vocal champion of home life and [placing-out](#) for dependent children.)

These elite women were frequently motivated to locate babies for well-off friends and acquaintances. The agencies they founded expressed great optimism about adoption, and this clashed sharply with the views of professionals, who believed in family preservation, and proponents of [eugenics](#), who stressed the terrible risks of adopting poor people's children. The specialized adoption agencies differed in other ways from most child welfare agencies at the time. They did not consider unmarried mothers and their babies to be complete family units and did not see the point in strenuous efforts to keep them together. In this sense, these pioneering adoption agencies, founded by amateurs, anticipated by many decades the pro-adoption ethos of the post-World War II years. During these years, adoption became “the best solution” for [illegitimate](#) children,

unmarried mothers, and **infertile** couples.

## Document Excerpts

- from the Archives of Spence-Chapin Adoption Service, 1916
- Louise Waterman Wise, "Mothers in Name," 1920
- Katharine F. Lenroot to Eleanor Roosevelt on The Cradle, March 4, 1944
- Justine Wise Polier to Riki Kosut, October 13, 1978



Further reading about the First Specialized Adoption Agencies

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Arnold Gesell (1880-1961)



Arnold Gesell



Gesell with a mother and child in his Yale clinic

Born in Alma, Wisconsin, Arnold Gesell was a psychologist and physician who influenced the way many Americans thought about children's development. "Nothing in the field of social welfare needs more deliberate and conscious regulation than child adoption," he declared, neatly summarizing the goals of adoption reformers during the first half of the twentieth century. Throughout his long career at Yale University, Gesell championed **minimum standards** and professionally governed family formation. He worked with the most important advocacy organizations of his day, including the **U.S. Children's Bureau** and the **Child Welfare League of America**. Gesell spoke and wrote widely on such topics as placement age, preplacement testing, and clinical supervision in adoption. He favored the **confidentiality** of adoption records. His public reputation was a hallmark of his career and he tried hard to popularize methods of scientific selection and **matching** in adoption. Like other adoption reformers, Gesell believed that adoption agencies run by trained experts would arrange adoptions far superior to those arranged through **baby farms** or black market adoptions based on commerce or sentiment.

Gesell attended the University of Wisconsin, where he was swept up in the tide of Progressive reform. After completing his Ph.D. at Clark University, he moved to New York City, where he taught elementary school and lived in the East Side Settlement House before launching an academic career. He headed Yale's Clinic of Child Development, founded in 1911. It was here that Gesell conducted his famous studies of hundreds of New Haven children, from the late 1910s through the 1930s. His project brought children into his Yale laboratory, where they were given mental and behavioral challenges ranging from bells and balls to stairs and strangers. He meticulously recorded their responses in numbers, pictures, and films. Whatever more

than half of the children he studied did regularly was defined as "normal."

Gesell's ambitious goal was to establish universal developmental norms beginning at birth. The idea that development follows regular patterns over time is commonplace today, but it was then a novel way of thinking about growth. It also had significant practical consequences. The applied technology that Gesell's research produced was a scale—a test—that promised to measure whether children were developing normally or deviating from expected patterns of mental, motor, linguistic, and social growth. By measuring more than intelligence, or I.Q. ("intelligence quotient"), the Gesell scales moved beyond the first generation of mental tests. They were widely utilized by clinicians working in medical and educational fields. In adoption, they were used to determine if children were qualified for adoption in the first place. At a time when social workers worried about under- and over-placement (errors that gave bright children to dull parents and dull children to bright parents), the Gesell scale also guided which children were placed with which parents.

Gesell believed that adoption was risky and even inappropriate for some children, but he also believed that the risks could be measured and predicted in advance. This made him a technological optimist. He was less inclined than many of his peers toward **eugenics** and the view that most dependent children were unadoptable because they were products of bad heredity. Gesell trusted developmental testing to prevent the adoption of defective children, but he also trusted it to make adoption better for the children and adults involved.

Here is how he put it in 1926: "[Adoption] can not be entrusted altogether to good will or to intuitive impulse, or even to unaided common sense. There are too many opportunities for error and miscarriage. The combined critical judgment of the social investigator, the court, the physician, and the mental examiner should enter into the regulation of adoption. . . . Systematic psychoclinical examinations not only will reduce the wastes of error and miscarriage but will serve to reveal children of normal and superior endowment beneath the concealment of neglect, of poverty, or of poor repute. Clinical safeguards can not solve all the problems of child adoption but they can steadily improve its methods and make them both more scientific and humane."

## Document Excerpts

- Arnold Gesell, "Psychoclinical Guidance in Child Adoption," 1926
- Arnold Gesell, "Child Adoptions in Connecticut," 1939
- Letters from Prospective Adopters to Arnold Gesell, 1939-1950



Further reading by and about Arnold Gesell

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



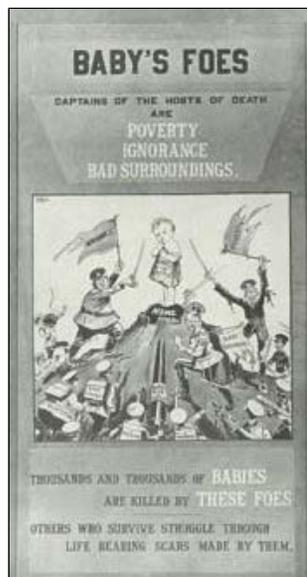
**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman

# The Adoption History Project


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## U.S. Children's Bureau

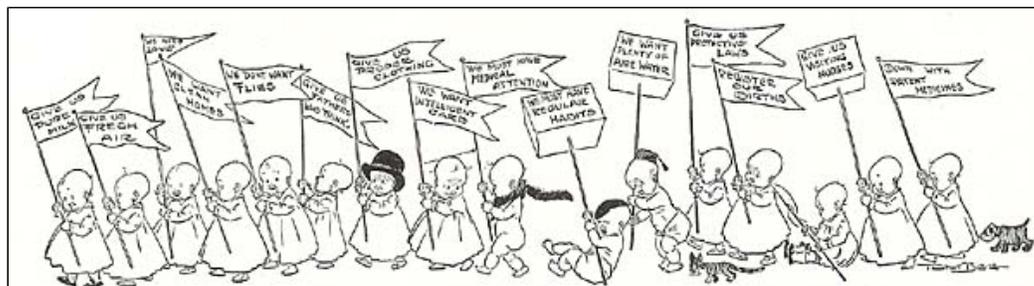


Large wall panels such as those above and below were regular features of [child welfare](#) exhibits sponsored by the U.S. Children's Bureau during its early years. As a method of popular education, they aimed to reach parents and citizens with messages about everything from the life-saving qualities of breast milk to the dangers of poverty, ignorance, and bad surroundings.

The U.S. Children's Bureau (USCB), was established by Congress in 1912 and is perhaps best known for its campaigns to reduce infant mortality and eradicate child labor. The first federal agency to be headed by a woman, Julia Lathrop, it was also the most important home in the federal government for advocates of adoption regulation. The USCB encouraged reforms in state adoption laws, disseminated original research, and sponsored conferences on child placement issues and priorities. The first major conference on child welfare standards, for example, took place in 1919 under USCB auspices. Its published summary included a resolution on desirable practices in child-placing and supervision drafted by Edmond Butler, Executive Secretary of New York's Catholic Home Bureau, the first Catholic agency to use family homes rather than congregate institutions. In adoption, as in many other issues related to American family life, [child welfare](#) was the paramount concern of the USCB. It worked closely with organizations like the [Child Welfare League of America](#) to extend the power of government and allied professionals over the adoption process. [Minimum standards](#) were a typical strategy.

The work done by the USCB on adoption was often galvanized by scandals related to [baby farming](#) and black market adoptions. USCB field agents documented deplorable conditions in maternity homes and orphanages and spearheaded investigations of placing-out and interstate traffic from the 1910s through the 1960s. Although the USCB itself provided no adoption services, thousands of adults seeking children wrote to the USCB in hopes of realizing their dreams. Each inquiry was answered promptly and respectfully; letter-writers were referred to local or state agencies whose staff and standards were deemed reliable. From its inception, the USCB worked to educate the public about the importance of regulating adoption. Pre-placement investigation, post-placement supervision, and lengthy probationary periods, according to the USCB, were the minimum standards necessary to safeguard children and adults and insure that adoptive families turned out well.

Today, the U.S. Children's Bureau is located in the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families.



Cartoons for baby-week, sponsored by the U.S. Children's Bureau, appeared in many newspapers. This one depicted babies asking for love, intelligent care, protective laws, birth registration, and "fathers who think," among other things.



## Document Excerpts

- [Rollin Lynder Hartt to Helen L. Sumner, May 10, 1915](#)
- [U.S. Children's Bureau Memo, "Investigation of Adoptions, etc." 1915](#)
- [Letters from Adults and Children to the U.S. Children's Bureau, 1918-1943](#)



[Further reading about the U.S. Children's Bureau](#)

## Links

- [U.S. Children's Bureau website](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Baby Farming



A child's life saved: before (above) and after (below) removal from a baby farm, 1917.



DESIRABLE home is available for boy of 7 or 8 with superior mentality and healthy heredity. Family consists of university graduates, and child would receive skillful attention in respect to health and education, including music if desirable, also college and professional training later. Neighborhood and general environment the best. Address Box 3,707, The Outlook, 331 Fourth Ave., New York City.

An official from the New Hampshire Children's Aid and Protective Society was alerted by this 1923 newspaper advertisement and contacted the [U.S. Children's Bureau](#).

The term "baby farming" was common in late nineteenth and early twentieth century cities but by 1920 or so most states had taken action against the commercial practices it suggested and the term was on the decline. It referred to [placing-out](#) infants for money as well as to their sale for profit. Many clients were unwed mothers, prostitutes, and destitute or deserted wives who needed help with their children while they worked for wages. Although most baby farming amounted to what we now call family day care, it developed a terrible reputation when exposes uncovered horrific abuses and horrible death traps. Stories about baby farming in newspapers and magazines were reported in lurid detail that called upon crude gender, racial, ethnic, and class stereotypes. These scandals helped to mobilize political support for child welfare regulation, including [minimum standards](#) such as state licensing, certification of child-placers, and investigation of foster homes.

Baby farming was condemned for being lethal, profitable, and at odds with [child welfare](#). At a time when public health reformers documented astronomical rates of infant mortality in poor, congested urban communities and congregate institutions, it came as no surprise that babies consigned to farms often died there, victims of epidemic disease and unsanitary conditions. The entrepreneurial side of baby farming was also used to vilify extreme forms of commercial adoption, in which babies were bought and sold like other commodities. Baby farmers sometimes profited on both ends of the adoption transaction, first extracting fees from desperate birth mothers and then demanding large sums from adopters. A survey by the Chicago Juvenile Protective Association reported that children were sold for up to \$100 in the 1910s, with a percentage down and the balance in installments. No questions were asked and children were frequently sent

out of state. One brash Chicago farmer even used the slogan: "It's cheaper and easier to buy a baby for \$100.00 than to have one of your own."

Maternity homes and lying-in hospitals where doctors and midwives worked as for-profit adoption brokers were, like baby farms, an important part of the commercial adoption scene. Newspaper advertising was the primary technique they used to reach potential customers and suppliers. "*For Adoption at Birth, Full Surrender, No Questions Asked.*" In several cities, early adoption reformers investigated adoption ads. Campaigns to eradicate the marketing strategies common in commercial adoption were a primary means of eradicating black market adoptions themselves.

## Document Excerpts

- [Arthur Alden Guild, "Baby Farms in Chicago," 1917](#)
- [U. S. Children's Bureau, Memo About Conditions at a Baby Farm, 1918](#)



[Further reading about Baby Farming](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman

# The Adoption History Project


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Child Welfare League of America

Originally located in New York, the CWLA moved to Washington, DC in 1985.

CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF AMERICA, INC.  
345 EAST 46TH STREET • NEW YORK 17, N. Y.  
TELEPHONE OXFORD 7-2960

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) has been, along with the [U.S. Children's Bureau](#), one of the most important players in the history of adoption regulation. It was founded in 1921 as a federation of approximately 70 service-providing organizations. Its first Director, C. C. Cars tens, was a well established national child welfare leader and opponent of institutional care for children.

In the vanguard of [social work](#) professionalism, the founders of the CWLA involved themselves in child-placing policy from the outset because they believed [child welfare](#) required definite standards in record keeping, personnel training, and financial management as well as placement practice. The new organization was dismayed by the absence of coordination in family-making and by the fact that just about anyone was allowed to do it. Work done on behalf of children outside their own homes, the CWLA charged in the 1920s, "ranges all the way from excellence to such a degree of inefficiency and malpractice as almost to justify legal prosecution."

In 1938, the CWLA issued its first set of [minimum standards](#) that distinguished between temporary and permanent placements. By the 1950s, several hundred CWLA members ranked adoptive and foster placements as a primary activity. The CWLA produced the most important empirical survey of adoption agency practice at mid century, including a landmark study of special needs adoptions. It organized a national conference on adoption in 1955 that brought together rank-and-file social workers, leading figures in many scientific fields, and the small but growing body of investigators whose research focused on adoption itself.

After 1955, the CWLA initiated a far more ambitious program of standardization, resulting in *Standards for Adoption Service* (1958). This publication was intended to guide social work practice and legal procedure on issues ranging from [matching to confidentiality and sealed records](#), while simultaneously raising public consciousness. Today, the CWLA counts more than 1100 organizational members

and has recently revised its adoption standards bible for the fifth time.

## Document Excerpts

- [Child Welfare League of America, Constitution, 1921](#)
- [Child Welfare League of America, "Adoptions: A Statement of the Problem," 1937](#)



[Further Reading about the Child Welfare League of America](#)

## Links

[Child Welfare League of America website](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Abraham Flexner, "Is Social Work a Profession?" 1915



Abraham Flexner, a well-known champion of reform in medical education, was also a keen observer of the social work profession.

Let me now review briefly the six criteria which we have mentioned; professions involve essentially intellectual operations with large individual responsibility; they derive their raw material from science and learning; this material they work up to a practical and definite end; they possess an educationally communicable technique; they tend to self-organization; they are becoming increasingly altruistic in motivation. . . .

Is social work a profession in the technical and strict sense of the term? The Bulletin of the New York School of Philanthropy under the title The Profession of Social Work makes the following explanation:

The School of Philanthropy is primarily a professional training school, of graduate rank, for civic and social work. The word *philanthropy* is to be understood in the broadest and deepest sense as including every kind of social work, whether under public or private auspices. By social work is meant any form of persistent and deliberate effort to improve living or working conditions in the community, or to relieve, diminish, or prevent distress, whether due to weakness of character or to pressure of external circumstances. All such efforts may be conceived as falling under the heads of charity, education, or justice, and the same action may sometimes appear as one or another according to the point of view.

The activities in these words are obviously intellectual, not mechanical, not routine in character. The worker must possess fine powers of analysis and discrimination, breadth and flexibility of sympathy, sound judgment, skill in utilizing whatever resources are available, facility in devising new combinations.

These operations are assuredly of intellectual quality. . . .

I have made the point that all the established and recognized professions have definite and specific ends: medicine, law, architecture, engineering—one can draw a clear line of demarcation about their respective fields. This is not true of social work. It appears not so much a definite field as an aspect of work in many fields. An aspect of medicine belongs to social work, as do certain aspects of law, education, architecture, etc. . . .

If social work fails to conform to some professional criteria, it very readily satisfies others. No question can be raised as to the source from which the social worker derives his material—it comes obviously from science and learning, from economics, ethics, religion and medicine; nor is there any doubt on the score of the rapid evolution of a professional self-consciousness, as these annual conferences abundantly testify. Finally, in the one respect in which most professions still fall short, social work is fairly on the same level as education, for the rewards of the social worker are in his own conscience and in heaven. His life is marked by devotion to impersonal ends and his own satisfaction is largely through the satisfactions procured by his efforts for others. . . .

But, after all, what matters most is professional spirit. All activities may be prosecuted in the genuine professional spirit. In so far as accepted professions are prosecuted at a mercenary or selfish level, law and medicine are ethically no better than trades. In so far as trades are honestly carried on, they tend to rise toward the professional level. Social work appeals strongly to the humanitarian and spiritual element. It holds out no inducement to the worldly—neither comfort, glory, nor money. The unselfish devotion of those who have chosen to give themselves to making the world a fitter place to live in can fill social work with the professional spirit and thus to some extent lift it above all the distinctions which I have been at such pains to make. In the long run, the first, main and indispensable criterion of a profession will be the possession of a professional spirit, and that test social work may, if it will, fully satisfy.

Source: Abraham Flexner, "Is Social Work a Profession?" (paper presented at the National Conference on Charities and Correction, 1915), 581, 584-588, 590.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman

# The Adoption History Project



[Timeline](#)   
 [People & Organizations](#)   
 [Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)   
 [Topics in Adoption History](#)   
 [Further Reading](#)   
 [Document Archives](#)   
 [Site Index](#)

## “Feeble-Minded” Children



Deborah Kallikak in 1912 at age twenty-two. An eight-year-old girl when she came to the Vineland Training School, Deborah became perhaps the most famous feeble-minded person, or “moron,” in the United States after Henry Herbert Goddard published *The Kallikak Family* (1912). Once considered scientific proof that mentality, morality, and criminality were all hereditary, the Kallikak story was thoroughly discredited by 1940.



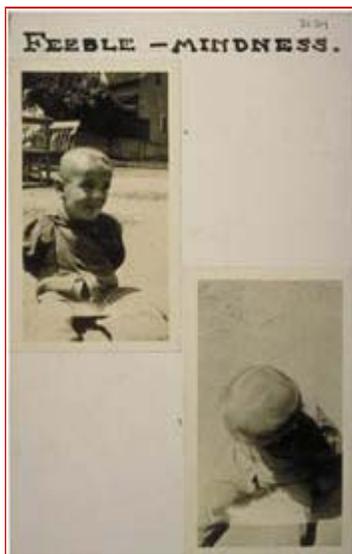
A picture of a “high grade moron” in front of a wagon he painted at Vineland Training School. The hyphen separating parts of the word “school” suggested his mental deficiency, but his work also illustrated that feeble-minded people could be trained to do productive work, much like normal individuals.

Americans have always worried that children available for adoption are defective. Before World War II, the **eugenics** movement openly promoted the view that children whose **birth parents** could not or would not care for them were likely to be genetic lemons, destined to reproduce a host of menacing social problems, from criminality and poverty to alcoholism and sexual immorality. According to the vocabulary of the day, many were “feeble-minded,” meaning mentally retarded or mentally deficient, a state that **illegitimate** children were especially prone to inheriting from their “feeble-minded” mothers. Early adoption field studies, like *Ida Parker's, Fit and Proper?*, confirmed that significant numbers of adoptions involved children whose hereditary unfitness was never discovered because **minimum standards** did not exist in law or were not enforced in practice.

Henry Herbert Goddard, Director of the Training School for Backward and Feeble-Minded Children in Vineland, New Jersey, was the single most prominent authority on “feeble-mindedness” during the early part of the century. Best known for introducing the term “moron” into the English language, he was outspoken about his opposition to adoption and his preference for institutionalization. “Normal” children were qualified for family life, according to his view. “Feeble-minded” children were not.

Many adults, however, were more than willing to discount heredity (or overlook it entirely) in their quest for children, especially infants. Even the era's social workers, who believed that natal families should be preserved and adoptions should be rare, were relatively more optimistic than Goddard about the credentials of available children.

Concern about mental retardation and deficiency was



A flash card used by eugenicists to illustrate that "feeble-mindedness" was a genetic defect.

widespread and long-lasting. They were visible in the mental tests that soon entered the adoption process. Goddard imported the French Binet Scale into the United States in 1908 and administered it first to the "feeble-minded" children in his own institution. The 1916 revision of this test, which popularized the Intelligence Quotient (or "I.Q."), gave adoption professionals a new and powerful technology. Mental and developmental tests should be used, they argued, for two important reasons. They could accurately distinguish adoptable from unadoptable children by detecting feeble-mindedness. And they could refine **matching** by pairing children and adults whose intellectual qualifications were similar. Mental resemblance was just as important in family-making as religious and racial resemblance.

Child welfare organizations like the New England Home for Little Wanderers and the New York State Charities Aid Association were in the vanguard on this issue. Their staff psychologists mounted testing programs, beginning in the 1910s and 1920s, to help determine which children were qualified for which family placements. Elaborate classification schemes for mental deviation were created—separating idiots from imbeciles and morons from dullards—in hopes that they would improve selection and placement techniques. Mental evaluation was considered so important to making adoption work that W.H. Slingerland, author of one of the first professional texts on family placement, issued the following warning in 1919. "To put a low grade mental defective in a family home where a normal child was expected is a social crime, once to be condoned because of ignorance, but now inexcusable in a well-ordered and progressive child-placing agency."

By the 1930s, new and improved methods were available for uncovering "feeble-mindedness." **Arnold Gesell** devised developmental scales that went beyond mentality to measure a number of other, related developmental norms. An assistant who worked Gesell's Yale clinic, **Margaret Cobb**, was one of the first researchers to explore the relationship between nature, nurture, and intelligence by studying children in need of family placement.

Efforts to expose "feeble-mindedness" assumed that potential parents did not want children who deviated from the mental average by falling below it. Was this true? In many cases, it probably was. But evidence also suggests that some adopters were willing and able to consider **special needs adoptions** long before professionals agreed that they might be flexible enough to love children who were something other than "normal."

## Document Excerpts

- Henry H. Goddard, "Wanted: A Child to Adopt," 1911
- Albert H. Stoneman, "Adoption of Illegitimate Children: The Peril of Ignorance," 1926
- The Case of Alice R., 1927
- W.H. Slingerland, *Child-Placing in Families*, 1919



[Further reading about "Feeble-Minded" Children](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

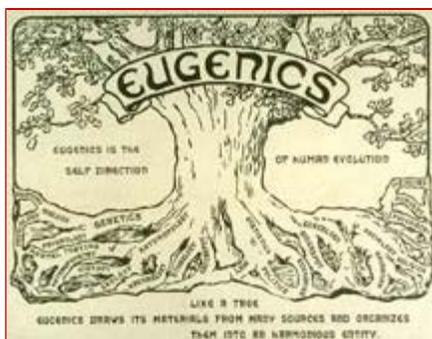
Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Eugenics



This image was frequently used by eugenics organizations. The text describes eugenics as “the self direction of evolution” and declares that “like a tree eugenics draws its materials from many sources and organizes them into a harmonious entity.” The tree’s roots include genealogy, biography, biology, mental testing, psychology, anthropology, and [statistics](#).



Pictured above are participants in the “fitter families” contest at the Georgia State Fair in 1924. Such contests were held all over the United States to educate the public about the importance of eugenics in decisions about reproduction and family-making. They originated in “better baby” contests during the 1910s.

Worries about the “bad blood” of children available for adoption were a prominent feature of the adoption landscape during the first four decades of the twentieth century. They help to explain why most child welfare professionals favored family preservation over adoption. At the time, a vigorous eugenics movement sought to control the reproduction of genetically inferior people through sterilization (called negative eugenics) and encourage the reproduction of genetically superior people (called positive eugenics). The movement drew support from Americans of all political persuasions. Henry Chapin, a famous pediatrician whose wife, Alice, founded one of the [first specialized adoption agencies](#), claimed that the divergent fertility rates of rich and poor were fueling the demand for adoptable babies because citizens with better genetic endowment were more likely to suffer from [infertility](#). For Chapin, eugenic factors always mattered in adoption. “Not babies merely, but better babies, are wanted.”

Fears about children’s quality or “stock” were shared by ordinary people as well as professionals and policy-makers. In 1928, one couple wrote to the [U.S. Children’s Bureau](#), “We are very anxious to adopt a baby but would like to get one that we know about its parentage. Are there any homes or orphanages where a person can find out whether there is insanity, fits, or other hereditary diseases in its ancestors? We would like to have one from Christian parentage.” In addition to religious preferences, specifications for gender, racial, ethnic, and national qualities in children illustrated popular ideas about heredity. Physical health, mental health, criminality, educability, sexual morality, intelligence, and temperament were all associated with blood.

Before 1940, eugenic concerns were expressed frequently

and bluntly. Henry Herbert Goddard, a national authority on “feeble-minded” children, insisted that compassion for needy children was shortsighted because adoption was “a crime against those yet unborn.” The eugenic threat adoption posed, according to Goddard, was directly tied to illegitimacy. Unmarried mothers were likely to be feeble-minded themselves and have feeble-minded children whose adoptions would contaminate the gene pool by reproducing future generations of defectives. Goddard advocated segregating these children and adults in benevolent institutions, where their dangerous sexuality could be contained.

Even professionals who believed in making adoption work believed that it was a “social crime” to place inferior children with parents who expected—and deserved—normal children. Agencies sometimes required parents to return children if and when abnormal characteristics appeared and laws, such as the [Minnesota Adoption Law of 1917](#), treated feeble-mindedness as cause for annulment. Medical writers in the popular press warned parents to “be careful whom you adopt.” Adopters faced frightening risks because children unlucky enough to need new parents were also unlucky enough to be genetic lemons.

Tragic stories of unregulated adoptions which ignored or overlooked the hard facts of bad heredity were publicized by reformers determined to institute [minimum standards](#) and protect couples from their own foolish desires to adopt newborns and infants. Professionals used mental tests and other assessment techniques to reveal hard-to-detect problems. Elaborate genealogies, extending well beyond parents to grandparents and other natal relatives, were considered evidence of thoroughness in child placement. Case records showed that many social workers expected anti-social behavior of all kinds to be passed intergenerationally from [birth parents](#) to children. [Nature-nurture studies](#) often reflected eugenic convictions about the heritability of intelligence and tried to establish scientifically the maximum tolerable gap between hereditary background and adoptive home.

Many people believe that eugenics disappeared in America after the specter of Nazism made eugenics synonymous with racism and genocide. While public discussion of taint and degeneration certainly decreased after World War II, blood and biology remained central themes in adoption history. Anxieties about miscegenation in [transracial adoptions](#) and [international adoptions](#), as well as strenuous efforts to make racial predictions and offer genetic

counseling in cases of mixed-race infants illustrate that eugenics did not disappear so much as change into a less aggressive, more polite form.

## Document Excerpts

- Henry H. Goddard, "Wanted: A Child to Adopt," 1911
- Albert H. Stoneman, "Adoption of Illegitimate Children: The Peril of Ignorance," 1926
- Ida Parker, *Fit and Proper?*, 1927
- Paul Popenoe, "The Foster Child," 1929
- Sheldon Reed and Esther B. Nordlie, "Genetic Counseling: For Children of Mixed Racial Ancestry," 1961



Further reading about Eugenics

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Minnesota Adoption Law, 1917

*Adoption; petition and consent.*—Any resident of the State may petition the district court of the county in which he resides for leave to adopt any child not his own. If the petitioner be married the spouse shall join in the petition. All petitions for the adoption of a child who is a ward or pupil of the State public school shall be made jointly by the person desiring to adopt such child and the superintendent of the State public school. . . .

*Investigation by board of control.*—Upon the filing of a petition for the adoption of a minor child the court shall notify the State board of control. It shall then be the duty of the board to verify the allegations of the petition, to investigate the condition and antecedents of the child for the purpose of ascertaining whether he is a proper subject for adoption, and to make appropriate inquiry to determine whether the proposed foster home is a suitable home for the child. The board shall as soon as practicable submit to the court a full report in writing, with a recommendation as to the granting of the petition and any other information regarding the child or the proposed home which the court shall require. No petition shall be granted until the child shall have lived for six months in the proposed home: *Provided, however,* That such investigation and period of residence may be waived by the court upon good cause shown, when satisfied that the proposed home and the child are suited to each other.

*Consent, when necessary.*—Except as herein provided, no adoption of a minor shall be permitted without the consent of his parents, but the consent of a parent who has abandoned the child, or who can not be found, or who is insane or otherwise incapacitated from giving such consent, or who has lost custody of the child through divorce proceedings or the order of a juvenile court, may be dispensed with, and consent may be given by the guardian, if there be one, or, if there be no guardian, by the State board of control. In case of illegitimacy, the consent of the mother alone shall suffice. In all cases where the child is over fourteen years old his own consent must be had also. . . .

*Decree; change of name.*—If upon the hearing the court shall be satisfied as to the identity and relationship of the persons concerned, and that the

petitioners are able to properly rear and educate the child, and that the petition should be granted, a decree shall be made and recorded in the office of the clerk, setting forth the facts and ordering that from the date thereof the child shall be the child of the petitioners. If desired, the court, in and by said decree, may change the name of the child.

*Status of adopted child.*—Upon adoption such child shall become the legal child of the persons adopting him, and they shall become his legal parents, with all the rights and duties between them of natural parents and legitimate child. By virtue of such adoption, he shall inherit from his adopting parents or their relatives the same as though he were the legitimate child of such parents, and shall not owe his natural parents or their relatives any legal duty; and in case of his death intestate the adopting parents and their relatives shall inherit his estate as if they had been his parents and relatives in fact.

*Annulment.*—If within five years after his adoption a child develops feeble-mindedness, epilepsy, insanity, or venereal infection as a result of conditions existing prior to the adoption, and of which the adopting parents had no knowledge or notice, a petition setting forth such facts may be filed with the court which entered the decree of adoption, and if such facts are proved the court may annul the adoption and commit the child to the guardianship of the State board of control. In every such proceeding it shall be the duty of the county attorney to represent the interests of the child.

*Records of adoption.*—The files and records of the court in adoption proceedings shall not be open to inspection or copy by other persons than the parties in interest and their attorneys and representatives of the State board of control, except upon an order of the court expressly permitting the same.

Source: U.S. Children's Bureau, *Adoption Laws in the United States: A Summary of the Development of Adoption Legislation and Significant Features of Adoption Statutes, With the Text of Selected Laws*, ed. Emelyn Foster Peck, Bureau Publication No. 148 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1925), 27-28.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:

**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact  
Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118



E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman

[Timeline](#)[People & Organizations](#)[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)[Topics in Adoption History](#)[Further Reading](#)[Document Archives](#)[Site Index](#)

## Home Studies

The term “home study” was not common until the mid-twentieth century, but investigations of potential foster and adoptive homes were hardly new in 1950. Children who rode the [orphan trains](#) in the nineteenth-century, or who were [placed-out](#) during the early years of the twentieth century, were supposed to be given to responsible adults who possessed adequate resources to care for them. At least in theory, child-placers were charged with insuring that families who took in children born to others had the money, food, and room—not to mention wisdom, patience, and love—to do the job.

The major finding of early adoption [field studies](#) was that home investigations were either not done well or not done at all. Progressive-era reformers were appalled by [baby farms](#) and other black-market adoptions that illustrated how children might be casually, cruelly, or commercially placed with just about anyone for just about any reason. They complained that sloppy and unregulated arrangements jeopardized [child welfare](#) and argued that states had a duty to the public to insure that placements were made according to [minimum standards](#), including the investigation of homes. In 1891, Michigan called on judges to “investigate” before entering final adoption decrees, but no state made such investigation mandatory until the [Minnesota Adoption Law of 1917](#) charged public authorities with making an “appropriate inquiry to determine whether the proposed foster home is a suitable home for the child.”

Between 1917 and midcentury, most states revised their laws to include such an inquiry. Enforcement was weak, however, and many states did not require that investigations take place [before](#) children were placed. This loophole made it considerably more difficult to remove children in undesirable placements because many of those children had already been living in their new homes for a long time. Judges who handled adoptions often found themselves in a no-win situation: severing attachments between children and their foster families was likely to compound problems caused by poor placements themselves.

The whole point of investigating homes was to predict, in advance, the

likelihood that any given child would find security and love and turn out well in the end. During the first several decades of the century, **social workers** made the novel argument that only trained and experienced professionals could make such predictions accurately. Yet most professional home investigations began by gathering facts that were readily visible to any attentive observer. Reports typically documented mothers' housekeeping and cooking skills, water supply, refrigeration, heating, and distance to church and school. Investigators asked if foster children would be expected to work and if they would have rooms of their own.

The moral qualifications of prospective **foster parents** were evaluated by inquiring about the regularity of church attendance, steadiness of work, sobriety, reputation, and the well-being of any children ("own" or foster) already living in the home. Questions about income, property, and literacy were also routine, giving rise to widespread suspicions—still prevalent today—that adoption, which regularly transferred children from poor to middle-class homes, was hopelessly corrupted by class and cultural biases. Whatever one's view, the home study illustrates one of the impossible balancing acts that adoption has performed over time: weighing the obvious advantage of belonging to a family blessed by wealth and educational privilege against the belief that child welfare should never be calculated in dollars and cents.

Child-placers during the Progressive era did not begin or end their investigations by running white gloves over windowsills. They also believed that home investigations should explore the intangible qualities that made the difference between happy and unhappy homes. Were parents kind? Were their expectations of children reasonable? Would they be able to see things from the child's point of view? These questions were as consequential for children as they were tricky to answer with certainty. One solution to this problem, frequently mentioned in child-placing manuals, was to obtain independent character references from neighbors and community leaders. Why? Child-placers realized that foster parents could misrepresent themselves and deceive investigators bent on uncovering the facts.

The transition from home investigations to home studies marked the spread of therapeutic approaches that emphasized psychological interpretation over empirical documentation in the investigation process. During the post-World War II era, home studies were protracted probes of parental worthiness in which personality profiles ranked equally with financial stability and physical health and in which **matching** aspired to both physical resemblance and temperamental compatibility. In a major national study of adoption practice at midcentury, for example, agencies reported that their investigations concentrated on such qualities as personal adjustment, happy marriages, congenial relationships with family and friends, ability to love a child, and resolution of the grief that accompanied childlessness. Applicants were asked about their families of

origin, their "sexual adjustment," and their reasons for wanting to adopt. The motivation of **infertile** couples became an especially sensitive issue in the adoption process.

Over time, adoption investigations became complex helping operations. The goal was not simply to accept or reject applicants on the basis of fixed standards, but to evaluate the strengths and weakness of their not-yet-realized parental capacity. Professionals influenced by **Freudian psychology** believed that people interested in adopting were, more often than not, unaware of their own motivations and unable to determine for themselves if they were emotionally ready for parenthood. The sincerest and most enthusiastic couples might be fooling themselves and never know it, whereas couples who expressed ambivalence might be perfectly suited to the task of raising adopted children. In either case, home studies aimed to reveal a truth deeper than words.

The most common explanation for the growing psychological emphasis in home studies was simple: supply and demand. Adoption was influenced by market forces, so couples were more frequently "screened out" when demand was high. Popular journalistic coverage of the "baby shortage" began as early as the 1930s and **adoption statistics** occasionally confirmed that applicants did sometimes dramatically outnumber available babies. According to this view, increasing competition allowed agencies to impose different, more selective standards for healthy white infants. After 1945, concerns about the different, less selective (and therefore discriminatory) standards used to place **African-American**, mixed-race, and other hard-to-place children also supported this view. Today's rhetoric about "screening in" adopters of children with **special needs** has led to a similar conclusion. When it comes to hard-to-place children, prospective parents are welcomed as "partners" and "allies" rather than scrutinized as subjects.

Home studies have had as many critics as defenders because their timing, duration, and results have been extremely unpredictable. Individuals and couples interested in adopting also wondered, reasonably enough, why they had to subject themselves to evaluations that most parents would find not only uncomfortable intrusions, but intolerable violations of their reproductive freedom. Recognizing, however, that agencies had the authority to give or withhold the children they sought, many adoption applicants resigned themselves to a family-making process in which professionals played God. Sometimes they complained about being put in a "fish bowl" or subverted the home study process by sharing with others what they had learned about the qualities social workers preferred, implying that the entire procedure was nothing but a hypocritical game in which theatrical skill and the "right answers" mattered more than good intentions or truth. Others simply decided to live without children or turned to independent adoptions, which tended to treat would-be parents as generous people with something to offer rather than clients whose motivations required strict scrutiny.

The rationale for regulating adoption legally and socially—as well as the

considerable difficulty of doing so—is apparent in the history of home studies. States believed that investigation was necessary to make families in which children would be reliably loved and protected, and in which belonging without blood would be authentic belonging nonetheless. Yet states never gave agencies a monopoly over adoption. (Only Delaware in 1952 and Connecticut in 1957 banned non-agency adoptions, and because it was so easy to cross state lines to adopt, these were largely symbolic acts.) The result was that the agency professionals most dedicated to home studies always had to compete with more flexible, less strenuous arrangements. Changing investigatory fashions reflected trends in **social work**, in the world of **child welfare**, and in the broader culture and economy. What was being tested and why may have changed, but at the heart of the modern home study was an enduring belief. Because kinship without blood was fragile and risky, systematic inquiry and interpretation were needed in order for it to succeed.

## Document Excerpts

- [Children's Home Society of Florida, Home Investigation Report Form, 1910s](#)
- [New York State Charities Aid Association, Records of Foster Home Investigations, 1910s](#)
- [Dorothy Hutchinson, "Factors to Consider in Family Study," late 1940s](#)
- [Two Adoption Home Studies, 1949 and 1950](#)
- [Helen Fradkin, "Outline for Adoption Studies," 1954](#)
- [Louise Wise Services, Different Eligibility Requirements for Different Children, 1961](#)
- [Child Welfare League of America, Rating Sheet for Prospective Parents, 1962](#)
- [Rael Jean Isaac, "What the Agency Looks For," 1965](#)
- [National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, "The Adoption Home Study Process," 2004](#)



[Further reading about Home Studies](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
 Site designed by:



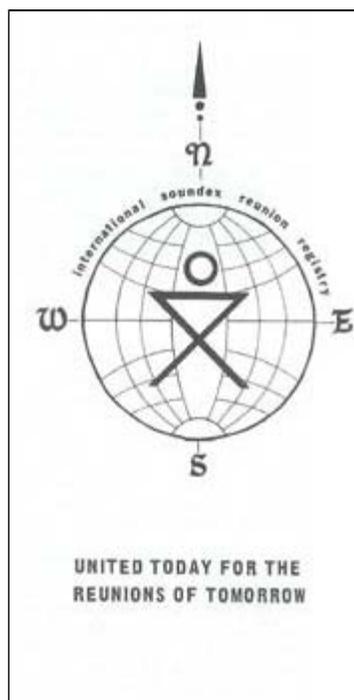
**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
 Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
 (541) 346-3118  
 E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
 © Ellen Herman

.



## Confidentiality and Sealed Records



The International Soundex Reunion Registry was founded in 1975 by Emma May Vilardi of Carson City, Nevada. Through voluntary registration, members of birth families separated by adoption might locate one another years later. As a practical matter, this innovation challenged policies of confidentiality and sealed records only in cases where all the parties were actively seeking to locate one another. But the registry also helped to normalize **search and reunion**, advancing the general cause of adoption reform.

The fact that adoption information has been both highly regulated and extremely controversial is one of the hallmarks of modern adoption. At first sketchy and incomplete, data contained in the adoption records of early twentieth-century courts and agencies was available to anyone curious enough to search it out. The same was true of uniform birth records, which were products of state efforts to standardize birth registration during the first third of the twentieth century.

In 1917, the **Minnesota adoption law** was revised to mandate confidential records, and between the world wars, most states in the country followed suit. Confidential records placed information off limits to nosy members of the public but kept it accessible to the children and adults directly involved in adoption, who were called the “parties in interest.”

Confidentiality was advocated by professionals and policy-makers determined to establish **minimum standards** in adoption, decrease the stigma associated with **illegitimacy**, and make **child welfare** the governing rule in placement decisions. In practice, confidentiality placed a premium on adoptions arranged anonymously, without any identifying contact between natal and adoptive parents. Confidentiality also meant that when courts issued adoption decrees, states produced new birth certificates, listing adopters’ names, and sealed away the originals, which contained the names of **birth parents**, or at least birth mothers.

Many adopters, especially those whose **infertility** made them long for exclusive parent-child ties, surely preferred anonymity as well. Confidentiality made it possible for some of these parents to avoid **telling** their children that they were adopted at all. The relatives of many unmarried birth mothers also favored confidentiality. Especially during the postwar baby boom, when more out-of-wedlock births occurred in middle-class families than had been the case earlier in the century, mortified parents

argued that their daughters should have a second chance to lead normal, married lives. Maternity homes proliferated to shield non-marital pregnancies from public view and helped to make adoption a topic of embarrassment and shame.

Anonymity and new birth certificates were both consistent with **matching**, which set out to make new families “as if” they had been made naturally. Confidentiality was converted into secrecy only after World War II. Secrecy meant that even adult adoptees, to their great surprise and frustration, could not obtain information about their births and backgrounds. The intentions behind confidentiality were benevolent, but sealed records created an oppressive adoption closet.

Even though sealed records were recent inventions, rather than enduring features of adoption history, they were largely responsible for the adoption reform movement that gathered steam in the 1970s. New York housewife Florence Fisher set out to find her birth mother and inspired adoptees around the country when she founded the Adoptees’ Liberty Movement Association, a pioneering reform organization that called sealed records “an affront to human dignity.” At the time, few adoption activists realized the newness of the policies they sought to overturn by opening sealed records, facilitating **search and reunion**, and advocating open adoption. Records activism attracted great sympathy but achieved relatively few practical victories and sealed records continue to provoke heated controversy today. Many states have established mutual consent registries, which aim for compromise between the rights of adult adoptees to obtain birth information and the assurance that many birth mothers were given that their identities would remain confidential. Sealed records are also the target of militant activism by such groups as **Bastard Nation**, which succeeded in passing **Ballot Measure 58**, an open records law, in the state of Oregon in 1998.

Until 1945, however, most members of adoptive families in the United States had perfectly legal access to birth certificates and adoption-related court documents and most agencies acted as passive registries through which separated relatives might locate one another. Disclosure—not secrecy—has been the historical norm in adoption.

## Document Excerpts

- [Minnesota Adoption Law, 1917](#)
- [A World War II Soldier Seeks Information About His Background, 1943](#)

- U.S. Children's Bureau, "The Confidential Nature of Birth Records," 1949
- Child Welfare League of America, "Proposal for Analysis of the Sealed Adoption Record Issue," 1973
- *ALMA et al v. Lefkowitz et al*, 1977
- National Committee for Adoption, "About Adoption and Privacy of Records," 1982
- Oregon Ballot Measure 58, 1998
- Bastard Nation, "Open Records: Why It's an Issue," 1999
- National Council for Adoption, "Protecting the Option of Privacy in Adoption"



Further reading about Confidentiality and Sealed Records

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

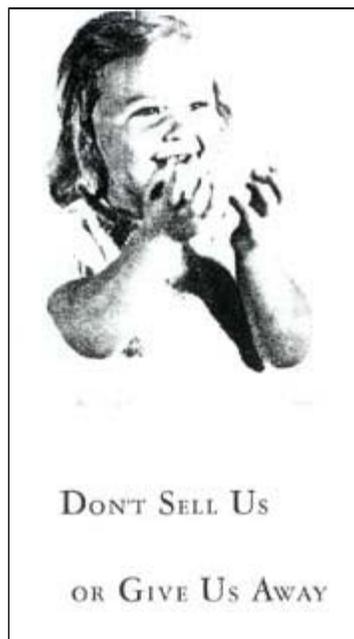
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Minimum Standards



From a [Child Welfare League of America](#) brochure on the importance of minimum standards, 1938



This illustration from a World War II-era brochure explained why adoptions arranged without minimum standards would result in heartache and tragedy. "I am an

For most of the twentieth century, "standards" and "safeguards" were interchangeable terms for adoption reformers. They believed that adoption was an urgent social problem in need of greatly expanded public regulation. The state's responsibility to protect **child welfare** was the animating principle behind minimum standards. Once legislated and enforced, these basic legal rules and social procedures would limit risk by constraining adoptions based purely on money or sentiment. Standards would require that placements be approved (if not actually arranged) by **social work** professionals operating in agencies rather than by **baby farmers** or other amateurs who specialized in independent (or private) adoptions. The most vigorous advocates of minimum standards were concentrated in the **U.S. Children's Bureau** and the **Child Welfare League of America**.

The standards they had in mind involved certification of child-placers, investigation of the child and adult parties to adoption, and supervision of new families after placement and before finalization. In 1917, **Minnesota** passed the first state law mandating that children's adoptability and prospective parents' suitability be investigated before adoption decrees were granted. Two decades later, more than twenty states had translated similar standards into law. By midcentury, virtually all states in the country required individual and organizational child-placers to be licensed and the vast majority had new or revised adoption statutes on the books echoing reformers' constant refrain: investigate and supervise. New record-keeping protocols included comprehensiveness, consistency, and **confidentiality and sealed records**. When **Minnesota** legislated adoption investigations, it was also the first state to seal adoption records.

Because early **field studies** revealed that many courts

adopted child, but I am not a happy child," this unwanted baby explained. Placed by a well-meaning but untrained physician in order to avoid agency "red tape," this baby ended up with the wrong parents, cruelly denied the "real home and family" that was the promise of adoption.

handled adoption petitions casually and legal requirements, where they existed, were often ignored, minimum standards were considered the most feasible path toward improvement. Typical early statements argued that unregulated **placing-out** was full of error and catastrophe. "Unless carried out in accordance with approved standards," declared Edmond Butler, Executive Secretary of New York's Catholic Home Bureau, child placing would add to the "thousands of human wrecks" already seeking public charity and "be responsible for destroying the future welfare of very many if not most of those intended to be helped."

Minimum standards were formulated in positive as well as negative terms. **Birth parents** should be beyond rehabilitation, children should be "normal," and adopters should be "industrious and thrifty," of the same religion as the child, and not too "advanced in years." Adopters were presumed to be married couples—and many surely were—but no rigid codes excluded **singles** from consideration. Religion was the only factor singled out for **matching** by adoption laws passed or revised in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Minimum standards helped to modernize adoption by subjecting family-formation to new forms of bureaucratic control and professional oversight. By turning helping practices into calculable operations, for instance, they enhanced the role of scientific authority in the adoption process. Standardizing the way families came into being was both the premise and the purpose of **outcome studies** and other ambitious enterprises in adoption knowledge.

## Document Excerpts

- [Minnesota Adoption Law, 1917](#)
- [Edmond J. Butler, "Standards of Child Placing and Supervision," 1919](#)
- [Child Welfare League of America, "Minimum Safeguards in Adoption," 1938](#)
- [Child Welfare League of America, \*Standards for Adoption Service\*, 1958](#)



[Further reading about Minimum Standards](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Jessie Taft (1882-1960)



Jessie Taft, Virginia Robinson, and their two adopted children, Everett and Martha, in 1923



Jessie Taft in 1912 or 1913

Jessie Taft was a prominent early national authority on child placement, an advocate for adoption professionalization, and a prophet of therapeutic adoption. Born in rural Iowa in 1882, Taft was one of very few American women to pursue doctoral studies in the early twentieth century. She graduated in 1913 from the University of Chicago with a Ph.D. in philosophy and a strong taste for social psychology. Because the male-dominated academic world she loved was closed to her, Taft made her way in the more hospitable women's world of **social work**. For two decades, she worked in child and family services before finally joining the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work in 1934.

Taft's career took her from the New York State Charities Aid Association to the Children's Aid Society of Pennsylvania. She was a leader of the movement to modernize adoption through **minimum standards**, mental and developmental tests, skilled supervision, and empirical research such as **field studies** and **outcome studies**. She knew **Sophie van Senden Theis**, and Theis encouraged Taft and her life-partner, Virginia Robinson (also an important figure in **social work** and **child welfare**), to take the risk of adopting themselves. The couple raised two children together, Everett and Martha, in Flourtown, Pennsylvania, where they belonged to a tight-knit community of like-minded professional women. A number of these friends also adopted children, deliberately bought homes in close proximity, spent holidays together, and provided one another with lifelong mutual aid.

Taft is known today, if she is known at all, as the translator, biographer, and leading American exponent of renegade Viennese psychoanalyst Otto Rank. Taft met him in 1924, entered analysis with him in 1926, and eventually



Jessie Taft in 1959



Martha Taft (middle) with Yvonne Patterson (left) and Bobby Ueland (right), early 1920s. Yvonne and Bobby were children adopted by Elsa Ueland and Kate Tucker, another female couple involved in the world of child welfare.

arranged for Rank's immigration to the United States and his employment at the University of Pennsylvania. Taft was largely responsible for Rank's fame in America, but deserves to be remembered for her own remarkable accomplishments. Until her death in 1960, Taft's work was located in between the male world of social science and the female world of help. Psychological sophistication, she believed, was the thread linking objectivity and subjectivity, knowledge and need.

The concepts that guided Taft's thinking about adoption were basic elements of therapeutic culture: personality, adjustment, normal and abnormal. "For the child-placing agency," Taft pointed out in 1919, "*all children are abnormal* in the sense that no child is so simple that it is not worth while to become intimately acquainted with his personality." Children needed scrutiny and understanding for adoption to turn out well. So did their **birth parents** and the adopters who volunteered to take them in. The first principle of therapeutic adoption was that everyone involved needed help to make it work, whether they knew it or not.

As a major theorist of professional help, Taft explored the difficulties of helping roles and the possibilities of helping relationships. Therapeutic interpretation and intervention were the antithesis of blame, Taft believed. She urged her colleagues to abandon moralistic notions about **illegitimacy** and outdated anxieties about "**feeble-minded**" children. All the people involved in adoption deserved to be active participants in the placement process. Even babies and very young children could become agents of their own growth rather than victims, if only given the chance.

Taft believed that adoption could bring love and belonging as well as pain and separation. But adoptive kinship would always substitute for natural kinship, based on blood. "We feel very much like a family," wrote Taft to a colleague in 1923, after five-year-old Martha arrived in her family, "and some times wonder whether we are going to live through it." "No one who is not willfully deluded would maintain that the experiences of adoption can take the place of the actual bearing and rearing of an own child," she added in 1929. Throughout its modern history, fervent advocates of adoption believed that professional management could and

should make adoption safer and happier. But even reformers like Taft conceded that adoption was different. It was not as real as the real thing.

## Document Excerpts

- Jessie Taft, "The Woman Movement from the Point of View of Social Consciousness," 1916
- Jessie Taft, "Relation of Personality Study to Child Placing," 1919
- Jessie Taft, Children's Aid Society of Pennsylvania, Annual Report, 1921
- Jessie Taft, "Early Conditioning of Personality in the Pre-School Child," 1925
- Jessie Taft, "The Re-Education of a Psychoneurotic Girl," 1925



Further reading by and about Jessie Taft

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Jessie Taft, "Relation of Personality Study to Child Placing," 1919



Jessie Taft, Virginia Robinson, and their two adopted children, Everett and Martha, in Royal Arch, New Hampshire, 1923

There was a time, not very long ago, a time which continues into the present in many communities in this country, when the only problem of placing a friendless child was that of finding someone, anyone, to take it. Any town official or group of city fathers would be competent to decide that the Jones family, being respectable and God-fearing, were just the people to bring up Mary Brown and that Mary was a lucky girl to find such a home. Or, if there were an orphan asylum available, Mary's fate would be settled even more simply.

### *Evolution of Standards in Child Care*

Today our organized child-placing agencies look back upon such methods as upon the dark ages. They know that only the trained worker is competent to place a child, they recognize the necessity of family history if it can be obtained, of physical examination and correction of physical handicaps before placement. They stand for adequate investigation of the foster home and a supervision of the child in that home after placement. The most advanced of the child-caring agencies also undertake to deal with the question of possible mental defect by requiring mental tests for all children or for any who are in the least doubtful. . . .

We have gotten to the point of trying to know something about the dependent child's heredity and we insist on a history and study of his physical condition as far as possible. Is it too much to ask, no matter how many children we have to place, that we know something intimate, personal and specific about the child himself? Is there any use in pretending to do intelligent child-placing unless we do know our children first? Surely, at best, the removal of any child from the family on which he has

depended and by which he has been formed, into strange medium to which he must adapt as best he may, is the most experimental and delicate of tasks. Can we hope to approach anything like a scientific attitude towards child-placing while we remain in ignorance of the most important condition of the experiment, the personality of the child who is placed?

I am sure no one here would oppose such a proposition and yet I doubt whether many of us are taking any systematic steps to study the intellectual, emotional and instinctive make-up of the children we place. We would like to, but we think we haven't time and we think it takes a psychologist or a psychiatrist. It does take time—but no more time than the unknown child consumes in the trial and error method of placing where success is more or less of an accident and may come only after many placements. Then there would be the tremendous saving of having one approach and one system for all kinds of children which would eliminate the need of special machinery except for the very abnormal child. . . .

*Objectives*

Finally, to get the most out of such a study you need to set yourself certain tasks, you must aim to find out certain things about every child and then get it down in written form so that the record gives a vivid but accurate impression of the child as he appeared at that time. In the little day school organized on the play school plan which Seybert Institution operates for the purpose of making just such personality studies of the children in the Temporary Shelter in Philadelphia, the teachers are asked to keep in mind certain points in observing the children. Their general aim is to see how the child is using his troublesome behavior as a form of adjustment, to what he is adjusting by that means, and how he can be led to a more happy and successful method of adapting. The following outline is suggestive of what they try to discover.

1. Child's adjustment to other people

|           |                 |              |
|-----------|-----------------|--------------|
|           | Affectionate    |              |
| In work   | Sociable        | Opposite sex |
| In play   | Solitary        | Children     |
| Generally | Individualistic | Adults       |
|           | Leader, etc.    |              |

|  |         |  |
|--|---------|--|
|  | Hostile |  |
|--|---------|--|

2. Child's way of meeting a difficult or problematic situation.

|                     |                          |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| In work             | Persistence              |
| In play             | Giving up quickly        |
| In social relations | Temper                   |
|                     | Sullenness               |
|                     | Indifference             |
|                     | Change of Activity, etc. |
|                     | Evasion                  |

3. What are his interests or aversions?

4. What can he do well? What does he do badly?

5. How does he work?

Manual

Book work, etc.

Organized Play

6. Can he learn? Does he follow directions?

7. Does he show any unusual or marked emotional reactions and under what circumstances?

8. Has he any marked peculiarities of behavior, such as taking things, story-telling, any nervous habit, any sex habit? . . . .

The self is a very complex, elusive, changing phenomenon and we should approach it with an humble spirit, an open mind and a desire not so much to judge as to understand.

Source: Jessie Taft, "Relation of Personality Study to Child Placing" (paper presented at the National Conference of Social Work, 1919), 63-67.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman

[Timeline](#)[People & Organizations](#)[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)[Topics in Adoption History](#)[Further Reading](#)[Document Archives](#)[Site Index](#)

## Field Studies

Field studies conducted in several states during the 1910s and 1920s were the first real empirical investigations of adoption in the United States. They aimed to gather basic **statistical data** on how many and what types of adoptions were occurring, drawing primarily on agency and court records. How many adoptions were there? At what age were children adopted? By whom? Who arranged adoptions? Field studies had two main purposes: to determine whether states' regulatory requirements were adequate and to discover whether those requirements were being followed or ignored. Field studies did not contact families after adoption decrees were issued or follow up on children later in life, as **outcome studies** did. What they did was link **child welfare** and the promise of safety in the adoption process to policies promoting extensive regulation by professionals, agencies, and courts.

### Chronological List of Field Studies

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 1921 | U.S. Children's Bureau, <i>Illegitimacy as a Child-Welfare Problem, Part 2: A Study of Original Records in the City of Boston and in the State of Massachusetts</i> , eds. Emma O. Lundberg and Katharine F. Lenroot, Dependent, Defective, and Delinquent Classes Series No. 10, Bureau Publication No. 75 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1921), chap. 3. |
| 1925 | <b>Helen Lucile Pearson</b> , "Child Adoption in Indiana" (M.A. thesis, Indiana University, 1925).   |
| 1925 | <b>Neva R. Deardorff</b> , <i>The Children's Commission of Pennsylvania Studies Adoption, 1925</i> , from "The Welfare of the Said Child..." <i>Survey Midmonthly</i> 53 (January 15, 1925): 457-460.  |
| 1926 | Neva R. Deardorff, "Scrutinizing Adoption," <i>Catholic Charities Review</i> 10, no. 1 (January 1926): 3-8.  |
| 1926 | Lawrence C. Cole, "A Study of Adoptions in Cuyahoga County," <i>The Family</i> (1926): 259-264.  |
| 1927 | <b>Ida R. Parker</b> , <i>Fit and Proper?: A Study of Legal Adoption in Massachusetts</i> (Boston:   |

Church Home Society, 1927).

1928

Elinor Nims, *The Illinois Adoption Law and Its Administration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928).

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012

Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Child Welfare League of America, Constitution, 1921

*Adopted June, 1921*

---

### **Article I The Name**

The name of this organization shall be Child Welfare League of America.

### **Article II Purpose**

The Purpose of this League is to secure the following results:

1. The better understanding of child welfare problems.
2. The formulation and improvement of standards and methods of the different forms of work with children.
3. The making available for all of its members the assured results of successful effort in any part of the field.
4. The development of inter-society service.

### **Article III Membership**

Section 1. All societies which were members of the Child Welfare League of America, formerly the Bureau for Exchange of Information, at the time of the adoption of this constitution, are hereby declared members of the League.

Section 2. Any organization operating in the field of child welfare may become a member of the Child Welfare League of America upon the affirmative vote of a majority of the Executive Committee of the League.

Section 3. Other agencies not distinctly in the children's field but who desire to obtain service from the League in the field of child welfare may become associate members on approval by the Executive Committee and on payment of a fee to be determined by that Committee but without the privilege of voting.

Section 4. The Executive Committee shall be authorized to prescribe the conditions of membership in the League.

Section 5. A member may be dismissed upon the recommendation of the Executive Committee by a majority vote of members present and voting at

any regular meeting of the League.

#### **Article IV Officers and Executive Committee**

Section 1. The officers of the League shall be a president, a vice-president, a secretary and a treasurer, to be elected by ballot at the annual meeting.

Section 2. There shall be an executive meeting of eighteen members, of whom at least six shall not be staff members of any of the constituent organizations. The first year there shall be elected eighteen members, six for a term of three years, six for a term of two years, and six for a term of one year; and thereafter six members shall be elected each year for a term of three years. If not members by election, the president, secretary and treasurer shall be members ex-officio of the executive committee. The president and secretary shall act as chairman and secretary, respectively, of this committee. Seven members shall constitute a quorum. Vacancies may be filled for unexpired terms by the executive committee.

#### **Article V Business**

Section 1. Members may appoint two voting delegates, one of whom shall be the chief executive of the agency, but other representative members of agencies may attend all meetings of the League and have all privileges except to vote.

#### **Article VI Meetings**

Section 1. The Annual Meeting of the League shall be held at the time and place of the annual meeting of the National Conference of Social Work. Additional meetings, including regional meetings, may be called by the president of the League, or upon vote of the executive committee. Upon written request of ten or more member agencies, such meetings shall be called by the president.

Section 2. Meetings of the executive committee may be called by the chairman or the secretary, and upon written request of seven members thereof shall be called by the chairman.

#### **Article VII Duties of the Executive Committee**

All questions of policy shall be submitted to the executive committee for consideration and report before final action is taken by the League. The executive committee shall from time to time make recommendations to the League for its development, and shall at all times carry out the directions of the League. Between meetings of the League the executive committee shall have power to make decisions of policy which shall be subject to review at the next meeting of the League, and shall have power to make by-laws not in conflict with the constitution.

#### **Article VIII Executive Officer and Staff**

Section 1. There shall be an executive officer who shall be called Director, to be elected by the executive committee without term.

Section 2. There shall be such additional employees as shall be determined by the executive committee, to be elected by the executive committee on nomination of the Director, and subject to dismissal by the Director at his

discretion.

Section 3. The executive committee shall determine the salary of the Director and of all other employees.

#### **Article IX Finances**

Section 1. There shall be a membership fee of ten dollars a year.

Section 2. Contributions from individuals and societies and grants from organizations may be received for carrying out the general purposes of the League or for carrying out special activities which may be in harmony with these purposes.

Section 3. The treasurer shall be bonded at the expense of the League in a sum to be fixed by the executive committee. He shall pay bills only when certified by the Director and approved by the chairman of the executive committee, unless otherwise ordered by the executive committee. He shall render his annual report which shall have been audited by a certified public accountant appointed by the executive committee to a meeting of the executive committee prior to the annual meeting of the League.

#### **Article X Amendments**

Amendments to the constitution may be made by an affirmative vote of two-thirds present and voting at any meeting of the League, provided a copy of the proposed amendment has been included in the call for the meeting.

Source: Child Welfare League of America, "Constitution of the Child Welfare League of America," 1921, Child Welfare League of America Papers, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Nature-Nurture Studies

Nature-nurture studies utilized adoption data to answer basic scientific questions about how and why human beings turn out as they do and where individual differences originate.

Because non-relative adoptions separated parental genes (nature) from family environment (nurture), adoption amounted to the sort of scientific experiment that could not otherwise be ethically conducted with human beings. Nature-nurture studies were designed by developmental psychologists and other researchers in the human sciences to reveal the relative power of heredity and home in intellectual and psychological development. In this sense, nature-nurture studies are different than [field studies](#) and [outcome studies](#), which were conducted mainly by [social work](#) researchers interested in using empirical data to refine future adoption practice and policy. But like these other kinds of adoption studies, nature-nurture science reinforced the belief that producing knowledge and protecting children were mutually reinforcing.

Researchers whose initial interest in adoption was abstract and theoretical often found themselves confronting very practical questions from parents and professionals. Did nature-nurture science support or contradict the placement of newborns and infants in adoptive homes? Should children with shameful or unknown natal backgrounds be placed for adoption? What did nature-nurture studies suggest about [matching](#) children and adults?

### Chronological List of Nature-Nurture Studies

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 1922 | <a href="#">Margaret Evertson Cobb</a> , "The Mentality of Dependent Children," <i>Journal of Delinquency</i> 7 (May 1922):132-140.  |
| 1927 | Barbara Stoddard Burks, "Foster Parent-Foster Child Comparisons as Evidence Upon The Nature-Nurture Problem," <i>Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences</i> 13, no. 12 (December 15, 1927):846-848. |
| 1928 | Barbara Stoddard Burks, "The Relative Influence of Nature and Nurture Upon   |

- Mental Development; A Comparative Study of Foster Parent-Foster child Resemblance and True Parent-True Child Resemblance," *27th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, part 1 (1928):219-316.
- 1928 Frank Nugent Freeman et. al., "The Influence of Environment on the Intelligence, School Achievement, and Conduct of Foster Children," *27th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, part 1 (1928):103-217.
- 1929 Frank N. Freeman, "An Investigation of the Intelligence of Foster Children," *Social Service Review* 3 (1929): 30-34.
- 1932 Alice Leahy, "A Study of Certain Selective Factors Influencing Prediction of the Mental Status of Adoptive Children, or Adopted Children in Nature-Nurture Research," *Pedagogical Seminary and Journal of Genetic Psychology* 41 (December 1932): 294-329.
- 1932 Dorothy K. Hallowell, "Stability of Mental Test Ratings for Preschool Children," *Pedagogical Seminary and Journal of Genetic Psychology* 40 (1932): 406-420.
- 1933 Alice Leahy, "Some Characteristics of Adoptive Parents," *American Journal of Sociology* 38 (January 1933):548-563.
- 1933 Donah B. Lithauer and Otto Klineberg, "A Study of the Variation in IQ of a Group of Dependent Children in Institution and Foster Home," *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 42, no. 1 (March 1933): 236-242.
- 1935 Alice M. Leahy, "Nature-Nurture and Intelligence," *Genetic Psychology Monographs* 17, no. 4 (August 1935):235-308.
- 1935 Alice M. Leahy, "A Study of Adopted Children as a Method of Investigating Nature-Nurture," *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 30 (March 1935): 281-287.
- 1936 Harold M. Skeels, "The Relation of the Foster Home Environment to the Mental Development of Children Placed in Infancy," *Child Development* 7, no. 1 (March 1936): 1-5.
- 1937 Emmett L. Schott, "IQ Changes in Foster Home Children," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 21 (1937): 107-112.
- 1937 Alice Leahy Shea, "Family Background and the Placement of Illegitimate Children," *American Journal of Sociology* 93, no. 1 (July 1937): 103-104.
- 1938 Donald Snygg, "The Relation Between Intelligence of Mothers and Their Children Living in Foster Homes," *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 52 (1938):401-406.
- 1938 Marie Skodak, "The Mental Development of Adopted Children Whose True Mothers are Feeble-Minded," *Child Development* 9, no. 3 (September 1938): 303-308.
- 1939 Harold M. Skeels, "Mental Development of Children in Foster Homes," *Journal of Consulting Psychology* 2, no. 2 (March-April 1939): 33-43.
- 1939 Harold M. Skeels and Harold B. Dye, "A Study of the Effects of Differential Stimulation on Mentally Retarded Children," *Proceedings and Addresses of the*

- American Association on Mental Deficiency* 44 (1939):114-136.
- 1939 Marie Skodak, "Children in Foster Homes: A Study of Mental Development," *Studies in Child Welfare* 16, no. 1 (1939):1-156.
- 1945 Anne Roe and Barbara Burks, "Adult Adjustment of Foster Children of Alcoholic and Psychotic Parentage and the Influence of the Foster Home," *Memoirs of the Section on Alcohol Studies, Yale University, No. 3, Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol* (New Haven, 1945).
- 1948 Harold M. Skeels and Irene Harms, "Children With Inferior Social Histories: Their Mental Development in Adoptive Homes," *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 72 (June 1948):283-294.
- 1949 Marie Skodak and Harold M. Skeels, "A Final Follow-Up Study of One Hundred Adopted Children," *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 75 (September 1949):85-125.
- 1965 Harold M. Skeels, "Effects of Adoption on Children from Institutions," *Children* (January-February 1965):33-34.
- 1966 Harold M. Skeels, "Adult Status of Children With Contrasting Early Life Experiences: A Follow-Up Study," *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 31, no. 3 (1966), 1-65.
- 1968 Seymour S. Kety et al, "The Types and Prevalence of Mental Illness in the Biological and Adoptive Families of Adopted Schizophrenics," *Journal of Psychiatric Research* 6 suppl. 1 (November 1968):345-362.
- 1974 Leon J. Kamin, "Studies of Adopted Children," in *The Science and Politics of I.Q.* (Potomac, MD: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1974), 111-134
- 1981 Leon Kamin, "Studies of Adopted Children," in *The Intelligence Controversy: H.J. Eysenck Versus Leon Kamin* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1981), 114-125.
- 1985 Robert Plomin and John C. DeFries, *Origins of Individual Differences in Infancy: The Colorado Adoption Project* (Orlando: Academic Press, 1985).
- 1992 Seymour S. Kety and Loring J. Ingraham, "Genetic Transmission and Improved Diagnosis of Schizophrenia From Pedigrees of Adoptees," *Journal of Psychiatric Research* 26, no. 4 (1992):247-255.
- 1994 Seymour Kety et al., "Mental Illness in the Biological and Adoptive Relatives of Schizophrenic Adoptees," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 51 (June 1994):442-455.
- 1998 David Howe, *Patterns of Adoption: Nature, Nurture and Psychosocial Development* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Fostering and Foster Care



President Franklin Roosevelt signing the Social Security Act of 1935. Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor, is the only woman visible in this photograph, but women were key advocates of "maternalist" social policies for children and families, including the program called Aid to Dependent Children, that eventually led to a dramatic expansion of foster placements.

Before 1945, "fostering" referred to numerous arrangements in which children were cared for in homes other than their own. The point of the term was to contrast institutional care with family placements. The case for foster care was articulated by nineteenth-century child-savers, including [Charles Loring Brace](#), publicized by the [orphan trains](#), and advanced by states that experimented with [placing-out](#) children rather than consigning them to orphanages.

In the early twentieth century, the cause was taken up by reformers like Henry Dwight Chapin, a New York pediatrician and founder of the Speedwell Society whose wife established one of the country's [first specialized adoption agencies](#), the Alice Chapin Nursery, in 1910. Henry Chapin circulated statistics showing that orphanages literally sickened and killed alarming numbers of children. His conviction that "a poor home is often better than a good institution" spread quickly among [child welfare](#) and public health professionals, but in 1910, there were well over 1000 orphanages in the United States, and their average size had grown considerably since the late nineteenth century. The campaign to make families the only acceptable places to raise children still had a long way to go.

On the front lines of this movement were "foster parents" who took other people's children into their homes temporarily and permanently, informally and formally. Children who earned their keep by working, children whose board was paid by agencies, and children placed in "free homes" were all living in foster families. During the early decades of the twentieth century, legally adopted children were also called foster children. The terms of family care varied enormously. Terminology did not.

Long before “adoption” was commonly used, child-placers appreciated the differences between permanent kinship and temporary residence in someone else’s home. Most Progressive-era **social workers** aimed to keep children with their own families, even if they were **illegitimate**, out of respect for the importance of blood ties. But advocates also knew that some children could not or should not live with their **birth parents**. For these children, becoming a lifelong member of a new family was desirable. Common sense suggested that emotional security was key to children’s health and welfare, and developmental science produced additional evidence for this claim. Research on attachment and loss and studies of maternal deprivation in infancy influenced policies of early placement and ushered in a more pro-adoption climate after 1940.

By 1950, **statistics** showed that children in family foster care outnumbered children in institutions for the first time. By 1960, there were more than twice as many in foster care. By the late 1970s, the foster child population exceeded 500,000, roughly where it stands today. Foster placements could be numerous and lengthy in practice, but in theory they were temporary because children maintained ties to their **birth parents**. Between the 1930s and the 1970s, as foster care became more common for more children, adoptions increasingly involved practices like **matching**, policies like **confidentiality and sealed records**, and placements of infants and toddlers rather than older children. Adoption aspired to the wholesale substitution of one family for another. Foster care did not.

Two developments distanced adoption from foster care after the New Deal and World War II: the growth of public social welfare services and a new consciousness about the plight of **African-American**, mixed-race, older, native, developmentally delayed, physically disabled, and other hard-to-place children. Anti-poverty programs like Aid to Dependent Children (established by the Social Security Act of 1935 and later renamed Aid to Families With Dependent Children) offered financially struggling parents an alternative to placing their children in institutions or surrendering them forever. When the program expanded in the early 1960s, federal funding for foster care was added. The result was an explosion in out-of-home family placements. During the last half-century, foster care has come to designate this government-funded system. Foster care is now the main form of assistance provided to poor children in the United States who cannot remain in their own homes because of neglect or abuse.

Race as well as class marked the growing gap between foster care and adoption. During the postwar civil rights era, poor children of color, formerly denied many services, comprised more of the foster care caseload. Foster parents were somewhat better off economically than the children in their care, but they too were increasingly drawn from minority racial and ethnic communities. Foster parents were licensed and compensated by the state for the work they did, however meagerly, and had fewer legal protections than adoptive or **birth parents**. By definition, foster parents were not autonomous. They were expected to provide havens of safety and love for children at risk, but they were also responsible for keeping children in contact with relatives and agency workers. Adopters, on the other hand, were more affluent. They paid for the services they received, overwhelmingly preferred babies and young children whose racial identities matched their own, and were legally entitled to manage their families without supervision after court decrees were issued. Adoption spelled permanence, but the price of that permanence was the social obliteration of natal ties.

Children sometimes moved from foster care to adoption. Because termination of parental rights was a lengthy process, most of these were (and are) **special needs adoptions**. Foster children were invariably older and had complex loyalties to natal and foster kin. Their histories of separation and trauma were associated with behavioral and health problems. These characteristics made them undesirable to many would-be parents, and that made their adoptions difficult and expensive to arrange. After midcentury, agencies invested scarce time and money recruiting parents for hard-to-place children. By the 1960s, a few turned in frustration to controversial solutions like **transracial adoptions**.

Another approach, pioneered by New York state in 1965 and supported by the federal **Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980**, was to subsidize adoptions. Subsidies exposed the cruelty of market forces by offering economic incentives to adopt children for whom there was little or no demand. They challenged the assumption that permanent kinship required financial independence and acknowledged the high costs of raising children who needed ongoing medical and psychological help. If subsidies began to undercut the differences between foster care and adoption, a 1977 class action suit did just the opposite. In **Smith v. OFFER**, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that foster parents

were not entitled to the same constitutional rights as other parents. Because states licensed, created, and paid them, foster families could not oppose children's removal or expect to remain intact, as birth families could, no matter how long-lasting and deep the ties between foster parents and children.

For the past several decades, the foster care system has confronted substance abuse, AIDS, and other adult epidemics that trickle down to children. Even as more Americans seek healthy infants and toddlers through open adoptions, [international adoptions](#), and new reproductive technologies, foster children drift from one placement to the next, and approximately 20,000 "age out" of the system each year. Their tragic plight has provoked soul-searching about "permanency planning," hearings about barriers to adoption, and legislation, such as the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, that commits new resources to adoption. "Kinship care," which seeks to transform grandmothers, aunts, and other birth relatives into certified foster parents or legal guardians, is one recent response to the failures of foster care. Such policies reflect the enduring rhetoric of family preservation while acknowledging the insurmountable odds against secure belonging for too many American children.

## Document Excerpts

- [Henry Dwight Chapin, "Family vs. Institution," 1926](#)
- [Child Welfare League of America Special Bulletin, "A Study of Board Rates," January 1942](#)
- [Child Welfare League of America, \*Standards for Foster Family Care Service\*, 1959](#)
- [New York Coalition for Families, "Beyond the Best Interests of the Child Is Being Used to Legitimize the Destruction of Poor Black and Hispanic Families," mid-1970s](#)
- [Smith v. OFFER \(Organization of Foster Families for Equality and Reform\), 1977](#)
- [Bernadine Barr, "Estimates of Numbers of Children in Institutions, Foster Family Care, and Adoptive Homes, 1910-1960"](#)



[Further reading about Fostering and Foster Care](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact  
Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Justine Wise Polier (1903-1987)



Justine, at approximately age ten, with her mother, Louise Waterman Wise



Justine Wise Polier standing in front of a self-portrait by her mother, Louise Waterman Wise, in the adoption agency founded by Wise in 1916

A brilliant jurist and activist on issues related to **child welfare** and the law, Justine Wise Polier was also one of the earliest and most vocal critics of religious and racial **matching** in adoption. Although her name is unlikely to be counted in the top ranks of civil rights and social justice advocates, Justine Wise Polier deserves to be remembered alongside figures such as Jane Addams and Eleanor Roosevelt. She worked tirelessly as a children's advocate, was the recipient of numerous national awards and honors, and spoke and wrote widely on legal and social issues for a broad audience. Her brilliant career was nourished by a long and supportive marriage to second husband Shad Polier, an attorney who shared his wife's passionate devotion to children's causes. Her first husband, Lee Tulin, a professor of criminal law at Yale Law School, died of leukemia in 1932.

Polier was born in Portland, Oregon to well known parents. Her father was Rabbi Stephen Wise, a founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and leader of the liberal American Jewish Congress. Her mother, Louise Waterman Wise, was a gifted artist who started one of the country's **first specialized adoption agencies**, the Free Synagogue Child Adoption Committee, in 1916. Her mother's determination to find homes for Jewish orphans at a time when adoption was still rare among Jews made a deep impression on the young Justine.

Child and family welfare became the focus of Polier's long and distinguished career as a judge. A child of privilege and elite education—she attended Bryn Mawr, Radcliffe, Barnard, and then Yale Law School—Polier was appointed to the Domestic Relations Court in Manhattan by Fiorello La Guardia, the first judicial appointment in New York state to elevate a woman above the rank of magistrate. It was 1935 and Polier was just 32 years old. She did not resign her judgeship until 1973. After



Justine and husband Shad Polier

that, she directed the Juvenile Justice Division of the Children's Defense Fund. She also played a pivotal role in mobilizing support for the *Wilder* case, a landmark class action suit filed in 1973 that eventually transformed the sectarian rules of New York's large **foster care** system, which had been in place since the nineteenth century.

Adoptions were among the happiest events in Polier's courtroom and she championed adoption's civic potential as well as its personal value. Providing children with family love and permanent belonging would produce better, more law-abiding citizens as well as happier people, she believed. Polier maintained an active role in the adoption agency her mother founded. Beginning in 1946, she served as President of its Board of Directors and renamed it Louise Wise Services to honor her mother's memory. Under the leadership of Polier and agency Director Florence Brown, Louise Wise Services was transformed from a sectarian organization devoted to Jewish adoptions into a national innovator in services for children of color in the 1950s and 1960s. It pioneered **African-American adoptions, transracial adoptions**, and placed more children for the **Indian Adoption Project** than any other private agency in the United States.

Polier believed that pluralism and separation of church and state were the essence of Americanism. During the 1930s and 1940s, when **matching** was almost universally accepted, Polier's criticism of it made her extremely controversial. She rejected the idea that children were the permanent property of parents or organized religion and suggested that families encompassing different faiths, races, and cultures were compatible with both child welfare and democracy. Because most child welfare services in New York were delivered by sectarian agencies that gave preferential treatment to their "own" children while excluding others, Polier equated matching with discrimination and accused its supporters of being children's enemies.

This view gained ground during the early stages of the civil rights movement that followed World War II, when the goal of integration underlined inter-racial commonalities and leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. expressed a universalistic morality that was as passionately admired as it was reviled. Here is how Polier put it in 1960: "By accepting this [matching] theory, we even justify the denial of loving family care to children who look different, speak differently, or have cultural backgrounds different from the stereotype of the American majority. This bulldozer approach to the newcomer or the 'different' child, which seeks to level the peaks of cultural differences in

American life, has contributed to the tragic shortcoming in our services."

## Document Excerpts

- *Matter of Vardinakis, 1936*
- White House Conference Subcommittee Discussion of "Adoption," 1959
- Justine Wise Polier, "Attitudes and Contradictions in Our Culture," 1960



Further reading by and about Justine Wise Polier

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Matching



Jeanette Bates, a Chicago attorney, with her adopted children, Katherine and Edward, who looked like each other and their adoptive mother, 1917

During much of the twentieth century, matching was the philosophy that governed non-relative adoption. Its goal was to make families socially that would “match” families made naturally. Matching required that adoptive parents be married heterosexual couples who looked, felt, and behaved as if they had, by themselves, conceived other people’s children. What this meant in practice was that physical resemblance, intellectual similarity, and racial and religious continuity between parents and children were preferred goals in adoptive families. Matching was the technique that could inject naturalness and realness into a family form stigmatized as artificial and less real than the “real thing.” Matching stood for safety and security. Difference spelled trouble.

Under the matching paradigm, one family was substituted for another so carefully, systematically, and completely that the old family was replaced, rendered invisible and unnecessary. This was not usually the case before the twentieth century. Children who were placed did not lose contact with their natal kin, even in the case of very young children placed permanently for adoption. The only matching required by early adoption laws was matching by religion, and these laws were frequently disregarded by child-savers, such as [Charles Loring Brace](#), who preferred matching children with the (Protestant) religion of the placing organization, rather than that of (Catholic) natal kin. In the nineteenth century, many adoptions involved sharing children rather than giving them away.

In contrast, matching was an optimistic, arrogant, and historically novel objective that suggested that a social operation could and should approximate nature by copying it. Between 1920 and 1970, matching was popular, especially among infertile couples who sought to adopt

because they were unable to conceive children of their “own.” By midcentury, **infertility** had become an unquestioned qualification for adoption. This reinforced the notion that matching compensated for reproductive failure by promising relationships that could pass for the exclusive, authentic, and permanent bonds of kinship that were only natural.

Matching confronted the central problem of modern adoption. It attempted to create kinship without blood in the face of an enduring equivalence between blood and belonging. The results were paradoxical. Matching reinforced the notion that blood was thicker than water, the very ideology that made adoption inferior, while seeking to equalize and dignify it.

The naturalness of matching still has ardent defenders today, especially with regard to race. Since 1970, however, its dominance has been criticized by movements opposing **confidentiality and sealed records**. **Transracial adoptions** and **international adoptions** also challenge matching by celebrating families deliberately and visibly formed across lines of race, ethnicity, and nation. Open adoption arrangements undercut matching too. They acknowledge an obvious truth that matching concealed: it is possible to have more than one mother, one father, one family.

## Document Excerpts

- *Purinton v. Jamrock*, 1907
- W.H. Slingerland, *Child-Placing in Families*, 1919
- *Matter of Vardinakis*, 1936
- Sample Letter to Families Applying for Infants Where the Woman is Over 40 Years of Age, early 1940s
- Placing Children of Unknown Background and the Problem of Matching, 1951
- *Petition of Goldman*, 1954
- Justine Wise Polier, “A Memorandum Concerning Child Adoption Across Religions Lines,” 1955
- Sheldon C. Reed, “Skin Color,” 1955
- Discussion of the Role of Anthropology in Transracial Adoptions, 1956
- Justine Wise Polier, “Attitudes and Contradictions in Our Culture,” 1960
- Muriel McCrea, “The Mix-Match Controversy,” 1967



[Further reading about Matching](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Valentina P. Wasson, *The Chosen Baby*, 1939

*The Chosen Baby* was illustrated by Hildegard Woodward



"Let us adopt a baby and bring him up as our own."



A "Lady from the Home came and looked over the house were the Man and his Wife lived to make sure that the Chosen Baby would live in a light, clean home."

*This children's story was introduced by Sophie van Senden Theis, who made a connection between telling and reading that remains with us to this day. She noted that "The Chosen Baby is intended for parents of young children, who wish to make the first explanation of adoption as happy as it is true. I suggest that this little book be used by parents to supplement their own explanation to their children of the facts of adoption."*

*The story illustrates both continuity and change in the history of adoption. It emphasized that adoptees were special because they were selected, an enduring theme in adoption literature. Yet it also described practices—such as allowing adoptive parents to make specific choices from among a number of waiting children—that fell out of favor in later years.*

Once upon a time in a large city lived a Man and his Wife. They were happily married for many years. Their one trouble was that they had no babies of their own.

One day they said to each other: "Let us adopt a baby and bring him up as our own." So the next day they called up a Home which helps people to adopt babies, and babies to adopt parents, and said: "We wish so much to find a baby who would like to have a mother and father and who could be our own. Will you help us find one?"

The Lady at the Home said: "This will be difficult because so many people wish to adopt babies and are waiting for them, but come and see me anyhow."

So the Man and his Wife went to the Home and said to the Lady: "We wish so much to choose a baby. We want to have a lovely, healthy baby boy." The Lady at the Home asked them many questions and said: "I will try very hard to find a lovely baby boy, but you must wait for a long



"This is our Chosen Baby. We don't have to look any further."



"All of Peter's new uncles and aunts, and his grandfather and grandmother came to see him, and they thought he was a lovely baby."

time."

A little later another Lady from the Home came and looked over the house where the Man and his Wife lived to make sure that the Chosen Baby would live in a light, clean home.

Many months went by and the Man and his Wife would say to each other: "I wonder when our baby will be coming." And the Wife would call up the Lady at the Home and say: "We are still waiting for our baby. Please don't forget about us." And she would be told not to worry, for the baby was sure to come some day.

Then suddenly one day the Lady at the Home called up and said: "We have three fine babies for you to choose from. Will you both come and see them?" So the very next day the Man and his Wife, feeling very excited, hurried to the Home. The Lady told them all about the babies.

The first baby was a little boy with blue eyes and curly blond hair. He laughed and played with a rattle. The Man and his Wife watched the baby, then they shook their heads and said: "This is a beautiful child, but we know it is not our baby." And they were taken to see the next.

And there asleep in the crib lay a lovely, rosy, fat baby boy. He opened his big brown eyes and smiled. The Wife picked him up and sat him on her lap. The baby gurgled, and the Man and his Wife said: "This is our Chosen Baby. We don't have to look any further. We will have everything ready for him by to-morrow, and would like to take him home then."

So that day the Wife went to a shop and bought a crib and a carriage and bottles, and all the clothes and things that babies need.

And the very next morning the Wife went to fetch the baby, and brought the baby home and put him in his crib, and fed him milk and cereal and orange juice. A nice, fat Nannie helped to look after the baby.

"We must find a good name for our baby," the Man and his

Wife said to each other. So they decided to call his name Peter, after his uncle. After a few days all of Peter's new uncles and aunts, and his grandfather and grandmother came to see him, and they thought he was a lovely baby. . . .

Source: Valentine P. Wasson, *The Chosen Baby* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1939).

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Telling



The history of telling has been closely tied to the modern ritual of parents reading to children. Books for children that helped tell the adoption story quickly emerged, including such classics as *The Chosen Baby*.

“Telling” has been a chronic dilemma in the history of adoption because it highlights the problem of making adoptive kinship real while also acknowledging its distinctiveness. During the twentieth century, adoption professionals maintained a firm consensus that children placed in infancy should be told of their adopted status early in life. Adoptive parents did not always agree, and anecdotal evidence suggests that many children were told in adolescence, on the eve of marriage, or even later in life. Young draftees during the two world wars, for example, were sometimes surprised to discover they had been adopted. In the era before most states passed laws mandating **confidentiality and sealed records**, the birth certificates needed for military induction introduced many soldiers and sailors to the fact that the people who had raised them were not the same as the people who had conceived them.

In the era of **matching**, before many **special needs**, **transracial**, and **international adoptions** made the fact of adoption visible, many adoptees were never told at all. Resistance to telling was a problem that symbolized adopters’ understandable but illogical insecurity, according to **social workers**, who suspected that difficulties with telling were linked to unresolved **infertility**. By midcentury, anxiety about telling was a big enough problem that many agencies required adopters to pledge, in writing, that they would tell. How-to-tell conversations became routine parts of the adoption process. Telling became a central ritual of adoptive family life.

Why were adoptees supposed to be told? The reason had less to do with honesty than it did with emotional inoculation against stigma. Parents would be wise to tell children about their adoptions with kindness and love

before they learned the truth from unfeeling relatives, nosy neighbors, or cruel classmates. Behind telling was the hope that convincing children early on of their selected status would protect them from the painful realization that many people considered adoption second-rate.

Telling emerged as the central purpose of a growing children's literature, including classic books like *The Chosen Baby* (1939) and *The Family That Grew* (1951). These books, sometimes accompanied by detailed instructions about when, how, who, and what to tell, literally made adoption go down as easily as a bedtime story, a tradition that continues to this day. No single formula existed for the timing or content of telling, but advice literature certainly gave the impression that there were right and wrong ways to talk and feel about adoption. "If you yourselves have fully accepted your child's adoption," one writer noted in 1955, "you will be able to make him accept it, fully and happily." Parents who told successfully would be rewarded by children who were at peace with their adoptive status. Parents who did not were asking for trouble.

Until fairly recently, the preferred telling method stressed the "chosen child." Parents were instructed to use the words "chosen" and "adopted" early, often, and always in a happy and relaxed tone of voice. Even with infants too young to understand, repeating phrases like "my precious adopted daughter" and "my dear little adopted son" promised to boost children's self-esteem and prepare them for the inevitable encounter with negative ideas about adoption. Terminology was tricky. Calling natal parents "real" or "natural," for instance, posed problems for parents hoping to communicate that being adopted was dignified and special. The debate about better and worse adoption terms is still ongoing.

Questions about **birth parents**, as well as the fact of adoption itself, were always at stake in telling. Because adoption was synonymous with upward mobility, adoptees' natal backgrounds frequently included "**feeble-mindedness**," poverty, alcoholism, mental illness, criminality, sexual immorality, and other sordid characteristics. What exactly should children be told about these? Here too, advice literature stressed the importance of talking casually about children's **birth parents**. Parents were assured that curiosity about the people who had given them life was inevitable among adoptees, especially at the point when they were old enough to understand sex.

In many cases, answering children's questions involved highly selective communication, if not outright lies. Even though many Americans regarded **illegitimacy** with moral disapproval and adoption as a **eugenic** risk, adopters were supposed to maintain that **birth parents** (particularly mothers) were good individuals who had made selfless decisions for their children. Surrender was an act of love, not abandonment. Adoption was a wonderful choice, not a last resort.

All the effort and emotion that surrounded telling proved that adoptees were different than non-adopted children. But the paradoxical goal of telling was to make adoptees feel that they were the same, just as real as the real thing.

## Document Excerpts

- Annie Hamilton Donnell, "The Adopted," 1906
- Martha Vansant, "The Life of the Adopted Child," 1933
- Valentina P. Wasson, *The Chosen Baby*, 1939
- Benjamin Spock, "Adopting a Child," 1946
- Kitte Turmell, "How We Told Our Adopted Children," 1950
- Joan Lawrence, "The Truth Hurt Our Adopted Daughter," 1963
- Agency Philosophy and Policy Regarding the "Telling" of Adoption, 1966
- Benson Jaffee and David Fanshel, *How They Fared in Adoption*, 1970
- Child Welfare League of America, "Adoption Terminology," 1980s

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Transracial Adoptions



In 1904, the Mexican-American family shown here adopted white orphans from New York through the Catholic church in their Arizona mining town. These families conformed to religious, but not to racial **matching**. Armed white vigilantes removed the children and placed them in white Protestant families instead. Transracial adoptions might occur when children of color were inadvertently placed with white parents, but the reverse was unthinkable and intolerable.



This publicity photo is from Louise Wise Services, an innovative New York agency. Its Interracial Adoption Program, established in 1953, concentrated on finding **matching** parents for children of color, but transracial placements were made.

Placement across racial lines—which almost always involved non-white children and white adults—challenged **matching** by suggesting that visible difference was compatible with love and belonging. During the first half of the century, anecdotes about children of color accidentally placed with white parents circulated in journalism, fiction, and professional literature. With few exceptions, these stories were considered tragic and shocking. The problem of racial mixups in adoption illustrated an important point. Most Americans believed in the naturalness of race-matching, but race-matching could be very difficult to achieve, so it was not at all natural in the sense of being automatic. In practice, color confusion was common, and parents and social workers alike expressed deep concern about how to categorize mixed-race children for the purpose of **matching**.

Making families inter-racial on purpose was the point of most **international adoptions** from Asian countries such as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam as well as adoptions arranged by the **Indian Adoption Project** after 1945. Attitudes toward these transracial placements reproduced the historical color line in the United States, which was emphatically black and white. White parents were more likely to accept “yellow,” “red,” or even “brown” children. Those who took in “black” children were considered the most transgressive. After World War II, demographic pressures shaped this trend at least as powerfully as civil rights ideology. New contraceptive technology like the pill, legalized abortion after *Roe v. Wade*, and the sexual revolution all decreased the supply of healthy white infants, along with the stigma surrounding **illegitimacy**. The result was that some white parents reconsidered their preference for same-race adoptions.



Small-town Oregonians Doug and Gloria Bates adopted two biracial girls, Lynn and Liska, in the early 1970s after having two sons, Steve and Mike. In his touching [narrative](#) about their lives, *Gift Children*, Doug Bates described how their naive faith in racial harmony was transformed over time, like the country around them. "My spouse and I have no illusions about tidy, fairy-tale endings, and life continues to mix our blessings with setbacks. Like America, we are somewhat more cynical today, a little less idealistic, a lot more world-weary than we were back in 1970 when we thought we could handle just about anything life chose to send our way."

Black children and white parents have always defined the debate about transracial adoption, achieving a symbolic importance that overshadowed their tiny numbers. After *Loving v. Virginia*, a 1967 Supreme Court case that made laws prohibiting racial intermarriage unconstitutional, some states, such as Louisiana, continued to ban transracial adoptions. Family-making between blacks and whites was invariably what these statutes aimed to prevent. Even at their peak around 1970, perhaps 2,500 such adoptions were finalized each year, and no more than 12,000 African-American children in all were placed in white homes before 1975. Researchers, policy-makers, and child welfare professionals carefully scrutinized these adoptions in hopes of discovering whether inter-racial families helped or hurt children, and how. [Outcome studies](#) rarely showed that children's development or identity were positively harmed, but they still could not answer the most important question. Was transracial adoption a socially desirable or undesirable policy in a society dedicated to pluralism but also polarized by racial strife?

Determined would-be parents were usually the impetus in the first black-white adoptions. Interestingly, they often lived in overwhelmingly white parts of the country. The first recorded adoption of an African-American child placed in a white home took place in Minnesota in 1948. In Washington, a white couple, the [Johnstons](#), took an African-American child into [foster care](#) in 1944, when she was only six weeks old, and adopted her—against the advice of their social worker—when she was nine. Campaigns during the 1950s to promote [African-American adoptions](#) inspired other white couples to inquire about transracial adoption. Worn down by the discrimination that made it difficult to find enough same-race parents for all the children of color in need, a few agencies began cautiously placing mixed-race and African-American children in white homes. Some, but not all, of these families became targets of violence and harassment. A program of the Children's Home Society of Minnesota called PAMY (Parents to Adopt Minority Youngsters) found that its first such placements in the early 1960s were blessedly uneventful. Transracial adoptions were only a "little revolution," concluded project director Harriet Fricke, in relief. Black children were kin, not projects in racial reconciliation or pawns in racial conflict.

The debate about transracial adoption changed course in 1972, when the National Association of Black Social Workers issued a statement that took "a vehement stand

against the placements of black children in white homes for any reason," calling transracial adoption "unnatural," "artificial," "unnecessary," and proof that African-Americans continued to be assigned to "chattel status." The organization was so committed to the position that black children's healthy development depended on having black parents that its President, Cenie J. Williams, argued that temporary foster and even institutional placements were preferable to adoption by white families. This opposition slowed black-white adoptions to a trickle. In 1973, the [Child Welfare League of America](#) adoption standards, which had been revised in 1968 to make them slightly friendlier to transracial adoption, were rewritten to clarify that same-race placements were always better. The [child welfare](#) establishment never supported transracial adoptions.

A number of new agencies, staffed almost entirely by African Americans, such as [Homes for Black Children](#) in Detroit and Harlem-Dowling Children's Service in New York, renewed the effort that had started in the late 1940s and 1950s to find black homes for black children. In spite of successful efforts to boost the numbers of black adoptive families, objections to whites adopting African-American children were never translated into law. Minority group rights to children were legally enforceable only in the case of Native American children, and only after the 1978 passage of the [Indian Child Welfare Act](#).

Since 1972, the numbers of black-white adoptions have declined, but this may have as much to do with stubborn private preferences and prejudices among white adopters as with organized opposition or public policies that created new barriers to transracial placements. [International adoptions](#), after all, increased quite dramatically at just the moment when the transracial adoption of African-American children was becoming controversial. They continued to accelerate throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, when Americans adopted more than a quarter of a million foreign children. International placements have increased much more dramatically than domestic transracial adoptions. Why? There are many reasons, but a simple one stands out. Most children have come from Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. They did not represent the specific kind of difference that had bothered Americans and had tortured their history most. Children adopted from overseas were not black.

## Document Excerpts

- [Placing Children of Unknown Background and the Problem of Matching, 1951](#)
- [Discussion of the Role of Anthropology in Transracial Adoptions, 1956](#)
- [Ann Johnston, "Our Negro Daughter," 1960](#)
- [Louise Wise Services, Press Release Announcing Recruitment of White Parents for Black Children, 1963](#)
- [Ethel E. Branham, The Los Angeles County Bureau of Adoptions Reflects on Its Transracial Adoption Program, 1964](#)
- [Harriet Fricke, "Interracial Adoption: The Little Revolution," 1965](#)
- [Report on the First International Conference on Transracial Adoption, 1969](#)
- [Pearl Buck, "I Am the Better Woman for Having My Two Black Children," 1972](#)
- [National Association of Black Social Workers, "Position Statement on Trans-Racial Adoption," September 1972](#)
- [Opportunity, National Survey of Black Children Adopted in 1972](#)
- [Randall Kennedy, "Orphans of Separatism: The Painful Politics of Transracial Adoption," 1994](#)



[Further reading about Transracial Adoptions](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Jean M. Paton, *Orphan Voyage*, 1968



This picture, which reads "Don't Forget," was drawn by a six year old girl, who gave it to Jean Paton, her social worker, on the day in 1940 she moved from a temporary placement to her new adoptive home.

*In a book written under the name Ruthena Hill Kittson, one of many that she used during her life, adoptee and visionary search activist Jean Pato presented her rationales for search: the equality of all citizens, the self-determination of individuals, and adoptees' emotional need for a "curative" and "breakthrough" reality that would finally make sense out of their disrupted life stories. Above all, she insisted that adoptees were not permanent children in need of lifelong supervision and protection. They were responsible, mature adults, fully capable of making their own decisions about **search and reunion**. Her vision of an independent, voluntary adoption registry through which natal relatives might be reunited dates to an article she wrote in 1949, making it one of the earliest such suggestions in the documentary record. Mutual consent registries proliferated after 1975. For more on Paton, see Wayne Carp's blog, [The Biography of Jean Paton](#).*

My own views on adoption have only recently come to their present relative fixity. As I am entering upon the middle years, this is no youthful immature view. I was myself twice adopted. Origins are relatively unknown. I understand the many phases in which this problem evolves to a final answer. In addition I have worked as a trained social worker for four years in the child placing field both with natural parents and placed children. This personal and professional experience has also made me alert to the expressions of this problem that arise in miscellaneous experience. And for a long time I have believed it impossible that anything could be done about the uncertainties and persistent dissatisfactions inherent in adoption.

This I no longer believe to be true. There is a very specific way in which a beginning could be made in minimizing these man-created "unknowns." I believe it is important that this be done, for two reasons. First, to give to natural and adoptive parents, and to adopted children, an opportunity to tie back into the racial stream. Second, to place emphasis on "unknowns" where it

properly belongs, in the sphere where it is not given to man to answer them. Each of us must struggle to live in a world of morality and uncertainty. Let it be on equal terms, with no one having the pain or the privilege of a special, private mystery to which he must adapt himself. . . .

In what we suggest is to be incorporated a more profound belief in adoption. When we reach the point of placing in the hands of natural parent and adopted adult the responsibility for and the means to their reunion, both the testing and the fulfillment of our practice break out at last into a reality. Adoption itself matures, and those who have experienced it mature. And this we believe is entirely possible for them. In fact the expectation of maturity is implicit in what we suggest. And, as will be seen, the adopting parents themselves take their true place and attain their full human value in the midst of this.

What is suggested is the establishment of a central point of clearance, separated from agency or court, to which natural parents and adopted adults who have attained 25 years, may come, registering the facts about themselves and whatever is known of the other persons, together with a request that each be notified when both have registered and been matched; that this notification be supplemented by giving to the person first registering the necessary information to put him in direct touch with the one he seeks, with the proviso that a registration always be open to cancellation upon request. Let it be assumed that those who have reached the point of sustaining themselves through a period of active registration will be able to sustain a contact which they must carry on without agency or court support, yet with the greatest positive strength which comes from the realization that both have come of age in this matter. . . .

Somehow it did not make sense to me that social agencies should decide when, how, and whether people should try to establish a means of helping themselves.

If adopted people wanted to try to build a responsible way of reconciling with natural families, should they not be allowed to try? Were they inferior people, who must cool their heels outside of agency offices, waiting for a nod? . . . .

Whatever may be the facts as to how many adopted people are distressed about lack of contact with kindred people, and whatever explanation may be adduced as to the reasons for their distress, the overriding reality of their pain must lead to help. How is this to begin? From whom shall it come? . . . .

Each step of the Search will further differentiate him [the adoptee] from a child of standard family. The most alarming step

of all—if he takes it—will put him face to face with a natural parent. Herein he will be at the same moment highly distinct from persons reared by their natural parents, and at the same moment he will find the universal, common element in himself—the cure of the stigma.

Here is the greatest threat and real danger in Search: that he will mistake the shock of loss of the Stigma (against which loss he has guarded himself for many years) for the shock of the reality of his parent which, though it exists, is far less in magnitude, involves less of himself, and involves him only childishly.

From this point he must meet a new difficulty, that of living openly in society as an adopted person who has completed Search. This phase is perhaps self-evident, and its problems will not be suggested here. They are common to all who have gone through a profound experience of change.

The Reunion of adopted people with their kindred is not equivalent to other human reunions because of the experience within it, the loss of Stigma, which other reunions do not include. Other actual reunions are not linked to concepts of personal change and personal reformation, except for reunion with God when that is experienced or believed possible. Therefore the special curative element in the adoption Reunion seems to most people to be an unlikely thing. Examples are, of course, known to many privately, whether or not the full potentials of the situations have been achieved.

Because, then, Search is so integral with the adoption life history it is of importance whether it shall be controlled, and by whom. In an age when release from conflict is almost lost to view, the Reunion experience is like water in the desert—scarce, desired, fought for. Here, in its control, is a possibility for freedom or for slavery that perhaps has been overlooked. . . .

Sealed, or closed, adoption and the control of Search by outsiders is a modern practice that exhibits modern thought. It is an attempt to evade aspects of life which have been designated as “unpleasant” and assumed to be incompatible with healthy development. This designation and assumption are in error, and the breakthrough of adoptive Search, when guided by sufficient balance and understanding, can enable a Seeker to become well in an age of illness and anxiety.

Source: Ruthena Hill Kittson, *Orphan Voyage* (New York: Vantage Press, 1968), 27-28, 31, 33, 253-255.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Search and Reunion



This sculpture by Jean Paton was titled "The Search." It illustrated at once the rift that secrecy caused and the potential of search and reunion to heal that rift between generations and within persons.

Search and reunion have been prominent features of adoption reform and activism in recent decades, and they appear as central themes in many [adoption narratives](#). The effort to locate [birth parents](#) and other natal relatives has a long history in adoption, however, since there was never a time when relatives separated by adoption did not seek to find them later in life. Throughout the era of the [orphan trains](#) in the nineteenth century, and during the heyday of [placing-out](#), information about the backgrounds of children placed temporarily or permanently was no mystery. During the formative stages of modern adoption, [social workers](#) and other child-placers frequently served as agents of disclosure. When adoptees came to them with questions about their backgrounds, they assumed it was part of their job to provide answers. The difficulties adoptees encountered in searching were more likely to be caused by sloppy or non-existent records than by design.

This changed with confidentiality and sealed records, but only gradually. Beginning with the [Minnesota Adoption Law of 1917](#), states began to treat adoption as a secret in hopes of reducing the stigma associated with [illegitimacy](#) and preventing natal relatives from interfering in adoptive families. Advocates believed that privacy in adoption would protect [child welfare](#) by shielding adoptees from public embarrassment while also reinforcing the integrity, autonomy, and "realness" of adoptive kinship. It was only after World War II that these new policies became so rigid that adoptees themselves were denied access to records, such as original birth certificates, that non-adopted citizens took for granted. It is curious that the enduring emphasis on [telling](#) children about their adoptions reached its height during the very same period when detailed information about natal origins became virtually impossible to obtain. To tell was considered only truthful, but it required a vague kind of truth-telling at odds with search and reunion. No practical details were conveyed, and certainly no identifying information.

For decades around midcentury, adoptees who expressed desires to learn more about their natal relatives, or find them, were considered maladjusted products of less than successful adoptive families. According to this way of thinking, children whose adoptive parents offered true love and belonging would have no reason to search. They already felt like members of complete and genuine families. The expectation that adoption could erase and should replace natal families completely, which gave rise to the practice of **matching**, turned any curiosity about origins into a sign of trouble.

Many adoptees, though, were plagued by questions about their pasts. They found it impossibly difficult to accept their adoptive status as a significant fact to be simultaneously accepted and permanently ignored. When their questions persisted, the typical solution was to offer therapy to adoptive parents (especially for unresolved feelings about **infertility**) rather than information to adoptees. Until at least 1970, clinical perspectives on emotional disturbance in adoptees emphasized that worries and fantasies about birth parents were the ingredients of **psychopathology**. So close was the connection between searching and poor adoption outcomes that even Jean Paton, founder in 1953 of the first adoptee search organization in the United States, Orphan Voyage, formulated a "search hypothesis" in which the impulse to seek out natal relatives corresponded directly to the security and happiness of the adoptive home.

Considering how widespread the belief was that only insecure, unhappy adoptees wondered about their genealogy or sought out their birth parents, it is all the more remarkable that so many adoptees did both. Jean Paton was among the first to propose that the need to search was both a psychological necessity for individuals and a social necessity that would bring about much-needed reform. Convinced that adoptees were capable of creating innovative new mechanisms for reunion, such as voluntary reunion registries, Paton argued "that the desire to know the natural parents can be the deepest and most compelling factor in an adopted child's life. . . . Unless this desire resolves into reality it may be obscured in a long diversion, and in many cases this will be accompanied by years of unproductive behavior."

The rise of new adoption reform movements in the 1960s and 1970s marked a turning point in the history of search and reunion. Civil rights movements had already increased public awareness of the heterogeneous origins of the American population, celebrated quests for "roots," and elevated authenticity over convention and honesty over pretense. In such a climate, adoptees who set out to come to terms with their natal pasts were understandable and sympathetic figures. By the mid-1970s, influential statements on

adoption and identity, such as *The Adoption Triangle*, announced what was already obvious to many adoptees: children who had more than two parents grew up aware of a generational rift in family life that non-adopted children never experienced. Search and reunion was the logical way to address this rift. Interpreted as a symbol of healing rather than disturbance, searching was perfectly normal.

Ironically, some advocates of search and reunion have been just as dogmatic as those who made the case against search and reunion in earlier generations. Open records activists have sometimes insisted, just as their opponents did, that the relationship between genealogical knowledge and healthy identity was stable and predictable across the entire adopted population. Where the proponents of **confidentiality and sealed records** considered blood ties so threatening to the security of adoptive kinship that permanent secrecy was required, proponents of openness considered them so essential that no child could hope to become emotionally whole without them. Arrogance characterized both sides of the argument. Everyone agreed that they knew what was right and true and best for everyone else.

The movement toward search and reunion has done much to promote greater honesty about differences in family life. It has offered concrete assistance to numerous adoptees and **birth parents** with an interest in reunion, not only helping long-lost relatives find one another, but assuring them that doing so can be a positive step in the adoption process rather than a sign of failure. If the movement has also underlined the blood-is-thicker-than-water bias that has been such a prominent feature of American family life, that is only one of many ironies in modern adoption history.

## Document Excerpts

- [A Young Man in Search of His Parents, 1913](#)
- [E. L. Beckwith to Grace Abbott, June 21, 1931](#)
- [Elizabeth A. Lee to Katharine F. Lenroot, August 6, 1931](#)
- [A World War II Soldier Seeks Information About His Background, 1943](#)
- [The Case of Michael B, 1965](#)
- [Jean M. Paton, \*Orphan Voyage\*, 1968](#)
- [North American Center on Adoption, Position Papers—Search \(Opening Sealed Records\), 1975](#)
- [Louise Wise Services, Sealed Records in Adoption, 1975](#)



[Further reading about Search and Reunion](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

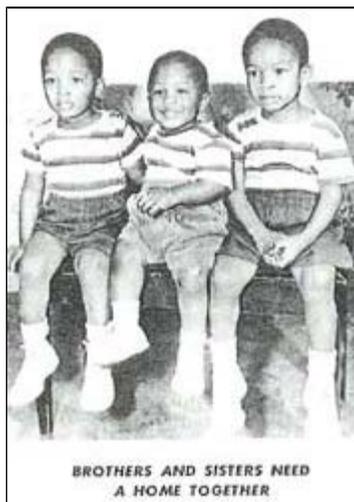
© Ellen Herman



## African-American Adoptions



Pictures (above and below) from a brochure to recruit African-American adoptive parents for "heartbreak babies," City of New York, Department of Welfare, c. 1950



Before the 1960s, "Negro" adoption referred to the permanent placement of African-American children or mixed-race children who had one "Negro" **birth parent**. Few people considered **transracial adoption** a viable option for these children, with important exceptions such as **Pearl S. Buck** and Helen Doss, author of *The Family Nobody Wanted*. When adoption services were extended to children of color, they were strictly segregated and **matching** mattered just as it did for their white counterparts. But these children were placed in families so infrequently before 1945 that "Negro" adoption was considered part of the revolution inaugurating **special needs adoptions** after World War II. Adoption resource exchanges that published monthly listings of waiting children and families were first used to find homes for "Negro" children. By the late 1960s, these exchanges were widely used to place all "hard-to-place" children.

For a good part of the twentieth century, African-American **birth parents** and children were simply denied adoption services by agencies because of their religion, race, or both. In some states with large African-American populations, such as Florida and Louisiana, not a single African-American child was placed for adoption by an agency for many years running as late as the 1940s. Discriminated against and reluctant to establish racially-exclusive organizations when integration was synonymous with equality, African Americans relied instead on traditions of informal adoption to take care of their own.

By midcentury, estimates were that up to 50,000 African-American children were in need of adoption, but would probably never find permanent homes. The **U.S. Children's Bureau** began including race in its reporting system in 1948 and during the 1950s, a number of innovative

During the early twentieth century, the **U.S. Children's Bureau** publicized many threats to African-American **child welfare**. A rural tenant farmer's cabin with daylight showing between the logs was one example.



An infant-care exhibit featuring an African-American doll, early twentieth century



Indianapolis children in need of social services, 1940s

programs around the country began recruiting non-white parents. From New York to Chicago and Los Angeles to Washington, DC, child welfare professionals and civil rights activists came together to promote culturally sensitive policies, integrate agency staff, and do community outreach. "You don't have to be a Joe Louis or a Jackie Robinson to adopt children," declared one encouraging radio spot created by the Citizens' Committee on Negro Adoptions of Lake County, Indiana.

The National Urban League Foster Care and Adoptions Project, founded in 1953, and Adopt-A-Child, founded in 1955, took big steps toward promoting "Negro" adoption nationally. Adopt-a-Child lasted for five years, received more than 4000 inquiries from around the United States and the Caribbean, and facilitated the placement of more than 800 children before running out of money. Most "Negro" adoption programs were located in cities with significant African-American and immigrant populations. In San Francisco, MARCH (Minority Adoption Recruitment of Children's Homes) had a large caseload of "Spanish-American," Chinese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Japanese, Korean, Samoan, and American Indian as well as "Negro" children. Some states with overwhelmingly white populations also initiated projects: The Children's Home Society of Minnesota launched PAMY (Parents to Adopt Minority Youngsters) and the Boys and Girls Aid Society of Oregon sponsored "Operation Brown Baby."

These programs did not promote **transracial adoption**, but they received numerous inquiries from white couples. After years of hard work had not eradicated the racial bias that made it difficult for African-American families to adopt, a few agencies began to cautiously challenge race-matching by placing African-American children in white homes. Parent-led organizations such as the Open Door Society and the Council on Adoptable Children also emerged during the 1960s to publicize the needs of waiting children. Only tiny numbers of African-American children were ever adopted by white parents, but these **transracial adoptions** reached their peak around 1970, when perhaps 2,500 such adoptions took place. This trend followed other important developments, especially Native American adoption (through the **Indian Adoption Project**) and **international adoption**, in which significant numbers of children from Asian countries crossed lines of race as well as nation to become members of American families.

## Document Excerpts

- "Homes Needed For 10,000 Brown Orphans," 1948
- Adopt-A-Child, Confidential Report, December 19, 1955
- "Children's Story Needs an Ending . . . Adoption Could Make It So!" 1956
- Sheldon Reed, Dight Institute for Human Genetics to R.T. Wilbur, Des Moines, Iowa Division of Child Welfare, November 26, 1957
- Clarence Fischer, "Homes For Black Children," 1970
- Opportunity, National Survey of Black Children Adopted in 1972



[Further reading about African-American Adoptions](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## The Family Nobody Wanted, 1954



Americans saw this picture of the Dosses, a "One-Family United Nations," in *Life* in 1951.



Two of the Doss children recite the Pledge of Allegiance in school. Their story suggested that making families internationally and transracially could be patriotic.

Stories about adoptive families who defied **matching** at midcentury were important because they offered examples of how love might triumph over difference at a time when difference was presumed to be an obstacle to stability and realness in family life. *The Family Nobody Wanted* was the single most popular story of this kind, effectively translating the ideas of such critics as **Pearl S. Buck** and **Justine Wise Polier** into **narrative** form and advancing the case for **transracial** and **international adoptions**. The book was serialized, picked up by major book clubs, and dramatized on film. It went through two dozen printings, was translated into seven languages, and remained in print for three decades.

The Doss family came to public attention in the pages of *Reader's Digest* and *Life* in the late 1940s and early 1950s, where they were presented as a "United Nations Family" that was endearingly ordinary at the same time as it offered a glimpse at difference that was unusual and unsettling. *The Family Nobody Wanted*, written by Helen Doss and published in 1954, told the full story. Helen Doss and her minister-in-training husband Carl were a young California couple. **Infertile** at a time when motherhood was the prerequisite to female fulfillment, Helen wanted nothing in the world more than to have a "happy, normal little family." After adopting one infant who matched them perfectly, they wanted more children but were frustrated by the lengthy waiting periods for white babies. And so Helen and Carl Doss, whose only desire was to expand their family, ended up with twelve children: Filipino, Hawaiian, Balinese, Malayan, Indian, Mexican, and Native American, in various combinations.

Some were afflicted by a host of other **special needs**—one child had a tumor on her forehead, another was described

as mentally retarded—but these defects quickly disappeared and the Doss children blossomed in their family filled with acceptance, faith, and love. Separately, they appeared exotic, but together they were just adorable American kids. Nor were their parents unusual. The Dosses just happened to think that love had more to do with making kinship than blood. Even so, *The Family Nobody Wanted* was more than a heart-warming story. It was good propaganda at a time of global anti-communism and domestic racial strife. Familial harmony among races and nations, however rare, was an answer to the accusation that Cold War policy hypocritically insisted on equality abroad while tolerating inequality at home. The Dosses proved that Americans believed prejudice was irrational and unpatriotic.

Their story hinted at racial realities so virulent that not even love could overcome them. In all the years they adopted and raised children, the Dosses never once adopted an **African-American** child. Their only effort to adopt a half-black German war orphan, four-year-old Gretchen, met such resistance among friends and family members (Carl's own mother swore that "no nigger will call *me* Grandma") that they finally gave up and helped to locate a "Negro" couple interested in adopting the child. Helen Doss was happy when Gretchen found parents exactly "the same warm toast shade that she was."

It is revealing that the publication of *The Family Nobody Wanted* coincided with *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1954 Supreme Court case that ended segregated schooling and also ushered in a lengthy period of violent resistance to integration. For the **African-American** children whose fates were most closely tied to that legal revolution, love most certainly did have a color.

## Document Excerpts

- Helen Doss, "Our International Family," 1949
- Helen Doss, *The Family Nobody Wanted*, 1954

Page Updated: 2-24-2012

Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Jean M. Paton, *The Adopted Break Silence*, 1954



A sculpture by Jean Paton titled "Insight" was the inspiration for this illustration, which appeared on the cover of *The Adopted Break Silence*.

*Jean Paton was a pioneering reformer and founder of the adoptee support and search network, Orphan Voyage, established in 1953. She was a talented sculptor as well as a tireless activist trained in social work. Born in Detroit in 1908, she had no difficulty obtaining her own adoption records and original birth certificate, including her birth parents' names, from the probate court in 1942. Several years later, she met her birth mother, and the experience changed her forever. By the time she began collecting the forty life stories that appeared in The Adopted Break Silence, most states in the country had instituted policies of confidentiality and sealed records, making search and reunion a virtual impossibility. Paton spent her adult life seeking to overturn adoption secrecy and frequently took positions well in advance of her contemporaries. She suggested the creation of a mutual consent registry as early as 1949, for example, and embraced the term "bastard" in the 1970s, declaring "Bastards Are Beautiful" long before the era of Bastard Nation. One of her most important arguments, evident in this excerpt, was that forever considering adoptees as children made the lifelong impact of adoption invisible. Hearing the voices of adult adoptees, she believed, was essential to learning more about the diversity of adoption experiences. Jean Paton died in 2002. For more on Paton, see Wayne Carp's blog, [The Biography of Jean Paton](#).*

---

Everyone except the adopted has been talking about adoption. About certain parts of adoption, the parts that can be seen and the parts that can be heard. The rest is silence—or was.

What other human institution has so little comment from those within it? Of what other group is so much said from without and so little from within? How has it been that the adopted seem to have had nothing to say, whereas it is conspicuous herein that they have waited only for an invitation, and that their thoughts have been long?

These questions put us to wondering if there is not some taboo within the institution of adoption which serves to forbid or at least

to discourage speech. . . .

These obstacles to the understanding of adoption cannot be moved. The adopted, and their natural and adopted parents, must themselves come to a solution without benefit of a general understanding. Let them look away from their paralyzing silences and their secrets and see whether speech has something to offer them. . . .

In August of 1953, we decided to attempt to get in touch with other adopted adults, and to obtain reports of the adoptions. We had no knowledge that any similar effort had been attempted, but felt that it was more than possible that many adults besides ourselves had outspoken views on the subject of adoption, and that, if properly approached, they would cooperate. In order to give some beginning effect to our attempt we established, in informal fashion, the Life History Study Center and assigned to it the task of gathering and publishing such material. The Center's name was selected in order to give emphasis to the view that adoption—among other human institutions—is a process which influences an individual life for many years beyond its initiation.

For the first request, we selected a medium which was available at moderate cost and one through which we hoped to reach a sufficient number of responsive adopted people. The following notice was inserted, for 7 weeks, between September 19 and November 14 in the Personals Column of the classified advertising section of the *Saturday Review of Literature*.

"Were you adopted before 1932? Your experience may assist research in adoption from the point of view of experienced adult. For details write: Life History Study Center, 222 N. Hicks St., Philadelphia 2, Penna." . . .

It was our hope, by these procedures, to obtain source material; to learn as directly as possible the nature of the elements in the fringe around the group known as "the adopted"; and to moderate all individual prejudice (including our own) while at the same time emphasizing the fact that the adoptive status is properly a matter of adult concern and should so be considered in all studies and methods. Beyond this, it seemed good that the people most directly involved with an institution should take voice concerning it. . . .

#### **DID THESE ADOPTIONS "WORK"?**

##### **Group A (It worked) 5 men; 17 women**

*Simply stated:*

I was loved and treated as their own child.

It has always seemed logical, natural, and undoubtedly was beneficial.

The adopted parents were wise and loving people. Also I was 12 years old at the time of the adoption.

To me, my adopted parents *are* my real parents. . . .

*Next, Advantages received:*

Any alternative possible would have been institutional life. My adopted parents were fine people. I was carefully brought up as their own, given a university education.

I received opportunities (college education, travel, etc.) which I'm sure I wouldn't have received from my real parent. Although I have no idea what my life would have been if my mother had kept me, I have never doubted that I fared better by being adopted. . . .

#### **Group B (It did and it didn't) 5 men; 3 women**

So hard to say—generally I would say it had its moments, as a small child and before I really knew what things were all about. Adolescence was awful, marriage. . . and then a return and a fairly pleasant relationship until their death.

What shall be the criteria? A happy, wholesome relationship, or the production of a useful, fairly well-adjusted individual? The relationship was neither wholesome nor happy, but I have lived on, finished college, married. . . We have two sons.

I was given a fine education, a most comfortable home and, in material things, pretty much what I desired. And you might say it didn't work in that within a week after my 21st birthday, I had to leave home. My foster parents and I have not seen each other since. . . .

#### **Group C (It didn't work) 4 men; 5 women**

*No pretenses:*

I didn't like my foster parents, and it is my belief they didn't like me.

It seemed to me they took me as an obligation and only as a maid in the home.

*Foster parent inadequacy (illustrated in reports):*

My foster parents separated when I was 12 years old after battling for many years. I have supported myself from age 15.

My foster mother was and is a psychopath with whom I had and have absolutely nothing in common. She is a brutal and domineering woman. My foster mother was emotionally unfitted

to rear a child. Left me with a feeling of insecurity and an inferiority complex. Made for an unhappy childhood.

It didn't work for the reason that the people that adopted me were emotionally immature.

*Subjective elements and apparent misplacements:*

Too pronounced a gap between intellectual level of foster-parents and that of the child. Too much religious fanaticism on part of foster-mother, with the inevitable concomitant of authoritarianism, anti-sexuality, etc.

I am not secure. I know very little about my background.

#### **Group A**

My experience as an adopted person has seemed neither tragic nor traumatic to me. In this regard I have been fortunate, more fortunate than many adopted persons, and many persons who were [not] adopted but born into families who did not truly want them. Living is a series of circumstances.

My family position has always been secure; in the community, I have never encountered any situation where my adoptive status has made me feel insecure. Even as a child, I can recall no situation where I was taunted for being adopted. . . . I think that I became so well adjusted to the situation that I am unable to answer your final questions. I suppose the important thing to adopted people is that the adoption work out so well that you never think of yourself as being adopted. . . .

#### **Group B**

It is very difficult to say which problems of one's life may be ascribed to being an adopted person. Some, I think, would take the experience in stride; others would go to pieces. But then, would these particular persons have been very different if they had had "normal" lives?

On the whole I think it is certainly preferable for a deserted or unwanted child to be given the advantages of a family rather than an institutional life. At the time I was adopted I think that there was probably little attention paid to "matching" the parties involved. With the personality and other tests which are available today they are probably doing a better job. . . .

#### **Group C**

I would have preferred to have had parents who really wanted a child. My own parents never needed me, I was left in their hands. I am now forced to be grateful for something I never asked for and never wanted. I feel that children who are adopted should, since early age, be told of their adoption. They should also be

told that they are wanted and loved. Affection makes a child feel secure. I don't think children should be adopted by wealthy people, not unless in extraordinary cases. The wealthier the parents, the more a child feels like a luxury toy, or the victim of people's wish to show off their 'kindness'. . . .

Adoption of a child is something that should be approached with care. Only kind, intelligent people should adopt children. It is quite a problem to cope with an adopted child because we are all so different. What might hurt me, wouldn't have hurt another, and so on. . . .

I do not believe that I lived through the years of torment I have described simply because I was an adopted child. The desire to belong is universal and everyone, who, through any set of circumstances, has lost his home moorings, or been deprived of them, has that longing. One finds it just as tragically present in the thousands of past-middle-age men and women who have lost their mates, whose children no longer need them, as one does among children. The natural moorings are gone and they can't seem to realize, or haven't made the effort to establish them, that there are real substitutes. We have compassion, sympathy, and understanding, usually, as experience has taught us the need for such qualities. I don't think the adopted are a heterogeneous group. I think some have experiences which they can share and find mutual help in the sharing. But they are experiences which they might just as profitably share with others, who, while not adopted, for one reason or another feel alone. I think we can help children who are adopted, or have been, by helping them to realize that their position is not un-natural and not unique. Some are very happy, well adjusted and content—some are not, but so, too, it is with children and adults everywhere. . . .

Source: Jean M. Paton, *The Adopted Break Silence* (Philadelphia: Life History Study Center, 1954), 3, 6-8, 49-51, 143, 148, 151-152, 155.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:

**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact  
Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon



Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

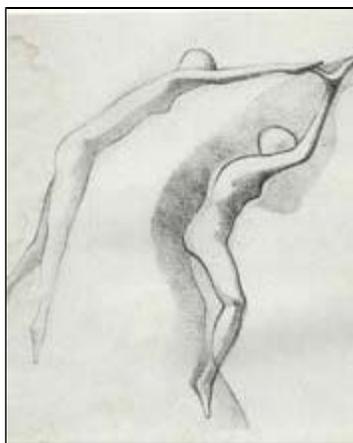
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Adoption Narratives



This drawing, titled "Legitimate and Illegitimate," was based on a sculpture by artist and activist Jean M. Paton, who included it in her pioneering collection of adoption narratives, *The Adopted Break Silence*, 1954. Paton's vision of "the adoptive character" illustrated the painfully divided self that often appeared in adoption stories and provided the rationale for [search and reunion](#).

Telling stories about adoption has played a crucial role in shaping and reshaping the modern adoption experience. Today, autobiographical narratives by birth parents, adoptees, and adoptive parents are as likely to appear on the Internet or in broadcast media as in print. But stories have served historically as crucial vehicles for adoption reform, facilitating the formation of adoption communities and altering the way the parties to adoption felt about themselves and one another. They have also helped to bring adoption to the attention of a broad public and have effectively conveyed the message—present in bible stories and fairy tales—that adoption is at once unique and universal. Only a tiny minority of children and families are touched by adoption, but as a symbol of identity and belonging, adoption speaks to us all.

Early in the twentieth century, when children available for adoption were suspected of being "bad seeds," their [birth parents](#) were presumed to be morally flawed, and [child welfare](#) professionals believed that adoption should be avoided at all costs, it took courage to come forward and share adoption stories. Fictional portrayals of adoption were more common than real-life stories, and they often took the form of formulaic and sentimental moral parables. Most people who wrote about actual experiences were adoptive mothers, perhaps because their claim to voluntary motherhood made them appear more virtuous than birth mothers, who had violated the rules of maternity by giving their children away. These brave souls often told their stories anonymously, as if to acknowledge that adoption evoked as much dismay as curiosity.

Narratives by adult adoptees were scarce before 1940, but they invariably raised elemental questions about identity and belonging and described early quests for community among adopted persons who wished to find others like themselves. By midcentury, policies of [confidentiality and sealed records](#) had

been instituted by most states. Their benign goal—to protect children from the pain of being different—paradoxically reinforced the stigma associated with natal families, life before adoption, and efforts to locate relatives, making these stories even more difficult to tell openly.

Adoption stories have often been narrated indirectly, in the third person as well as the first. **Social workers** recorded their impressions and countless details in case files and conferences. Researchers conducting **outcome studies** compiled what amounted to collective adoption biographies. Lawyers deployed personal testimonies to persuade judges and juries of the emotional damage done by the culture of secrecy. Curiously enough, **“telling”** was not an invitation to share autobiographical details. It described a mandatory ritual, dreaded by many parents, of informing children about their adopted status. Telling was a story, but one that included few or no references to specific narrative details.

Adoption was a very sensitive subject, connected to other sensitive subjects like **infertility** and **illegitimacy**. The result was that magazine articles and books describing the personal joys and sorrows of adoption attracted a great deal of curiosity from the general public. *The Family Nobody Wanted* (1954) was such a popular narrative that Hollywood made two films out of it. Narratives touching on controversial issues, such as **transracial adoptions**, have been the most likely to be told through the medium of television or in feature films. But adoption stories of all kinds were eagerly read by people relieved to discover that others felt as they did. When Jean Paton interviewed adult adoptees and published their thoughts and feelings in 1954, she established an organization called the Life History Study Center and called her book *The Adopted Break Silence*.

Stories were the antidote to secrecy. They pointed the way out of the adoption closet. That is what made them powerful, frightening, and enticing all at the same time. Narratives in which adults adoptees described the pain associated with mysterious origins, the need to search for natal kin, and the deep longing for the connection of physical resemblance were significant in launching a movement for **search and reunion**. *The Search for Anna Fisher* (1973) was a classic in this genre, along with Betty Jean Lifton's *Twice Born: Memoirs of an Adopted Daughter* (1975).

Adoptee narratives were soon joined by a flood of accounts by birth mothers who testified to the long-term grief associated with surrender, figured blood as an essential component of healthy identity, and insisted that adoption had far more to do with coercion than with choice. Stories like Carol Schaefer's *The Other*

*Mother* (1991), which was turned into a television movie, brought renewed attention to such organizations as Adoptees' Liberty Movement Association and **Concerned United Birthparents**. These groups were pioneers in mobilizing narratives for political purposes. In the 1970s and 1980s, stories figured prominently in lawsuits, such as *ALMA v. Lefkowitz*, that sought access to adoption records on the theory that adoptees' biographies had been buried and distorted along with their birth certificates.

Since 1970, narratives have chronicled a sea change in thinking about adoption and have also given expression to a multiplicity of adoption experiences, such as **transracial**, **special needs**, **international**, and gay and lesbian adoptions. Some grew out of notorious cases of conflict and tragedy. Robby DeBoer's  *Losing Jessica* recounted a widely publicized case of contested adoption. Michele Launders' *I Wish You Didn't Know My Name* was written by the birth mother of Lisa Steinberg, a child who died at the hands of her abusive adopters.

During the past three decades, more stories have described more adoptions more openly than in the past, but they have done so with more ambivalence. Margaret Moorman's *Waiting to Forget* (by a birth mother), Ann Kimble Loux's *The Limits of Hope* (by an adoptive mother), and Deann Borshay Liem's documentary film, "First Person Plural" (by an adoptee) are eloquent examples. They testify that adoption is an always distinctive, often difficult, form of family.

One thing that has changed very little in adoption narratives is the female voice. Stories by male adoptees and adoptive fathers are rare, and birth fathers' stories are even rarer. Adoption memoirs are still overwhelmingly authored by women. Is this because women are considered specialists in "private" life experiences such as childhood and family? Because women are more comfortable with the confessional and emotional style of autobiography? Whatever the reason, this gendered dimension of adoption narratives contrasts sharply with the fact that adoption is a very public family-making operation, and one that has been the target of almost constant political and legal change throughout its modern history.

## Document Excerpts

- Anonymous, "How It Feels to Have Been an Adopted Child," 1920
- Anonymous, "An Adopted Mother Speaks," 1922
- Martha Vansant, "The Life of the Adopted Child," 1933

Carol S. Prentice, *An Adopted Child Looks at Adoption*, 1940

- Helen Doss, *The Family Nobody Wanted*, 1954
- Jean M. Paton, *The Adopted Break Silence*, 1954
- *ALMA et al v. Lefkowitz et al*, 1977



Further reading about Adoption Narratives

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

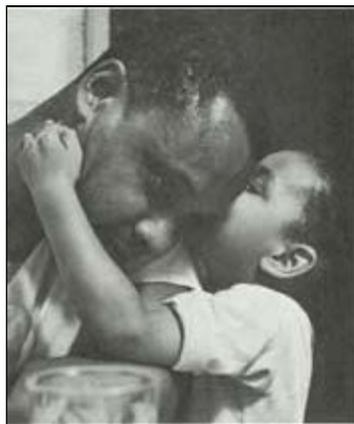
© Ellen Herman


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Special Needs Adoptions



Mrs. William Stewart and her adopted daughters Marion and Ethel in 1919. One of the children was blind and the other physically disabled at a time when "special needs" adoptions were still rare.



Roy DeCarava, a well known African-American photographer, took pictures of family life in Harlem after World War II that were used to publicize the urgent need for adoptive homes.

Systematic efforts to locate families for children who were "hard-to-place" did not really occur until midcentury. It was only after World War II that agencies began to test the feasibility of adoptions previously ruled out of bounds because they were considered difficult, risky, and likely to fail: **African-American** children and children of racially and ethnically mixed heritage, children with physical and mental disabilities, older children, and sibling groups. Efforts to arrange such adoptions challenged older views, influenced by **eugenics**, that only normal, white children were qualified for family life. Special needs adoptions were founded on a novel philosophy at odds with **matching**: "Adoption is appropriate for any child without family ties who is in need of a family and for whom a family can be found to meet his need." This new slogan came to life for the American public through the writing of **Pearl Buck**, a best-selling novelist, and popular narratives like *The Family Nobody Wanted*.

Anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that class differences have significantly shaped Americans' openness to the adoption of children with special needs. Working-class adopters have tended to be less demanding than their middle- and upper-class counterparts that adoptees live up to high standards of intellectual achievement or that children be scientifically selected to meet their specifications. Before the special needs revolution at midcentury, when social workers were still reluctant to place less-than-perfect children, many ordinary families expressed both willingness and desire to raise many different kinds of children as their own. At the same time, other would-be adopters actively sought out children who would measure up to their expectations for background, behavior, appearance, and education. Well-educated adopters were particularly interested in identifying children

who could take advantage of a college education. (For examples, see the [Letters from Prospective Adopters to Arnold Gesell, 1939-1950.](#))

By the 1960s, statewide adoption resource exchanges were helping with special needs placements. In 1968, the national Adoption Resource Exchange of North America (ARENA) was founded, partly as an outgrowth of the [Indian Adoption Project](#). New parent-led organizations were also crucial in publicizing the needs of children with a wide variety of special needs. The Open Door Society of North America began in Montreal in 1959 and migrated to the United States from Canada, where chapters began in many states. The Council on Adoptable Children, headquartered in Ann Arbor, also emerged in the 1960s. Led by adoptive parents Peter and Joyce Forsythe, the group sponsored an important conference, "Frontiers in Adoption," in October 1967. By 1969, there were at least 47 organizations in the United States whose mission was to advocate for "waiting" children. Many were local groups, like Transracial Adoptive Parents in Illinois and Families for Inter-Racial Adoption in Boston. In the mid-1960s, [single parent adoptions](#) were first tried in order to locate homes for hard-to-place children.

Special needs pioneers changed adoption culture dramatically. Their vision of family defied the claim that adoptive kinship had to be invisible in order to be authentic, insisting instead on the purposeful and open inclusion of difference. This value, in turn, reflected an even broader shift in conceptions of national belonging and citizenship in the United States after World War II. Special needs adoptions symbolized the civil rights revolution within the adoption world. Their accomplishment was not only to offer more different kinds of families to more different kinds of children, but to openly welcome multiculturalism and multiracialism within the family well as within the history, demography, and politics of the country at large.

## Document Excerpts

- [Marshall Field, Child Welfare League of America President, Address to National Conference on Adoptions, 1955](#)
- [Child Welfare League of America Memo, "Description of Children Who Were Referred For Adoptive Placement and Considered Difficult to Place," 1955](#)

Michael Schapiro, *A Study of Adoption Practice, Adoption of Children With Special Needs*, 1956

- Louise Wise Services, *Different Eligibility Requirements for Different Children*, 1961
- Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980



[Further reading on Special Needs Adoptions](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Bertha and Harry Holt



The Holts and their fourteen children in the 1950s



Bertha Holt with Vice-President Hubert Humphrey at the American Mother of the Year presentation, 1966

In 1955, a special act of Congress allowed Bertha and Harry Holt, an evangelical couple from rural Oregon, to adopt eight Korean War orphans. The Holts had a large family before the adoptions, but they were so moved by their experience that they became pioneers of **international adoptions** and arranged hundreds for other American couples. They relied on **proxy adoptions** and overlooked the **minimum standards** and investigatory practices endorsed by social workers. They honored adopters' specifications for age and sex, gave priority to couples with one or no children, and asked only that applicants be "saved persons" who could pay the cost of children's airfare from Korea. They paid close attention to race-matching for children whose fathers were African-American, but otherwise ignored it entirely. They were happy to accept couples who had been rejected, for a variety of reasons, by conventional adoption agencies.

The Holts believed they were doing God's work, but they became lightning rods for controversy about how adoptive families should be made. In the press, the Holts were portrayed as heroic, selfless figures. In Congress, Oregon Senator Richard Neuberger called them incarnations of "the Biblical Good Samaritan." In Christian communities around the country, their work was held up as a model to be emulated. But many professionals and policy-makers in the **U.S. Children's Bureau**, the **Child Welfare League of America**, and the International Social Service devoted themselves (unsuccessfully) to putting the Holts out of business. They considered the Holts dangerous amateurs, throwbacks to the bad old days of charity and sentiment. Their placements threatened **child welfare** by substituting religious zeal and haphazard methods for professional skill and supervision.

For the Holts, family-making required faith and altruism, not **social work** or regulation, and they found nothing wrong with the idea of Americans adopting foreign children, sight unseen. American childhood, they assumed, was unquestionably superior to childhood in developing nations. The Holts' form letter seeking adoptive parents included the following request. "We would ask all of you who are Christians to pray to God that He will give us the wisdom and the strength and the power to deliver his little children from the cold and misery and darkness of Korea into the warmth and love of your homes." For the Holts and many of their supporters, Korea was a backward country whose children deserved to be rescued.

Many Americans cheered the Holts and found their promises of speedy and uncomplicated adoptions a refreshing alternative to inspection by choosy agencies with waiting lists that could last for years. **Pearl S. Buck** admired the Holts, even though she disliked their Christian fundamentalism, and shared their suspicion that the professionals who were supposed to be helping children were actually doing them more harm than good. By identifying themselves with suffering children that most people ignored, the Holts reinforced the messages that emerged from popular books like *The Family Nobody Wanted*. Adoption was an act of faith. Love was enough to make the families that children needed.

By the early 1960s, the Holts responded to pressure from the child welfare establishment. Their operation began to follow standard professional procedures, hired social worker John Adams as its Executive Director in 1962, and gradually evolved into a typical adoption agency. In a little more than a decade, the Holts repeated a pattern central to the history of modern adoption: the movement from humanitarian to professionalism and from religion to science.

The Holt agency continues to make international placements today. It is located in Eugene, Oregon.

## Document Excerpts

- **Harry Holt's 'Dear Friends' letter, 1955**
- **Miss Elizabeth Campbell to Bessie Irvin, April 4, 1956**
- **Mrs. Harry Holt, *The Seed from the East*, 1956**

Arnold Lyslo, "Impressions on Meeting the Harry Holt Plane," 1958

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Pearl S. Buck (1892-1973)



Buck at about the time she was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1938

Pearl Buck, who won both the Pulitzer and Nobel Prizes, was one of the best known and most widely read American novelists of the twentieth century. She was also an adoptive parent, a prominent early critic of racial and religious **matching**, a thorn in the side of the child welfare establishment, and an advocate of special needs, **transracial**, and **international adoptions**.

The child of Protestant missionaries, Buck spent the first half of her life in China and the second half living in the United States. Her formative experience abroad led her to write prolifically about Asia for western audiences and work tirelessly on behalf of international humanitarianism and intercultural understanding. She was a multiculturalist who hoped to dignify Chinese history and make cultural difference understandable for Americans. But she was also an anti-communist and a champion of civil rights who believed that the human story was fundamentally universal.

After her first marriage, to John Lossing Buck, Pearl give birth to a **"feeble-minded" child**, Carol, in 1921. Carol was a victim of PKU, an inherited metabolic disease, and was institutionalized for most of her life. After her daughter's birth, Buck had a hysterectomy. Although this wrenching personal experience must have shaped her thinking about children and families profoundly, Buck kept the fact of Carol's existence and mental retardation secret for a very long time. Buck and her first husband adopted a baby in 1926. With her second husband, Richard Walsh, Buck adopted two infant boys from the Cradle (one of the country's **first specialized adoption agencies**) in 1936, followed by four mixed-race children from Europe, Asia, and the United States. In 1949, she founded an adoption agency, Welcome House, after being unable to locate an agency that was willing to place a fifteen-month old of mixed racial background because of his brown skin. "I was indignant, so I started my own damned agency!" she explained.

In 1955, Buck publicly criticized social workers and religious institutions for standing between tens of thousands of homeless children and willing parents in order to preserve their jobs. She believed that families formed by love—rather than prejudices based on race, religion, nation, and blood—were living expressions of democracy that could counteract communist charges that America’s global defense of freedom was deeply hypocritical in the era of Jim Crow.

In 1991, after forty years, Welcome House merged with the Pearl S. Buck Foundation to form Pearl S. Buck International, an organization that continues to carry out Buck’s work in the fields of humanitarian aid, intercultural education, and adoption.

## Document Excerpts

- Pearl Buck, “The Children Waiting: The Shocking Scandal of Adoption,” 1955
- Joseph Reid to Paul Smith, September 15, 1955
- Pearl Buck, “I Am the Better Woman for Having My Two Black Children,” 1972



Further reading by and about Pearl S. Buck

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## International Adoptions



Tak Oi Shi from Hong Kong, adopted by the Skinner family of Tacoma and renamed Susie, in 1954.



Cartoon accompanying an article about "Operation Babylift," which evacuated children from Saigon on the eve of the U.S. departure in 1975.

Before 1970, "intercountry" was the more typical term for the adoptions of children born in foreign countries by U.S. citizens. Today, these placements are called international adoptions.

After World War II and during the early Cold War, the adoption market globalized as wars, refugee migrations, famines, and other disasters made the plight of dependent and orphaned children abroad more visible to Americans. U.S. service personnel stationed around the world were on the front lines of this movement. Soldiers and sailors sent to Europe during the war, Germany and Japan after 1945, and eventually Korea, Vietnam, and elsewhere in Asia produced significant numbers of children in those countries. The story of these half-American waifs, many of them mixed-race and sometimes cruelly stigmatized in their countries of origin, attracted attention in the United States.

These children of crisis resurrected the language of rescue and the religious impulses that had characterized the era of the **orphan trains** and pointed in the direction of **special needs adoptions**, which had similar humanitarian overtones. After 1945, international adoptions mobilized Lutherans, Catholics, and Seventh Day Adventists, among others, and inspired the formation of such organizations as the League for Orphan Victims in Europe (LOVE) and the American Joint Committee for Assisting Japanese-American Orphans.

As with the earlier phase in adoption history, benevolence was compatible with self-interest. Some Americans were delighted to discover a baby boom in West Germany, where thousands of healthy children had been abandoned by irresponsible fathers or men who had never been told of

their children's existence. Military families stationed abroad were the first to adopt these children but the mass media quickly spread the news to Americans at home. The story of the Doss family, popularized by *The Family Nobody Wanted*, was first described in a 1949 *Readers' Digest* article entitled "Our 'International Family'."

During the 1950s, **proxy adoptions**, which allowed U.S. citizens to adopt in foreign courts in absentia, were the most widely publicized means of international adoption. They gained ground after 1955, when an evangelical couple from rural Oregon, **Bertha and Harry Holt**, adopted eight Korean War orphans. The Holts went on to arrange scores of adoptions for other Americans who shared their fervent belief that children could be brought from Korea to America with divine guidance.

Child welfare professionals hated this type of adoption, not because it was religious but because it lacked regulation. **U.S. Children's Bureau** Chief Katherine Oettinger argued that children adopted from abroad were more likely to suffer abuse, neglect, and disruption because their adoptions circumvented **minimum standards**. "All of us respond to the idea of rescuing helpless children from the dragon of deprivation," she agreed, but "problems in adoption are infinitely harder to resolve in an adoption which spans the ocean." Between 1953 and 1962, Americans adopted 15,000 foreign children.

International adoptions often amounted to **transracial adoptions** since they brought Asian children into white American families. Directly at odds with **matching**, these adoptions paved the way for domestic **transracial adoptions** by making family formation across racial lines a conspicuous social issue for the first time. **Pearl S. Buck** was perhaps the most important public champion of parentless children of color born within and without the United States. She insisted that love made families—not race, religion, or national background. **Outcome studies** of international adoptees also prompted new thinking about the need for cultural sensitivity to such issues as language and national heritage. Concerns about whether foreign adoptees might bring about an American future with more interracial dating and marriage were common and urgent, indicating that earlier concerns about **eugenics** had not disappeared.

Like domestic **transracial adoptions**, international adoptions raised basic questions that Americans have still not answered in spite of the dramatic recent increase in

international adoptions. Is love enough to make a family?  
Does belonging have a color or a nation?

## Document Excerpts

- International Social Service Memo, "Home Study Material for Intercountry Adoption Applications," 1957
- International Social Service Memo, "Telephone Calls Concerning Adoption", 1957
- Arnold Lyslo, "Impressions on Meeting the Harry Holt Plane," 1958
- Phan Ngoc-Quoi to Miriam Lewis, International Social Service Case Consultant, April 27, 1966
- Department of Defense Position Regarding Children Born Out of Wedlock, 1971
- *New York Times* ad about "Operation Babylift," 1975
- Statement on the Immorality of Bringing South Vietnamese Orphans to the United States, April 4, 1975
- Gloria Emerson, "Operation Babylift," 1975
- Agency for International Development, Operation Babylift Report, 1975
- Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, 1993
- Child Citizenship Act of 2000



Further reading about International Adoptions

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Proxy Adoptions



The dangers of proxy adoption: According to an official of the International Social Service, this woman from Texas "appeared to be drunk and she appeared to be over 50 years of age" when she first greeted the baby adopted for her, by proxy, in Greece, 1957.

During the 1950s, proxy adoptions were the most widely publicized means of **international adoption**. They allowed U.S. citizens to adopt in foreign courts by designating a proxy agent to act in their place. Thousands of children, especially from Japan, Greece, and Korea, were adopted in this way. Because these adoptees entered the United States as the legal children of parents who had never met them, proxies avoided the requirements of state laws and flouted the notion that **child welfare** was the dominant factor in adoption.

Proxy adoptions revealed how inadequate federal policy was in dealing with family-making across national borders. Until passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1961, which incorporated **international adoption**, the migration of foreign-born children to the U.S. had no place in permanent law. It was governed by a series of provisional refugee and displaced persons acts, beginning with a directive from President Truman in December 1945, that envisioned the entry of "eligible orphans" from war-torn countries as a temporary emergency and set quotas for that purpose. National concerns about immigration and unwillingness to interfere in the legal systems of sovereign nations meant that **international adoptions** were effectively exempted from the regulatory regime that had been laboriously put into place domestically.

Proxy adoptions epitomized the problem, as professionals saw it, that foreign children were given unequal legal protection and accorded few if any safeguards. Officials in the **U.S Children's Bureau**, the **Child Welfare League of America**, and the American Branch of International Social Service charged proxy peddlers, including **Bertha and Harry Holt**, with masterminding an unscrupulous, global mail-order baby racket and hiding behind humanitarian rhetoric. Transnational migrants needed the **minimum standards** mandated in most domestic adoptions: investigation, supervision, and probation. Professionals pointed to additional hazards in **international adoption**. Many foreign children—from Asia in particular—had spent lengthy periods in orphanages and needed special attention as a result. Professionals

also claimed to possess crucial cultural awareness that amateurs lacked. They suggested that parents adopting foreign children needed basic education about children's home countries, rudimentary language skills, and enlightened attitudes about a host of things from food and sleeping arrangements to neighborhood integration and interracial dating and marriage.

Proxy adoptions ignored all of this and left family-making up to faith and chance.

## Document Excerpts

- [International Social Service, "Proxy Adoptions," 1954-1956](#)
- [Susan Pettiss to Rosalind Giles, February 8, 1957](#)
- [Arnold Lyslo, "Impressions on Meeting the Harry Holt Plane," 1958](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman

# The Adoption History Project


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Indian Adoption Project



Beginning in 1916, the [U.S. Children's Bureau](#) brought its baby-week campaign to thousands of cities, towns, and rural communities across the United States. The photograph above was taken during a baby-week celebration on an Indian reservation.



A visiting nurse weighs an infant in the kitchen of an Indian household while the mother and several children look on, 1967.

Administered by the [Child Welfare League of America](#) and funded by a federal contract from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the [U.S. Children's Bureau](#), the Indian Adoption Project lasted from 1958 through 1967. During an era when [matching](#) dominated adoption practice, it placed 395 Native American children from 16 western states with white families in Illinois, Indiana, New York, Massachusetts, Missouri, and other states in the East and Midwest. (Only 14 children were adopted by Southern families and one child was adopted in Puerto Rico.) Approximately fifty public and private adoption agencies cooperated with the project, but the largest number of children were placed by agencies that were leaders in [African-American adoptions](#) and services to children of color: Louise Wise Services and Spence-Chapin Adoption Services (both of New York) and the Children's Bureau of Delaware.

Because tribes are legally considered sovereign nations, the incorporation of Indian children into non-Indian families constituted a kind of [international](#) as well as [transracial adoption](#), paralleling the adoptions of foreign children from Europe and Asia after 1945. The Indian Adoption Project was perhaps the single most important exception to race-matching, an almost universal policy at the time. It aspired to systematically place an entire child population across lines of nation, culture, and race.

The project's Director, Arnold Lyslo, and many other child welfare leaders viewed the Indian Adoption Project as an example of enlightened adoption practice, made possible by a decrease in the climate of racial prejudice that had formerly prevented the adoption of Native American children. "One can no longer say that the Indian child is the 'forgotten child'," Lyslo proudly declared upon the project's completion. The Adoption Resource Exchange of North

America (ARENA), founded in 1966, was the immediate successor to the Indian Adoption Project. ARENA was the first national adoption resource exchange devoted to finding homes for hard-to-place children. It continued the practice of placing Native American children with white adoptive parents for a number of years in the early 1970s.

A significant **outcome study** of families who adopted through the Indian Adoption Project was conducted from 1960 to 1968 by David Fanshel, a well-known child welfare researcher. Fanshel studied the motivations of parents and the outcomes for children in approximately one-quarter of all the adoptions arranged through the Indian Adoption Project. In *Far from the Reservation*, Fanshel concluded that the vast majority of children and families had adjusted extremely well, but he also anticipated criticism. "It may be that Indian leaders would rather see their children share the fate of their fellow Indians than lose them in the white world. It is for the Indian people to decide."

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Native American activists and their allies challenged the idea that the Indian Adoption Project was a triumph for civil rights and equality. They denounced the project as the most recent in a long line of genocidal policies toward native communities and cultures. Tribal advocates worked hard for the passage of the **Indian Child Welfare Act**, which reacted against the Indian Adoption Project by making it extremely difficult for Native American children to be adopted by non-native parents. In June 2001, Child Welfare League Executive Director Shay Bilchik legitimated Native concerns, formally apologizing for the Indian Adoption Project at a meeting of the National Indian Child Welfare Association. He put the **Child Welfare League of America** on record in support of the **Indian Child Welfare Act**. "No matter how well intentioned and how squarely in the mainstream this was at the time," he said, "it was wrong; it was hurtful; and it reflected a kind of bias that surfaces feelings of shame."

## Document Excerpts

- Navajo Tribal Council, "Tribal Policy on Adoption of Navajo Orphans and Abandoned or Neglected Children," 1960
- Louise Wise Services, "Our Indian Program," 1960
- Arnold Lyslo, "Suggested Criteria to Evaluate Families to Adopt American Indian Children Through the Indian Adoption Project," 1962

- [Indian Adoption Project Evaluation, 1958 through 1967](#)
- [David Fanshel, \*Far From the Reservation\*, 1972](#)



[Further reading about the Indian Adoption Project and the Indian Child Welfare Act](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Marshall D. Schechter, "Observations on Adopted Children," 1960

Marshall Schechter, a psychiatrist in private practice in Beverly Hills, California, reported in 1960 that adoptees were 100 times more likely than non-adoptees to present a range of serious emotional problems. Like a number of other contributions to the psychopathology literature, Schechter's report was based on a tiny number of cases. He presented information about 120 children seen in his practice between 1948 and 1953, of whom exactly sixteen (or 13.3 percent) were adopted. Since adoptees numbered less than one-tenth of one percent in the general population, adopted children were greatly over-represented in his practice. Schechter's friend, Povl Toussieng, a child psychiatrist at the famous Menninger Clinic, had also told him that up to one-third of all children seen as outpatients at the clinic were adopted. Schechter's own observations, confirmed by a trusted colleague, were the basis for his conclusion. Adoption had an emotionally damaging impact on child development.

What exactly was it about adoption that caused problems? According to Schechter, the answer could be found in the psychoanalytic theory that "object relations" (the first and closest ties formed between infants and the adults who care for them) were crucial determinants of personhood. Children could not cope with the knowledge that they had been rejected by **birth parents** and no amount of reassurance that their adoptive parents loved and wanted them could make up for the "severe narcissistic injury" that adoption inflicted. Each and every one of his sixteen cases illustrated "how the idea of adoption had woven itself into the framework of the child's personality configuration." **Telling** children they were adopted was mandatory, Schechter agreed, but it also precipitated psychological difficulties. Carefully timing and managing the details of **telling** could help mitigate the resulting problems. (Later studies challenged this view. See, for example, the excerpt from **Benson Jaffee and David Fanshel, *How They Fared in Adoption.***)

Schechter was not the first person to suggest that adoption posed intrinsic psychological risks. As early as 1937, psychiatrist David Levy presented case histories showing that adoptees suffered from "primary affect hunger," a term he used to describe what is now called attachment

disorder. A number of other clinicians in the U.S. and Britain published reports in the 1940s and 1950s about the deleterious consequences of growing up "without genealogy." It was the boldness of Schechter's claim that adopted children were much more likely to become neurotic and psychotic that galvanized helping professionals and therapeutic approaches to adoption. It also generated a great deal of controversy. H. David Kirk, author of *Shared Fate*, called Schechter's study "spurious." Many other researchers were equally skeptical that adoption was the sort of risk factor Schechter maintained it was.

Schechter's methodology drew the most fire. Small numbers of detailed case histories had long been standard features of medical research and psychiatrists renowned for their contributions to developmental theory, including [Sigmund Freud](#) and [Anna Freud](#), relied on them extensively. But psychologists and social workers with training in scientific research methods insisted that Schechter's sample was far too small to be representative and disparaged his crude and inaccurate statistical calculations. His research design was so flawed as to be hopelessly unreliable.

Schechter responded by sending a questionnaire to members of the Southern California Psychiatric Society and various regional institutions. A follow-up report presented empirical data showing that adoptees showed up in clinical populations everywhere at much higher than average rates.

Schechter's account of the damage that adoption did to children was vigorously contested during the 1960s. Today, it is widely accepted by parents and professionals who agree that attachment and loss are at the heart of what makes adoption a distinctive and difficult experience. This consensus was efficiently summarized in a book that Schechter co-edited with developmental psychologist David Brodzinsky: *The Psychology of Adoption* (1990).

## Document Excerpt

- [Marshall D. Schechter, "Observations on Adopted Children," 1960](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:

**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact  
Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon



Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Psychopathology Studies

Does adoption jeopardize the mental and emotional health of children, making adoptees especially vulnerable to developmental, behavioral, and academic problems? Most people connected to adoption today think it does. Most Americans agree that adoption is a “risk factor,” according to public opinion polls.

The belief that adoption has a psychology of its own is recent, indebted to a tradition of controversial clinical studies linking adoption to psychopathology. Beginning around World War II, some mental health professionals, often influenced by [psychoanalysis](#), proposed that the losses associated with adoption made normal development tricky for adopted children and stability difficult to achieve for adoptive families. The new worries about adoption generated by psychopathology studies added to already well established concerns that available children were [feeble-minded](#) and adoption unusually risky.

Psychopathology studies equated difference with damage. They helped to transform adoption into a full-fledged object of casework and counseling, and this was essential for the emergence of therapeutic adoption. The rapid spread of post-adoption services, non-existent in 1950, indicates that many parents and professionals now accept the need for long-term, perhaps permanent, help in order to avoid or manage adoption-related problems.

Awareness that the parties to adoption face unique psychological challenges may well be one of the things that makes twentieth-century adoption practices historically distinctive—as distinctive as the psychology of adoption itself.

### Chronological List of Psychopathology Studies

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 1937 | David M. Levy, “Primary Affect Hunger,” <i>American Journal of Psychiatry</i> 94 (November 1937):643-652. |
| 1937 | Sydney Tarachow, “The Disclosure of Foster-Parentage to a Boy: Behavior                                   |

- Disorders and Other Psychological Problems Resulting," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 94 (September 1937):401-412
- 1938 Edwina A. Cowan, "Some Emotional Problems Besetting the Lives of Foster Children," *Mental Hygiene* 22 (July 1938):454-458.
- 1941 Robert P. Knight, "Some Problems in Selecting and Rearing Adopted Children," *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic* 5 (May 1941):65-74.
- 1942 Elsie Stonesifer, "The Behavior Difficulties of Adopted and Own Children," *Smith College Studies in Social Work* 13 (November-December 1942):161.
- 1944 Houston McKee Mitchell, "Adopted Children as Patients of a Mental Hygiene Clinic," *Smith College Studies in Social Work* 15 (1944):122-123.
- 1952 E. Wellisch, "Children Without Genealogy—A Problem of Adoption," *Mental Health* 13 (1952):41-42.
- 1953 Portia Holman, "Some Factors in the Aetiology of Maladjusted Children," *Journal of Mental Science* 99 (1953):654-688.
- 1953 Bernice T. Eiduson and Jean B. Livermore, "Complications in Therapy with Adopted Children," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 23 (October 1953):795-802
- 1954 National Association for Mental Health, *A Survey Based on Adoption Case Records* (London: National Association for Mental Health, 1954 est.).
- 1960 **Marshall D. Schechter**, "Observations on Adopted Children," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 3 (July 1960):21-32.
- 1961 M.L. Kellmer Pringle, "The Incidence of Some Supposedly Adverse Family Conditions and of Left-Handedness in Schools for Maladjusted Children," *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 31, no. 2 (June 1961):183-193.
- 1961 Bruce Gardner, Glenn R. Hawkes, and Lee G. Burchinal, "Noncontinuous Mothering in Infancy and Development in Later Childhood," *Child Development* 32 (June 1961):225-234.
- 1962 Betty K. Ketchum, "An Exploratory Study of the Disproportionate Number of Adopted Children Hospitalized at Columbus Children's Psychiatric Hospital" (Masters Thesis, Ohio State University, 1962).
- 1962 Povl W. Toussieng, "Thoughts Regarding the Etiology of Psychological Difficulties in Adopted Children," *Child Welfare* (February 1962):59-65, 71.
- 1962 Frances Lee Anderson Menlove, "Acting Out Behavior in Emotionally Disturbed Adopted Children" (Ph.D., University of Michigan, 1962).
- 1963 Michael Humphrey and Christopher Ounsted, "Adoptive Families Referred for Psychiatric Advice," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 109 (1963):599-608.
- 1963 Jerome D. Goodman, Richard M. Silberstein, and Wallace Mandell, "Adopted Children Brought to Child Psychiatric Clinic," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 9, no. 5 (November 1963):451-456.

- 1964 Marshall D. Schechter et al., "Emotional Problems in the Adoptee," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 10 (February 1964): 109-118.
- 1964 H. J. Sants, "Genealogical Bewilderment in Children with Substitute Parents," *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 37, no. 1964 (1964): 133-141.
- 1964 **H. David Kirk, *Shared Fate: A Theory of Adoption and Mental Health*** (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964).
- 1965 Frances Lee Menlove, "Aggressive Symptoms in Emotionally Disturbed Adopted Children," *Child Development* 36, no. 2 (June 1965): 519-532.
- 1966 Nathan M. Simon and Audrey G. Senturia, "Adoption and Psychiatric Illness," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 122, no. 8 (February 1966): 858-868.
- 1966 H. David Kirk, "Are Adopted Children Especially Vulnerable to Stress? A Critique of Some Recent Assertions," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 14 (March 1966): 291-298.
- 1966 Alfred Kadushin, "Adoptive Parenthood: A Hazardous Adventure?," *Social Work* (July 1966): 30-39.
- 1968 Shirley A. Reece and Barbara Levin, "Psychiatric Disturbances in Adopted Children: A Descriptive Study," *Social Work* (January 1968): 101-111.
- 1970 Marshall D. Schechter, "About Adoptive Parents," in *Parenthood: Its Psychology and Psychopathology*, eds. E. James Anthony and Therese Benedek (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970), 353-371.
- 1975 Arthur D. Sorosky, Annette Baran, and Reuben Pannor, "Identity Conflicts in Adoptees," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 45 (January 1975): 18-27.
- 1988 David Kirschner and Linda S. Nagel, "Antisocial Behavior in Adoptees: Patterns and Dynamics," *Child and Adolescent Social Work* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 300-314.
- 1990 David Kirschner, "The Adopted Child Syndrome: Considerations for Psychotherapy," *Psychotherapy in Private Practice* 8, no. 3 (1990): 93-100.
- 1990 David Brodzinsky and Marshall Schechter, eds., *The Psychology of Adoption* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
- 1993 Nancy Newton Verrier, *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child* (Baltimore, MD: Gateway Press, 1993).
- 1995 P.F. Sullivan, J.E. Wells, and J.A. Bushnell, "Adoption as a Risk Factor for Mental Disorders," *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 92, no. 2 (August 1995): 119-124.
- 1995 Katarina Wegar, "Adoption and Mental Health: A Theoretical Critique of the Psychopathological Model," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 65 (October 1995): 540-548.
- 1998 Joyce Maguire Pavao, *The Family of Adoption* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998).
- 1998 Jeffrey J. Hugaard, "Is adoption a risk factor for the development of adjustment problems?," *Clinical Psychology Review* 18, no. 1 (January 1998): 47-69.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact  
Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

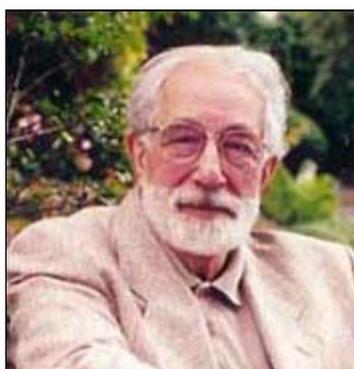
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## ***Shared Fate: A Theory of Adoption and Mental Health, 1964***



H. David Kirk in 1999

This influential book was the first to make adoption a significant issue in the sociological literatures on family and mental health. Its author, H. David Kirk, was an adoptive father of four. Born in Germany in 1918 and educated at the City College of New York and Cornell University, he directed the Adoption Research Project at McGill University from 1951 to 1961. This project eventually compiled data about the attitudes and experiences of 2000 adoptive families in Canada and the United States, most headed by infertile couples. What he learned was that “role handicap” characterized the experience of adoptive parents. Adults who failed to have children naturally were labeled abnormal and experienced discrimination. Adopting other people’s children, Kirk found, did not relieve their pain. The agony of **infertility** followed them into parenthood.

Two choices existed for handling the strain, according to Kirk. Adoptive parents could believe in the promises of **matching** and pretend to be something they were not. Or they could own up to their deprivation and make common cause with their children and their children’s **birth parents**. Kirk called these two options “rejection-of-difference” and “acknowledgment-of-difference.” Adopters who made the first choice escaped social stigma by claiming they were just like biological parents and avoiding the dreaded task of **telling** their children about their adoptive status. Adopters who made the second choice had to live with doubts about their own authenticity, but they cast their lot with children whose hold on belonging was as shaky as their own. Difference was the “shared fate” of adoptive parents and children. Acknowledging it was less comfortable but far better for everyone involved.

*Shared Fate* was important for two reasons. First, it analyzed adoption as an important social institution rather than as an arrangement made by individuals seeking to solve a range of personal problems. Second, it promoted a decisive shift in the world of adoption away from simulation and toward diversity as the foundation for family-making. As a new adoption reform movement dawned in

the late 1960s, [matching](#) was criticized, along with policies of [confidentiality and sealed records](#). The denial of difference no longer seemed natural or wise, as it had earlier in the century. The struggle with difference, also at the heart of therapeutic adoption, emerged as the single most defining feature of the adoption experience.

It is obvious to most people that adoption is a different way to make a family. Kirk elevated this common sense observation to the level of social theory. Bringing difference into the open made it more urgent than ever to know whether difference was just difference or whether difference caused damage. [Psychopathology studies](#) suggested that difference was detrimental and that adoptees were prone to behavior problems and emotional disturbance because they were adopted. Kirk protested this pessimistic conclusion, but *Shared Fate* had provided significant momentum for a wave of thinking about the risks of adoptive kinship for adults and children. The notion that adoption was fragile primarily because of its emotional defects was fairly new, but the notion that adoption was an especially hazardous and inferior form of kinship was not. Danger has been an enduring theme in modern adoption history.

## Document Excerpt

- H. David Kirk, *Shared Fate: A Theory of Adoption and Mental Health*, 1964



Further reading by H. David Kirk, author of *Shared Fate*

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012

Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Single Parent Adoptions



This 1966 cover of *Jet* magazine publicized the innovative effort by the Los Angeles County Bureau of Adoptions to seek out single parents for children in need of adoption.



Juanita Nichols, a staffer at the Los Angeles County Bureau of Child Adoptions, conducting a training class for prospective single adopters.

Every state in the country currently allows single adults to adopt children. This may be less surprising than the fact that singles have been legally eligible to adopt since the first adoption laws were passed in the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, the “spinster” who took in children was a staple of Victorian moral fiction and a recurrent figure in [adoption narratives](#). A fair number of unmarried women ([Jessie Taft](#) was one) adopted children in the early decades of the twentieth century. They often raised children in pairs as well as alone, illustrating that the vast majority of adoptions by lesbians and gay men have been arranged as single parent adoptions, whether they actually were or not. But formal legal eligibility did not imply tolerance, let alone acceptance. Singles were viewed as less desirable parents than married couples. Men were considered far less desirable than women, if they were considered at all.

The number of families headed by single parents increased in the United States throughout the twentieth century, due mainly to rising rates of divorce and nonmarital childbearing, but their increasing prevalence did little to dispel fears that growing up in such families would harm children, both emotionally and economically. Many state welfare officials enacted regulations making it difficult or impossible for agencies to place children in the care of single individuals. By midcentury, encouraged by the popularization of [Freudian](#) ideas and therapeutic approaches to [child welfare](#), agency workers were determined to find “normal” families for parentless children. To be normal, households had to be headed by heterosexual, married, couples who were comfortable with a division of labor between non-working wives and bread-winning husbands. This ideal made single applicants for adoption abnormal by definition. If they wanted children so badly, why weren’t they married? Who would take care of children whose single mothers worked for

a living? What would become of children, especially boys, who grew up without fathers? In 1958, the adoption standards issued by the [Child Welfare League of America](#) stated simply that adoptive families should include both a mother and a father. No mention was made of single parents at all.

In the popular imagination, unmarried adults figured as [birth parents](#), not adopters. The stigma attached to illegitimacy could be reason enough for unwed mothers to surrender children to married couples who could, at least, legitimize their birth status. Why heap more shame on unlucky bastards by having them adopted by single parents?

Still, single parents did adopt prior to the 1960s, although there is no way of knowing how many. The number was probably small. We know very little about who these adopters were or what kind of children they took in, although it is certain that most were women and probable that they adopted more relatives (i.e., nieces and nephews) than unrelated children. [Adoption statistics](#) offer few clues.

Systematic efforts to recruit single parents began only in the 1960s, initiated by advocates of the special needs revolution in adoption. These advocates insisted that children who were hard to place should have equal opportunities to grow up in families in spite of their mental or physical disabilities, advanced ages, minority or mixed-race status, or a combination of these factors. Many potential adopters, however, were looking for healthy white infants, and these private preferences slowed the practical progress of [special needs adoptions](#), as did agency policies that favored or limited placements to [infertile](#) couples.

The first organized effort to enlist single parents was a program of the Los Angeles Bureau of Adoptions. In 1965, this public agency sought out single African-Americans in order to locate same-race parents for [African-American children](#) for whom married parents could not be found. Over the next two years, the agency placed a total of thirty-nine children with single mothers and one child with a single father, a fairly small number considering the hundreds of children in care. The Los Angeles Bureau of Adoptions also experimented with placing minority children with white married couples, an experience described in some detail by agency official [Ethel E. Branham](#). For even the most daring agencies, however, [transracial adoptions](#) represented a partial solution to the urgent needs of children of color, especially as the controversy over placing black children in white families heated up in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

According to Los Angeles Bureau director Walter A. Heath, two parents were preferable, "but one parent is better than none." By the time it revised its adoption standards in 1968, the [Child Welfare League of America](#) conceded that married parents were an unattainable luxury for some children. Single parent adoptions were permissible in "exceptional circumstances" where the child would not otherwise be adopted.

The story of single parent adoptions illustrates change as well as continuity in the history of adoption. That some adults previously considered ineligible or even entirely unfit for parenthood were eventually recognized as a positive resource for children attests to the democratization of adoption, which now includes many more kinds of people than it did in the past, at least in theory. At the same time, single parent adoptions prove that [matching](#) children and parents on a hierarchy of more and less desirable characteristics persists. Approximately one-third of children adopted from the public foster care system and one-quarter of all children with [special needs](#) are adopted by single individuals today, but many fewer singles adopt healthy infants domestically or internationally. This strongly suggests that single parents offer families of last resort for desperate children who have no other choices. They are as unwanted as the children they take in.

Adoption had evolved significantly as a social institution during the past century, but the cultural values that mark certain children, adults, and families as more and less worthy have been stubborn and very slow to change.

## Document Excerpts

- [Loretta Renn, "The Single Woman as a Foster Mother," 1948](#)
- [Peter B. Neubauer, "The One-Parent Child and His Oedipal Development," 1960](#)
- [Charles E. Brown, "Agency Seeks Homes for Negro Kids, Single Persons May Adopt," 1966](#)
- [Ethel Branham, "One Parent Adoptions," 1970](#)
- [Alfred Kadushin, "Single-Parent Adoptions: An Overview and Some Relevant Research" 1970](#)
- [Joan F. Shireman and Penny R. Johnson, "Single Persons as Adoptive Parents," 1976](#)
- [National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, "Single Parent Adoption: What You Need to Know" \(1994\)](#)



[Further reading about Single Parent Adoptions](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Adoption Statistics



Historical statistics on domestic adoptions during the twentieth century are interesting, but they are scarce and can also be misleading. **Field studies** did not even begin to estimate numbers of adoptions, or document who was being adopted by whom, until almost 1920. When researchers began to tally adoptions, they did so in only a handful of Northeastern and Midwestern states and based conclusions about statewide patterns on records from a few counties, usually in urban areas.

A national reporting system for adoption existed only between 1945 and 1975, when the **U.S. Children's Bureau** and the National Center for Social Statistics collected data voluntarily supplied by states and territories. Today, most statistics available about adoption are being gathered by private organizations, such as universities and foundations. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 requires states to collect information about the adoptions of children in public **foster care**, but these are the only adoption-related statistics regularly reported by governments.

Even when the federal government was trying to keep track, during the three decades after World War II, adoption statistics were incomplete. They never included informal adoptions, which were beyond the reach of law and uncountable by definition. The summary data that did exist tended to obscure trends that were as important as total figures. How many children were adopted by relatives and how many by strangers? How many were arranged independently or by agencies? How many involved infants or adolescents? What factors explain regional and state differences in the past and present? Why, for example, are adoption rates in Wyoming and Alaska higher today than in California, Delaware, and Texas? Have any or all of these patterns changed over time? We can guess, but usually on

the basis of partial or non-existent numbers.

We know one thing with certainty on the basis of historical statistics. Adoptions were rare, even at the height of their popularity, around 1970. What is paradoxical is that adoptions have become rarer during the past several decades, just they have become more visible. A total of approximately 125,000 children have been adopted annually in the United States in recent years, a sharp drop since the century-long high point of 175,000 adoptions in 1970. Growing numbers of recent adoptions have been **transracial** and **international**—producing families in which parents and children look nothing alike—and the attention attracted by these adoptive families has led many Americans to believe that adoption was increasing. The adoption rate has actually been declining since 1970, along with the total number of adoptions.

Estimates suggest that adoptive families are atypical as well as few in number. Approximately 5 million Americans alive today are adoptees, 2-4 percent of all families have adopted, and 2.5 percent of all children under 18 are adopted. Adoptive families are more racially diverse, better educated, and more affluent than families in general. We know this because **Census 2000** included “adopted son/daughter” as a kinship category for the first time in U.S. history. It is possible that the demographic profile of adoptions arranged many decades ago was just as distinctive. We simply do not know.

Special-purpose adoption laws have existed in the United States since the middle of the nineteenth century. More than a century ago, however, very few Americans entered courts in order to formalize kin ties. Divorce, still very unusual at the turn of the twentieth century, was more common than adoption. After 1900, numbers of adoptions in the United States began to climb. Why? First, a new culture of children’s innocence and vulnerability placed a premium on their **welfare** and secure membership in families. Second, tangible benefits, such as those available through the social security system established during the 1930s, offered practical incentives for Americans to legalize family bonds. For the period before 1945, however, we have practically no detailed national statistics. After 1945, the number of total adoptions increased steadily, with numbers of adoptions doubling in the decade after World War II to reach approximately 100,000 annually by the mid-1950s. During this period, the proportion of non-relative adoptions arranged by agencies also increased significantly, a partial victory for child welfare professionals who had been

advocating expansive regulation, uniformity, and **minimum standards** for decades. Before 1945, independent placements probably represented more than half of all adoptions. These decreased to an all-time low of 21 percent in 1970.

The statistical picture for **international adoptions** is uniquely clear because the federal government counts all legal immigrants, including immigrant "orphans," as they are still called. (We also know that approximately 500 American children are adopted annually by foreigners, mostly in Canada and Europe, but in comparison to this country's status as a "receiving country," we know practically nothing about the United States as a "sending country.") We know with some precision how many children born in South Korea have been adopted by U.S. citizens during the past fifty years—well over 100,000—and figures available through the Department of State tell us the number of Vietnamese, Guatemalan, Romanian, Chinese, and children of other nationalities who have been incorporated into American families through adoption. In the past decade, international adoptions have increased dramatically as a component of the adoption total: the 2002 figure of 20,009 was more than triple the 1992 figure, and comprised approximately 16 percent of all adoptions.

In addition to knowing where international adoptees come from and how many of them there are, we also know that well over 60 percent are girls and virtually all have been non-relatives. That does not mean that non-relative adoptions are on the rise, however. Because divorce and remarriage have become more common, relative adoptions (by step-parents, for example) have become much more prevalent among domestic adoptions in recent decades.

Numerically significant adoptions are not necessarily socially sensitive adoptions. Relative adoptions have become more common in recent decades but have attracted relatively little notice. Exactly the opposite is true for transracial adoptions. These have been covered extensively in the press and studied intensively by researchers, but their importance is symbolic rather than statistical. The largest number of **transracial adoptions** occurred in the years around 1970, when there were perhaps a few thousand annually. **Opportunity**, an Oregon program, conducted one of the only national surveys of black adopted children; it documented 7,420 total adoptions in 1971, of which 2,574 were transracial. This was a tiny number, considering that almost 170,000 adoptions were finalized in the country that

year. Why did **outcome studies** focus on a small number of African-American children adopted by white parents but ignore the thousands of children adopted by relatives? The former was controversial and the latter was not.

Since all kinds of adoptions were and still are rare, the reason to subject them to quantitative inquiry has had little to do with sheer numbers. Governments and private organizations have compiled adoption statistics because numbers have been crucial in adoption policy debates. Proof that adoptions arranged in the black market turned out poorly was valuable ammunition in the campaign against disreputable independent adoptions, for instance, while proof of how professionally arranged adoptions turned out could make or break the reputation of agencies. Numbers were also accorded great meaning within the placement process. The I.Q. scores of children, the ages of aspiring parents, and the educational levels of birth parents were all, at one time or another, treated as key indicators of where and with whom they belonged.

Social researchers who conducted pioneering studies of child placement, such as **Sophie van Senden Theis**, author of *How Foster Children Turn Out*, believed that counting was a privileged method of accumulating knowledge and approaching truth scientifically. They were sometimes surprised or disturbed by what statistics and correlations revealed—that many adopters failed to inform their children about their adoptions or that **“telling”** was not a reliable predictor of positive outcomes—but they were always confident that compiling aggregate data would improve the lives of individual children. Statistical evidence based on many adoptions was often compared with anecdotal evidence, which revealed the details of one child’s or family’s story. Numbers were often considered more objective than **narratives**, and therefore more legitimate and trustworthy as a basis for policy and practice.

That adoption statistics have been gathered so haphazardly suggests that the effort to tie adoption reform to adoption knowledge has been a partial success, at best. But they also embody a uniquely modern faith in numbers and a widespread belief that they could be trusted to plan and govern the future.

## Document Excerpts

- Joseph L. Zarefsky, “Children Acquire New Parents,” 1946

- Opportunity, National Survey of Black Children Adopted in 1972
- Penelope L. Maza, "Adoption Trends: 1944-1975"
- Bernadine Barr, "Estimates of Numbers of Children in Institutions, Foster Family Care, and Adoptive Homes, 1910-1960"
- U.S. Census Bureau, "Census 2000 Special Reports, Adopted Children and Stepchildren: 2000"



Further reading about Adoption Statistics

## Links

- Adoption Information Clearinghouse, Statistics and Research
- Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, Facts About Adoption
- U.S. Department of State, Statistics on Intercountry Adoptions

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## National Association of Black Social Workers, "Position Statement on Trans-Racial Adoption," September 1972



A meeting at Harlem-Dowling Children's Service, staffed entirely by African-Americans. The agency was founded in 1972 by opponents of **transracial adoption** whose goal was to locate black homes for black children. Harlem-Dowling was the brainchild of African-American administrators at Spence Chapin Adoption Service.

The National Association of Black Social Workers has taken a vehement stand against the placement of black children in white homes for any reason. We affirm the inviolable position of black children in black families where they belong physically, psychologically and culturally in order that they receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound projection of their future.

Ethnicity is a way of life in these United States, and the world at large; a viable, sensitive, meaningful and legitimate societal construct. This is no less true nor legitimate for black people than for other ethnic groups. . .

The socialization process for every child begins at birth and includes his cultural heritage as an important segment of the process. In our society, the developmental needs of Black children are significantly different from those of white children. Black children are taught, from an early age, highly sophisticated coping techniques to deal with racist practices perpetrated by individuals and institutions. These coping techniques become successfully integrated into ego functions and can be incorporated only through the process of developing positive identification with significant black others. Only a black family can transmit the emotional and sensitive subtleties of perception and reaction essential for a black child's survival in a racist society. Our society is distinctly black or white and characterized by white racism at every level. We repudiate the fallacious and fantasied reasoning of some that whites adopting black children will alter that basic character.

We fully recognize the phenomenon of transracial adoption as an expedient for white folk, not as an altruistic humane

concern for black children. The supply of white children for adoption has all but vanished and adoption agencies, having always catered to middle class whites developed an answer to their desire for parenthood by motivating them to consider black children. This has brought about a re-definition of some black children. Those born of black-white alliances are no longer black as decreed by immutable law and social custom for centuries. They are now black-white, inter-racial, bi-racial, emphasizing the whiteness as the adoptable quality; a further subtle, but vicious design to further diminish black and accentuate white. We resent this high-handed arrogance and are insulted by this further assignment of chattel status to black people. . . .

White parents of black children seek out special help with their parenting; help with acquiring the normal and usually instinctual parental behaviors inherent in the cultural and psychological development of children. It is tantamount to having to be taught to do what comes naturally.

Special programming in learning to handle black children's hair, learning black culture, "trying to become black," puts normal family activities in the form of special family projects to accommodate the odd member of the family. This is accentuated by the white parents who had to *prepare* their neighbors for their forthcoming black child and those who hasten, even struggle, to make acquaintance with black persons. These actions highlight the unnatural character of trans racial adoption, giving rise to artificial conditions, logically lacking in substance. Superficialities convey nothing of worth and are more damaging than helpful.

We know there are numerous alternatives to the placement of black children with white families and challenge all agencies and organizations to commit themselves to the basic concept of black families for black children. With such commitment all else finds its way to successful realization of that concept. Black families can be found when agencies alter their requirements, methods of approach, definition of suitable family and tackle the legal machinery to facilitate inter-state placements. Additionally, the proposed commitment invokes the social work profession to a re-orientation to the black family permitting sight of the strengths therein. Exploration for resources within a child's biological family can reveal possibilities for permanent planning. The extended family of grandparents, aunts, cousins, etc. may well be viable resources if agencies will legitimize them; make them their area for initial

exploration and work first to develop and cement their potential. This is valid and preferable even if financial assistance is necessary.

We denounce the assertions that blacks will not adopt; we affirm the fact that black people, in large number, can not maneuver the obstacle course of the traditional adoption process. This process has long been a screening out device. The emphasis on high income, educational achievement, residential status and other accoutrements of a white middle class life style eliminates black applicants by the score.

The National Association of Black Social Workers asserts the conviction that children should not remain in foster homes or institutions when adoption can be a reality. We stand firmly, though, on conviction that a white home is not a suitable placement for black children and contend it is totally unnecessary.

Source: Robert H. Bremner, *Children and Youth in America: A Documentary History, Vol. 3, Parts 1-4* (Harvard University Press, 1974):777-780.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



[Timeline](#)

[People &  
Organizations](#)

[Adoption Studies/  
Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in  
Adoption History](#)

[Further  
Reading](#)

[Document  
Archives](#)

[Site  
Index](#)

## [Stanley v. Illinois, 1972](#)

MR. JUSTICE WHITE delivered the opinion of the Court.

Joan Stanley lived with Peter Stanley intermittently for 18 years, during which time they had three children. When Joan Stanley died, Peter Stanley lost not only her but also his children. Under Illinois law, the children of unwed fathers become wards of the State upon the death of the mother. Accordingly, upon Joan Stanley's death, in a dependency proceeding instituted by the State of Illinois, Stanley's children were declared wards of the State and placed with court-appointed guardians. Stanley appealed, claiming that he had never been shown to be an unfit parent and that since married fathers and unwed mothers could not be deprived of their children without such a showing, he had been deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed him by the Fourteenth Amendment. The Illinois Supreme Court accepted the fact that Stanley's own unfitness had not been established but rejected the equal protection claim, holding that Stanley could properly be separated from his children upon proof of the single fact that he and the dead mother had not been married. Stanley's actual fitness as a father was irrelevant.

Stanley presses his equal protection claim here. The State continues to respond that unwed fathers are presumed unfit to raise their children and that it is unnecessary to hold individualized hearings to determine whether particular fathers are in fact unfit parents before they are separated from their children. We granted certiorari to determine whether this method of procedure by presumption could be allowed to stand in light of the fact that Illinois allows married fathers—whether divorced, widowed, or separated—and mothers—even if unwed—the benefit of the presumption that they are fit to raise their children. . . .

We must therefore examine the question that Illinois would have us avoid: Is a presumption that distinguishes and burdens all unwed fathers constitutionally repugnant? We conclude that, as a matter of due process of law, Stanley was entitled to a hearing on his fitness as a parent before his children were taken from him and that, by denying him a hearing and extending it to all other parents whose custody of their children is

challenged, the State denied Stanley the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. . . .

The Court has frequently emphasized the importance of the family. The rights to conceive and to raise one's children have been deemed "essential," "basic civil rights of man," and "rights far more precious. . . than property rights." "It is cardinal with us that the custody, care and nurture of the child reside first in the parents, whose primary function and freedom include preparation for obligations the state can neither supply nor hinder." The integrity of the family unit has found protection in the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, *Meyer v. Nebraska*, the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, *Skinner v. Oklahoma*, and the Ninth Amendment, *Griswold v. Connecticut*. . . .

It may be, as the State insists, that most unmarried fathers are unsuitable and neglectful parents. It may also be that Stanley is such a parent and that his children should be placed in other hands. But all unmarried fathers are not in this category; some are wholly suited to have custody of their children. This much the State readily concedes, and nothing in this record indicates that Stanley is or has been a neglectful father who has not cared for his children. Given the opportunity to make his case, Stanley may have been seen to be deserving of custody of his offspring. Had this been so, the State's statutory policy would have been furthered by leaving custody in him. . . .

The State of Illinois assumes custody of the children of married parents, divorced parents, and unmarried mothers only after a hearing and proof of neglect. The children of unmarried fathers, however, are declared dependent children without a hearing on parental fitness and without proof of neglect. Stanley's claim in the state courts and here is that failure to afford him a hearing on his parental qualifications while extending it to other parents denied him equal protection of the laws. We have concluded that all Illinois parents are constitutionally entitled to a hearing on their fitness before their children are removed from their custody. It follows that denying such a hearing to Stanley and those like him while granting it to other Illinois parents is inescapably contrary to the Equal Protection Clause.

The judgment of the Supreme Court of Illinois is reversed and the case is remanded to that court for proceedings not inconsistent with this opinion.

It is so ordered. . . .

MR. CHIEF JUSTICE BURGER, with whom MR. JUSTICE BLACKMUN concurs, dissenting. . . .

In regard to the only issue that I consider properly before the Court, I agree with the State's argument that the Equal Protection Clause is not violated when Illinois gives full recognition only to those father-child relationships that arise in the context of family units bound together by

legal obligations arising from marriage or from adoption proceedings. Quite apart from the religious or quasi-religious connotations that marriage has—and has historically enjoyed—for a large proportion of this Nation's citizens, it is in law an essentially contractual relationship, the parties to which have legally enforceable rights and duties, with respect both to each other and to any children born to them. Stanley and the mother of these children never entered such a relationship. The record is silent as to whether they ever privately exchanged such promises as would have bound them in marriage under the common law. In any event, Illinois has not recognized common-law marriages since 1905. Stanley did not seek the burdens when he could have freely assumed them. . . .

The Illinois Supreme Court correctly held that the State may constitutionally distinguish between unwed fathers and unwed mothers. Here, Illinois' different treatment of the two is part of that State's statutory scheme for protecting the welfare of illegitimate children. In almost all cases, the unwed mother is readily identifiable, generally from hospital records, and alternatively by physicians or others attending the child's birth. Unwed fathers, as a class, are not traditionally quite so easy to identify and locate. Many of them either deny all responsibility or exhibit no interest in the child or its welfare; and, of course, many unwed fathers are simply not aware of their parenthood.

Furthermore, I believe that a State is fully justified in concluding, on the basis of common human experience, that the biological role of the mother in carrying and nursing an infant creates stronger bonds between her and the child than the bonds resulting from the male's often casual encounter. This view is reinforced by the observable fact that most unwed mothers exhibit a concern for their offspring either permanently or at least until they are safely placed for adoption, while unwed fathers rarely burden either the mother or the child with their attentions or loyalties. Centuries of human experience buttress this view of the realities of human conditions and suggest that unwed mothers of illegitimate children are generally more dependable protectors of their children than are unwed fathers. While these, like most generalizations, are not without exceptions, they nevertheless provide a sufficient basis to sustain a statutory classification whose objective is not to penalize unwed parents but to further the welfare of illegitimate children in fulfillment of the State's obligations as *parens patriae*.

Source: 405 U.S. 645 (1972).

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Joseph Goldstein, Anna Freud, and Albert J. Solnit, *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child*, 1973



Albert Solnit, Anna Freud, Dorothy Burlingham, and Joseph Goldstein (left to right) in Cork, Ireland after the publication of *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child*

### *THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP*

The child's psychological tie to a parent figure is not the simple, uncomplicated relationship which it may appear to be at first glance. While it is rooted inevitably in the infant's inability to ensure his own survival, it varies according to the manner in which protection is given and the physical needs fulfilled. Where this is done impersonally and with routine regularity, as in institutions, the infant may remain involved with his own body and not take an alert interest in his surroundings. Where the adult in charge of the child is personally and emotionally involved, a psychological interplay between adult and child will be superimposed on the events of bodily care. Then the child's libidinal interest will be drawn for the first time to the human object in the outside world.

Such primitive and tenuous first attachments form the base from which any further relationships develop. What the child brings to them next are no longer only his needs for body comfort and gratification but his emotional demands for affection, companionship, and stimulating intimacy. Where these are answered reliably and regularly, the child-parent relationship becomes firm, with immensely productive effects on the child's intellectual and social development. Where parental care is inadequate, this may be matched by deficits in the child's mental growth. Where there are changes of parent figure or other hurtful interruptions, the child's vulnerability and the fragility of the relationship become evident. The child regresses along the whole line of his affections, skills, achievements, and social adaptation. It is only with the advance toward maturity that the emotional ties of the young will outgrow this vulnerability. The first relief in this respect is the

formation of internal mental images of the parents which remain available even if the parents are absent. The next step is due to identification with parental attitudes. Once these have become the child's own, they ensure stability within his inner structure.

As the prototype of true human relationship, the psychological child-parent relationship is not wholly positive but has its admixture of negative elements. Both partners bring to it the combination of loving and hostile feelings that characterize the emotional life of all human beings, whether mature or immature. The balance between positive and negative feelings fluctuates during the years. For children, this culminates in the inevitable and potentially constructive struggle with their parents during adolescence.

Whether an adult becomes the psychological parent of a child is based thus on day-to-day interaction, companionship, and shared experiences. The role can be fulfilled either by a biological parent or by an adoptive parent or by any other caring adult—but never by an absent, inactive adult, whatever his biological or legal relationship to the child may be.

The best qualities in an adult's personality give no assurance in themselves for a sound result if, for any reason, the necessary psychological tie is absent. Children may also be deeply attached to parents with impoverished or unstable personalities and may progress emotionally within this relationship on the basis of mutual attachment. Where the tie is to adults who are "unfit" as parents, unbroken closeness to them, and especially identification with them, may cease to be a benefit and become a threat. In extreme cases this necessitates state interference. Nevertheless, so far as the child's emotions are concerned, interference with the tie, whether to a "fit" or "unfit" psychological parent, is extremely painful. . . .

We propose three component guidelines for decision-makers concerned with determining the placement and the process of placement of a child in a family or alternative setting. These guidelines rest on the belief that children whose placement becomes the subject of controversy should be provided with an opportunity to be placed with adults who are or are likely to become their psychological parents.

*PLACEMENT DECISIONS SHOULD SAFEGUARD THE CHILD'S NEED FOR CONTINUITY OF RELATIONSHIPS. . . .*

*PLACEMENT DECISIONS SHOULD REFLECT THE CHILD'S,  
NOT THE ADULT'S, SENSE OF TIME. . . .*

*CHILD PLACEMENT DECISIONS MUST TAKE INTO  
ACCOUNT THE LAW'S INCAPACITY TO SUPERVISE  
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND THE LIMITS OF  
KNOWLEDGE TO MAKE LONG-RANGE PREDICTIONS. . . .*

*WHY SHOULD THE CHILD'S INTERESTS BE PARAMOUNT?*

Some will assert that the views presented in this volume are so child-oriented as to neglect the needs and rights of the adults. In fact, this is not the case. There is nothing one-sided about our position, that the child's interests should be the paramount consideration once, but not before, a child's placement becomes the subject of official controversy. Its other side is that the law, to accord with the continuity guideline, must safeguard the rights of any adults, serving as parents, to raise their children as they see fit, free of intervention by the state, and free of law-aided and law-abetted harassment by disappointed adult claimants. To say that a child's ongoing relationship with a specific adult, the psychological parent, must not be interrupted, is also to say that this adult's rights are protected against intrusion by the state on behalf of other adults.

As set out in this volume, then, a child's placement should rest entirely on consideration for the child's own inner situation and developmental needs. Simple as this rule sounds, there are circumstances which make it difficult to apply even with ample evidence in support of the child's interests. The injunction disregards that laws are made by adults for the protection of adult rights. . . .

Source: Joseph Goldstein, Anna Freud, and Albert J. Solnit, *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 17-20, 31, 40, 49, 105-106.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

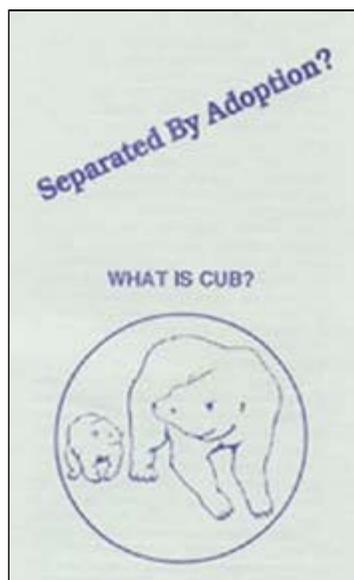
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Concerned United Birthparents



The CUB logo depicts a mother bear and her cub, symbol of both power and nurturance.

Founded in Massachusetts in 1976, Concerned United Birthparents (CUB) is currently headquartered in Encinitas, California and has 10 chapters and over 400 members around the United States. Its original mission was “to provide support for birthparents who have relinquished a child to adoption; to provide resources to help prevent unnecessary family separations; to educate the public about the life-long impact on all who are touched by adoption; and to advocate for fair and ethical adoption laws, policies, and practices.” A 2003 revision of this statement formally extends CUB’s supportive mantle to cover “all family members separated by adoption” rather than **birth parents** alone.

CUB has offered vital organizational resources and a political voice chiefly to those birth mothers who felt most disempowered in the era before the sexual revolution normalized premarital heterosexuality and *Roe v. Wade* made abortion legal: young, unmarried white women whose middle-class families considered their out-of-wedlock pregnancies a source of terrible shame and moral failure. Many were packed off to maternity homes in the 1950s and 1960s, where they waited out their “confinements” in isolation and loneliness and then surrendered healthy newborns to childless couples under policies of **confidentiality and sealed records**. These infant placements were in great demand and often conformed to **matching**, which aimed to replicate nature so closely that natal relatives were made to disappear altogether. This kind of adoption promised to permanently solve two problems at once: **infertility** and **illegitimacy**.

CUB came into existence at precisely the moment when this promise was no longer convincing. Members were inspired by **search and reunion** pioneers among adult adoptees, particularly Jean Paton, founder of Orphan Voyage, and Florence Fisher, of the Adoptees’ Liberty Movement Association (ALMA). At the same time, the second wave of feminism was forcefully pursuing

reproductive rights and arguing that “the personal is political.” Although white feminists were more closely identified with the struggle for safe and legal abortion than with the protection of women’s childbearing rights, the logic and rhetoric of reproductive choice encompassed birth mothers, at least in theory. Why should women be pressured to give up their children forever simply because they were unmarried, or young, or poor, or without adequate support? Didn’t equality require the freedom to decide when to have children as well as when not to have them?

Lee Campbell, a banker’s wife, placed a personal ad in the *Boston Globe*, hoping that others who had surrendered children would reply. The result was a meeting at a Cape Cod church in July 1976, and a new organization was born. The women who attended came together out of personal need. They did not all share an ideological commitment to either women’s or children’s rights and frequently disagreed on matters other than the suffering caused by having given up a child. Yet they discovered they had a lot in common, just as members of feminist consciousness-raising groups did at the time. Gradually, their shared experience of surrendering children under extreme pressure evolved from a personal complaint into a subject of social analysis and a matter of social justice.

“Birthmother” was the term they coined to describe themselves. They considered it a compromise of sorts between “natural mother,” prevalent at the time, and “biological mother,” which many adoptive parents preferred but CUB members found insultingly mechanical. The term’s emphasis on birth reclaimed without apology an important place in an adoption process that had too often rendered them invisible and irrelevant. In addition to Campbell, other CUB pioneers included Mary Anne Cohen, Susan Darke, Gail Hanssen, Kathy Leahy, Joanne McDonald, and Sandy Musser. (Musser later became a celebrated and controversial figure as the first search consultant to go to jail. She was convicted on thirty-five counts of fraudulently obtaining confidential records and spent four months in federal prison in 1993 and 1994.) Carole Anderson joined CUB two years after its founding and became one of the group’s most important theoreticians. These women articulated an **adoption narrative** that was empowering but also full of pain and frustration. Their feelings about the permanence of biological kinship were heartfelt, and so were their views about the devastating, long-lasting effects of surrender on parents and children.

This was a far more ambivalent view of adoption than the sunny picture prevalent between 1940 and 1970, and it revived themes that had a long history: that natal families should be preserved

whenever possible and that adoption was extremely risky, unwise, and damaging. Adoption, these women suggested, was not a choice, but proof that they had been deprived of choice. Surrender was a product of material deprivation, social stigma, and political powerlessness rather than a voluntary act.

At a time when feminists emphasized the common plight of all women, CUB's analysis exposed cracks in the gender consensus even as it revealed changing demographic patterns among birth mothers themselves. Married women who occupied privileged class positions were most likely to be adoptive mothers, whereas women without money were punished for their poverty and girls from middle-class families were ostracized for their premarital sexual activity with pressure to give up their babies. A majority of birth mothers before World War II were married women, but statistical analyses have shown that by the mid-1960s, single women had taken their place. Class privilege divided these two categories of women. CUB represented the latter.

The consequences of adoption for children were as negative as they were for mothers, according to CUB. Adoptees were destined to live without crucial knowledge of their genetic origins and family background, and were disadvantaged by growing up in families where they did not resemble their relatives or "fit in" in other ways. Adoptive parents might provide love and care, and these were precious resources in cases where children had been abandoned by chaotic and dysfunctional natal families. But in most cases, CUB members believed, adoption could not compensate for children's loss of essential, natural connections.

This suggested that family preservation was CUB's top priority. CUB never opposed adoption outright, but its argument was that the vast majority of adoptions could and should be prevented. This echoed a position staked out by professionals and policy-makers involved in placing-out and social welfare early in the twentieth century. Instead of adoption services, vulnerable young families should be given the support they needed to overcome their challenges and stay together. Ironically, CUB emphasized family preservation at just the moment when the American welfare state was beginning to contract under effective attack by the right. The expansive safety net they envisioned might have been an alternative to surrender for those women who placed children mainly for economic reasons. But that vision did not survive the Reagan revolution. Recent welfare reform policies have concentrated simultaneously on decreasing out-of-wedlock births and promoting heterosexual marriage as anti-poverty measures. But family preservation programs have been decisively subordinated to policies emphasizing faster terminations of parental rights and adoptive placements.

CUB began as a support group, reaching out to new members with a newsletter, the *CUB Communicator*. It also attracted a great deal of mainstream media attention from newspapers, women's magazines, and television. Lee Campbell, CUB's first president, made four appearances on the popular "Donahue" talk show, for instance. But the first time she was interviewed, by a Boston television station, she was hidden in shadows, evidence of how difficult it was even for committed activists to go public with their stories. Lorraine Dusky, author of the 1979 memoir, *Birthmark*, was told by other birth mothers that they could not bring themselves to purchase copies of the book even though they wanted to read it. Embarrassment that cashiers might believe they were "one of them" was more than they could bear. Coming out as a birth mother was still cause for severe disgrace.

It was in this judgmental atmosphere that CUB mobilized to promote adoption reform. In the late 1970s and 1980s, the group cooperated with other organizations interested in ending secrecy and promoting **search and reunion**, including Adoptees' Liberty Movement Association (ALMA). More recently, it has worked with **Bastard Nation**. CUB members testified at some of the earliest hearings about open records in state legislatures around the country and before the U.S. Congress. Many members of the organization believe that openness is preferable to secrecy in cases where adoption is unavoidable, and the organization went on record in favor of open adoptions in its early years. But it withdrew support after seeing evidence that adopters were renegeing on their agreements, most of which are not legally enforceable. CUB members worry that "openness" may simply be a new way to pressure vulnerable girls and women into surrender and make adoption more palatable.

CUB made good on its critical view of adoption and its defense of family preservation by sponsoring a number of programs that aimed to keep young mothers and newborns together through practical help with housing and jobs. In 1978, CUB was also involved in establishing the American Adoption Congress, an umbrella group representing individuals, search organizations, and others devoted to adoption reform.

CUB is still largely identified with the cause of birth mothers. The fact that large numbers of unmarried mothers today keep their babies proves that the stigma of **illegitimacy** has been reduced very dramatically in recent decades. But birth mothers' stories still evoke shock and condemnation in a culture that cannot forgive women who surrender children, whether their decisions were made freely or under pressure. In comparison, birth fathers have attracted little notice.

Now almost thirty years old, CUB's recent activities suggest that

the group hopes to advocate effectively for a new and different generation of **birth parents**. There have been efforts to incorporate more men, publicize their stories of **search and reunion**, and address their needs. Even in the twenty-first century, however, men have not yet made the dramatic transition from paralyzed privacy to public engagement that CUB pioneered for the women who first gave life to children and then had to live with the pain of giving them up and living without them.

\* \* \*

With special thanks to Lee Campbell, Mary Anne Cohen, Lorraine Dusky, and Jane Edwards.

## Document Excerpts

- Concerned United Birthparents, "Separated By Adoption? What Is CUB?"
- Carole J. Anderson, "Child Abuse & Adoption," 1991



Further reading about Concerned United Birthparents

## Links

- Concerned United Birthparents website

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 7-11-2007  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)



Students who attended the Genoa Industrial School for Indian Youth in Nebraska in 1910, when this photograph was taken, were mostly Sioux, placed off the reservation and away from their families. The Indian Child Welfare Act reacted against this long history of displacement as well as against the [Indian Adoption Project](#) of the 1950s and 1960s.

In 1978, Congress took a giant legal step toward consolidating group rights to children by passing the Indian Child Welfare Act. ICWA is unique in several ways. First, most laws governing adoption have been passed by states. In this case the federal government overcame its reluctance to legislate because of a long history of displacement of Native American children, significant and systematic enough to be considered a genocidal policy by many tribes. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Native American children were often placed in boarding schools in hopes that education would speed their cultural assimilation, much like the theory of the [orphan trains](#). In the 1950s and 1960s, the [Indian Adoption Project](#) placed hundreds of Native American children with white parents, the first national effort to place an entire child population transracially and transculturally.

ICWA reversed this policy. By defining children as collective resources, essential to tribal survival, it stands as a significant exception to the rule of individualism in American law, where children's best interests are invariably assessed case by case. ICWA made the adoption of Native American children by non-native people extremely difficult by erecting significant barriers to their adoption by anyone without tribal affiliation. It remains a source of ongoing controversy among civil rights and children's advocates.

### Document Excerpt

- [Indian Child Welfare Act, 1978](#)



[Further reading about the Indian Child Welfare Act and the Indian Adoption Project](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980

### **42 U.S.C.A. §§ 670. Congressional declaration of purpose; authorization of appropriations**

For the purpose of enabling each State to provide, in appropriate cases, foster care and transitional independent living programs for children who otherwise would have been eligible for assistance under the State's plan approved under part A of this subchapter (as such plan was in effect on June 1, 1995) and adoption assistance for children with special needs, there are authorized to be appropriated for each fiscal year (commencing with the fiscal year which begins October 1, 1980) such sums as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of this part. The sums made available under this section shall be used for making payments to States which have submitted, and had approved by the Secretary, State plans under this part. . . .

### **42 U.S.C.A. §§673. Adoption assistance program**

a. Agreements with adoptive parents of children with special needs; State payments; qualifying children; amount of payments; changes in circumstances; placement period prior to adoption; nonrecurring adoption expenses

1.

A. Each State having a plan approved under this part shall enter into adoption assistance agreements (as defined in section 675(3) of this title with the adoptive parents of children with special needs.

B. Under any adoption assistance agreement entered into by a State with parents who adopt a child with special needs, the State—

i. shall make payments of nonrecurring adoption expenses incurred by or on behalf of such parents in connection with the adoption of such child, directly through the State agency or through another public or nonprofit private agency, in amounts determined under paragraph (3), and

ii. in any case where the child meets the requirements of paragraph (2),

may make adoption assistance payments to such parents, directly through the State agency or through another public or nonprofit private agency, in amounts so determined.

2. For purposes of paragraph (1)(B)(ii), a child meets the requirements of this paragraph if such child—

A.

i. at the time adoption proceedings were initiated, met the requirements of section 606(a) of this title or section 607 of this title (as such sections were in effect on July 16, 1996) or would have met such requirements except for his removal from the home of a relative (specified in section 606(a) of this title (as so in effect)), either pursuant to a voluntary placement agreement with respect to which Federal payments are provided under section 674 (or 603 (as such section was in effect on July 16, 1996)) of this title or as a result of a judicial determination to the effect that continuation therein would be contrary to the welfare of such child,

ii. meets all of the requirements of subchapter XVI of this chapter with respect to eligibility for supplemental security income benefits, or

iii. is a child whose costs in a foster family home or child-care institution are covered by the foster care maintenance payments being made with respect to his or her minor parent as provided in section 675(4)(B) of this title,

B.

i. would have received aid under the State plan approved under section 602 of this title (as in effect on July 16, 1996) in or for the month in which such agreement was entered into or court proceedings leading to the removal of such child from the home were initiated, or

ii.

I. would have received such aid in or for such month if application had been made therefor, or

II. had been living with a relative specified in section 606(a) of this title (as in effect on July 16, 1996) within six months prior to the month in which such agreement was entered into or such proceedings were initiated, and would have received such aid in or for such month if in such month he had been living with such a relative and application therefor had been made, or

III. is a child described in subparagraph (A)(ii) or (A)(iii), and

C. has been determined by the State, pursuant to subsection (c) of this section, to be a child with special needs. . . .

c. Children with special needs—For purposes of this section, a child shall not be considered a child with special needs unless—

1. the State has determined that the child cannot or should not be

returned to the home of his parents; and

2. the State had first determined (A) that there exists with respect to the child a specific factor or condition (such as his ethnic background, age, or membership in a minority or sibling group, or the presence of factors such as medical conditions or physical, mental, or emotional handicaps) because of which it is reasonable to conclude that such child cannot be placed with adoptive parents without providing adoption assistance under this section or medical assistance under subchapter XIX of this chapter, and (B) that, except where it would be against the best interests of the child because of such factors as the existence of significant emotional ties with prospective adoptive parents while in the care of such parents as a foster child, a reasonable, but unsuccessful, effort has been made to place the child with appropriate adoptive parents without providing adoption assistance under this section or medical assistance under subchapter XIX of this chapter.

Source: United States Code, Title 42, Chapter 7, Subchapter IV, Part E, available online at [www.supreme.state.az.us](http://www.supreme.state.az.us)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989

*This Convention, which extended human rights more fully to children than any other legal document, inspired other international laws, such as the [Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption](#). The UN Convention has been ratified by 192 countries, all but two member countries of the United Nations. The United States and Somalia have signed the Convention but have not yet ratified it.*

---

### **Preamble**

*The States Parties to the present Convention,*

*Considering that, in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,*

*Bearing in mind that the peoples of the United Nations have, in the Charter, reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,*

*Recognizing that the United Nations has, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenants on Human Rights, proclaimed and agreed that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status,*

*Recalling that, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations has proclaimed that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance,*

*Convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community,*

*Recognizing* that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding,

*Considering* that the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity,

*Bearing in mind* that the need to extend particular care to the child has been stated in the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924 and in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly on 20 November 1959 and recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (in particular in articles 23 and 24), in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (in particular in article 10) and in the statutes and relevant instruments of specialized agencies and international organizations concerned with the welfare of children,

*Bearing in mind* that, as indicated in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, "the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth",

*Recalling* the provisions of the Declaration on Social and Legal Principles relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children, with Special Reference to Foster Placement and Adoption Nationally and Internationally; the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (The Beijing Rules); and the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict,

*Recognizing* that, in all countries in the world, there are children living in exceptionally difficult conditions and that such children need special consideration,

*Taking due account* of the importance of the traditions and cultural values of each people for the protection and harmonious development of the child,

*Recognizing* the importance of international co-operation for improving the living conditions of children in every country, in particular in the developing countries,

*Have agreed as follows:*

### **Part I**

#### **Article 1**

For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

#### **Article 2**

1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of

any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

**Article 3**

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

2. States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

3. States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.

**Article 4**

States Parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States Parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international co-operation.

**Article 5**

States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention.

**Article 6**

1. States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.

2. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.

**Article 7**

1. The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as

possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.

2. States Parties shall ensure the implementation of these rights in accordance with their national law and their obligations under the relevant international instruments in this field, in particular where the child would otherwise be stateless.

**Article 8**

1. States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.

2. Where a child is illegally deprived of some or all of the elements of his or her identity, States Parties shall provide appropriate assistance and protection, with a view to re-establishing speedily his or her identity.

**Article 9**

1. States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child. Such determination may be necessary in a particular case such as one involving abuse or neglect of the child by the parents, or one where the parents are living separately and a decision must be made as to the child's place of residence.

2. In any proceedings pursuant to paragraph 1 of the present article, all interested parties shall be given an opportunity to participate in the proceedings and make their views known.

3. States Parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests.

4. Where such separation results from any action initiated by a State Party, such as the detention, imprisonment, exile, deportation or death (including death arising from any cause while the person is in the custody of the State) of one or both parents or of the child, that State Party shall, upon request, provide the parents, the child or, if appropriate, another member of the family with the essential information concerning the whereabouts of the absent member(s) of the family unless the provision of the information would be detrimental to the well-being of the child. States Parties shall further ensure that the submission of such a request shall of itself entail no adverse consequences for the person(s) concerned. . . .

**Article 11**

1. States Parties shall take measures to combat the illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad.

2. To this end, States Parties shall promote the conclusion of bilateral or multilateral agreements or accession to existing agreements. . . .

**Article 18**

1. States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.

2. For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.

3. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible. . . .

**Article 20**

1. A child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State.

2. States Parties shall in accordance with their national laws ensure alternative care for such a child.

3. Such care could include, inter alia, foster placement, kafalah of Islamic law, adoption or if necessary placement in suitable institutions for the care of children. When considering solutions, due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background.

**Article 21**

States Parties that recognize and/or permit the system of adoption shall ensure that the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration and they shall:

(a) Ensure that the adoption of a child is authorized only by competent authorities who determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures and on the basis of all pertinent and reliable information, that the adoption is permissible in view of the child's status concerning parents, relatives and legal guardians and that, if required, the persons concerned have given their informed consent to the adoption on the basis of such counselling as may be necessary;

(b) Recognize that inter-country adoption may be considered as an alternative means of child's care, if the child cannot be placed in a foster or an adoptive family or cannot in any suitable manner be cared for in the child's country of origin;

(c) Ensure that the child concerned by inter-country adoption enjoys

safeguards and standards equivalent to those existing in the case of national adoption;

(d) Take all appropriate measures to ensure that, in inter-country adoption, the placement does not result in improper financial gain for those involved in it;

(e) Promote, where appropriate, the objectives of the present article by concluding bilateral or multilateral arrangements or agreements and endeavour, within this framework, to ensure that the placement of the child in another country is carried out by competent authorities or organs. . . .

**Article 35**

States Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form. . . .

**Article 54**

The original of the present Convention, of which the Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish texts are equally authentic, shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

In witness thereof the undersigned plenipotentiaries, being duly authorized thereto by their respective governments, have signed the present Convention.

Source: Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 20, 1989, available online at [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, 1993

*The full title of this multilateral treaty is the Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption. It was approved by 66 nations on May 29, 1993 at The Hague. It built directly on the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), seeking to protect all parties to international adoptions and to prevent an international traffic in children. The United States signed the Convention in 1994, and it was passed by Congress in 2000.*

---

The States signatory to the present Convention,

Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding,

Recalling that each State should take, as a matter of priority, appropriate measures to enable the child to remain in the care of his or her family of origin,

Recognizing that intercountry adoption may offer the advantage of a permanent family to a child for whom a suitable family cannot be found in his or her State of origin,

Convinced of the necessity to take measures to ensure that intercountry adoptions are made in the best interests of the child and with respect for his or her fundamental rights, and to prevent the abduction, the sale of, or traffic in children,

Desiring to establish common provisions to this effect, taking into account the principles set forth in international instruments, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, of 20 November 1989, and the United Nations Declaration on Social and Legal Principles relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children, with Special Reference to Foster Placement and Adoption Nationally and Internationally (General Assembly Resolution 41/85, of 3 December 1986),

Have agreed upon the following provisions—

CHAPTER I—SCOPE OF THE CONVENTION

*Article 1*

The objects of the present Convention are—

- a) to establish safeguards to ensure that intercountry adoptions take place in the best interests of the child and with respect for his or her fundamental rights as recognized in international law;
- b) to establish a system of co-operation amongst Contracting States to ensure that those safeguards are respected and thereby prevent the abduction, the sale of, or traffic in children;
- c) to secure the recognition in Contracting States of adoptions made in accordance with the Convention.

*Article 2*

(1) The Convention shall apply where a child habitually resident in one Contracting State (“the State of origin”) has been, is being, or is to be moved to another Contracting State (“the receiving State”) either after his or her adoption in the State of origin by spouses or a person habitually resident in the receiving State, or for the purposes of such an adoption in the receiving State or in the State of origin.

(2) The Convention covers only adoptions which create a permanent parent-child relationship. . . .

CHAPTER II—REQUIREMENTS FOR INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTIONS

*Article 4*

An adoption within the scope of the Convention shall take place only if the competent authorities of the State of origin—

- a) have established that the child is adoptable;
- b) have determined, after possibilities for placement of the child within the State of origin have been given due consideration, that an intercountry adoption is in the child's best interests;
- c) have ensured that
  - (1) the persons, institutions and authorities whose consent is necessary for adoption, have been counselled as may be necessary and duly informed of the effects of their consent, in particular whether or not an adoption will result in the termination of the legal relationship between the child and his or her family of origin,
  - (2) such persons, institutions and authorities have given their consent freely, in the required legal form, and expressed or evidenced in writing,
  - (3) the consents have not been induced by payment or compensation of any kind and have not been withdrawn, and
  - (4) the consent of the mother, where required, has been given only after the birth of the child; and
- d) have ensured, having regard to the age and degree of maturity of the

child, that

(1) he or she has been counselled and duly informed of the effects of the adoption and of his or her consent to the adoption, where such consent is required,

(2) consideration has been given to the child's wishes and opinions,

(3) the child's consent to the adoption, where such consent is required, has been given freely, in the required legal form, and expressed or evidenced in writing, and

(4) such consent has not been induced by payment or compensation of any kind.

*Article 5*

An adoption within the scope of the Convention shall take place only if the competent authorities of the receiving State—

a) have determined that the prospective adoptive parents are eligible and suited to adopt;

b) have ensured that the prospective adoptive parents have been counselled as may be necessary; and

c) have determined that the child is or will be authorized to enter and reside permanently in that State.

Source: Hague Convention #33, Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption, May 29, 1993, available online at [www.hcch.net](http://www.hcch.net)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Bastard Nation



Bastard Nationals demonstrated in Atlantic City, New Jersey, 1999

A feisty organizational newcomer to the landscape of adoption reform, Bastard Nation was a term first coined by Marley Greiner, a contributor to the Usenet newsgroup, alt.adoption. The group was formally incorporated in 1996 by co-founders Marley Greiner, Shea Grimm, and Damsel Plum. Influenced by the Internet and by the in-your-face activist style of AIDS-era groups such as Queer Nation, Bastard Nation had a website before it had a significant membership. Concerned about negative media portrayals of adoption and, above all, about the issue of **confidentiality and sealed records**, Bastard Nation is made up primarily of adult adoptees, although **birth parents**, adoptive parents, and others who support the group's platform of unconditional adoptee rights are allowed to join. Bastard Nation has a reputation for refusing to compromise on its principles. Its radicalism has elicited reactions ranging from admiration to shock and dismay.

Bastard Nationals, as they like to call themselves, are fiercely determined to accomplish two primary goals: open access to records as a matter of basic civil rights and unfettered expression for adult adoptees. Unlike some other adoption organizations, who argue that reforming **confidentiality and sealed records** is important in order to promote adoptees' mental health or who advocate mutual consent registries as a compromise between the rights of **birth parents** and adoptees, Bastard Nation maintains that adoption secrecy must end because it is a symbol of shame about **illegitimacy**, **infertility**, and adoption itself. Members deliberately use the term "bastard" in order to ridicule adoption stigma and contend that stigma will diminish only with more frank, angry, and humorous sharing of experiences among adult adoptees. They militantly oppose their second-class status, insist that they should have exactly the same relationship to the state (and the information it possesses) as other citizens, and deplore the tendency to cast adoptees as perpetual children regardless of their age.

Members of Bastard Nation have participated in numerous public demonstrations against [confidentiality and sealed records](#) and in favor of adoption dignity, including protests against reform organizations, such as the National Council for Adoption, which opposes open records. The Bastard Nation website offers information about state laws, [search and reunion](#), and resources for effective grassroots political and media activism.

The high point of Bastard Nation's own effectiveness was the passage of an open records law in Oregon in 1998. [Ballot Measure 58](#), the first such law in the country to be passed by voter referendum, gave adoptees twenty-one years of age or older access to their birth certificates upon request. This policy has been in effect in the state since June 2000. Since then, adult adoptees in Oregon have been entitled to information about their births that remains off limits throughout most of the rest of the country.

## Document Excerpts

- [Bastard Nation, Mission Statement, 1996](#)
- [Oregon Ballot Measure 58, 1998](#)
- [Bastard Nation, "Open Records: Why It's an Issue," 1999](#)
- [Bastard Nation, "Why It's Great to Be a Bastard"](#)



[Further reading about Bastard Nation](#)

## Links

- [Bastard Nation website](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Bastard Nation, Mission Statement, 1996

Bastard Nation is dedicated to the recognition of the full human and civil rights of adult adoptees. Toward that end, we advocate the opening to adoptees, upon request at age of majority, of those government documents which pertain to the adoptee's historical, genetic, and legal identity, including the unaltered original birth certificate and adoption decree. Bastard Nation asserts that it is the right of people everywhere to have their official original birth records unaltered and free from falsification, and that the adoptive status of any person should not prohibit him or her from choosing to exercise that right. We have reclaimed the badge of bastardy placed on us by those who would attempt to shame us; we see nothing shameful in having been born out of wedlock or in being adopted. Bastard Nation does not support mandated mutual consent registries or intermediary systems in place of unconditional open records, nor any other system that is less than access on demand to the adult adoptee, without condition, and without qualification.

Source: Bastard Nation, [www.bastards.org](http://www.bastards.org)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

About the Project and the Author  
© Ellen Herman



## Oregon Ballot Measure 58, 1998



*Oregon did not endorse a strict regime of **confidentiality and sealed records** until 1957, and nothing prevented adult adoptees in the state from obtaining copies of their adoption records, including original birth certificates, before the 1950s. Forty-one years after passage of the 1957 law, which placed adoption information off limits, Chief Petitioner Helen Hill, **Bastard Nation**, and other advocates sought to overturn adoption secrecy. They took their case directly to voters, a novel approach in adoption reform. A majority (57%) of those voters agreed that sealed records had no place in adoption. After the election, thousands of adoptees applied for their original birth certificates, but the measure did not go into effect because of a lawsuit filed by a group of **birth mothers** who challenged its constitutionality and argued that it violated their rights by ignoring the assurances they had been given that their identities would remain confidential. Their suit ultimately failed. Ballot Measure 58 was upheld. Oregon's open records policy has been in effect since the summer of 2000.*

---

### **BALLOT TITLE: 58**

REQUIRES ISSUING COPY OF ORIGINAL OREGON BIRTH CERTIFICATE TO ADOPTEES

### **TEXT OF MEASURE**

Upon receipt of a written application to the state registrar, any adopted person 21 years of age and older born in the state of Oregon shall be issued a certified copy of his/her unaltered, original and unamended certificate of birth in the custody of the state registrar, with procedures, filing fees, and waiting periods identical to those imposed upon non-adopted citizens of the State of Oregon pursuant to ORS 432.120 and 432.146. Contains no exceptions.

### **EXPLANATORY STATEMENT**

This measure changes existing law to allow an adopted person 21 years of age or older to obtain a copy of the person's original birth certificate. Current Oregon law prohibits the release of an original birth certificate to such an adopted person without a court order. The law currently requires that upon receipt of a decree of adoption or a report of adoption from a court, the state registrar shall issue a new birth certificate unless the court, the adoptive parents or the adopted person requests otherwise.

This measure requires that upon receipt of a written application the state registrar shall provide a copy of the original birth certificate to an Oregon born adopted person 21 years of age or older. This measure requires that the procedures, filing fees and waiting periods for certified copies of original birth certificates be the same for requests by adopted persons as for non-adopted persons.

This measure applies to persons adopted in the past or in the future. There are no exceptions to this measure.

Source: Oregon Secretary of State 1998 General Election Voter Guide, available online at [www.sos.state.or.us/elections/nov398/guide/measure/m58.htm](http://www.sos.state.or.us/elections/nov398/guide/measure/m58.htm)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Child Citizenship Act of 2000

*This law amended the Immigration and Nationality Act to make citizenship automatic for many children adopted by (as well as born to) U.S. citizens outside the United States. Such children, who are not granted citizenship by birth, enter the United States as lawful permanent residents. The Act also extended protections related to deportation, to findings of "bad moral character," and to criminal penalties associated with voting illegally and making false claims of citizenship. The law became effective on February 27, 2001. Children who met the requirements on that date, including thousands of foreign-born adoptees already in the United States, became automatic citizens, greatly streamlining one aspect of [international adoptions](#).*

### **TITLE I—CITIZENSHIP FOR CERTAIN CHILDREN BORN OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES**

#### **SEC. 101. AUTOMATIC ACQUISITION OF CITIZENSHIP FOR CERTAIN CHILDREN BORN OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES.**

(a) In General.—Section 320 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1431) is amended to read as follows:

"children born outside the United States and residing permanently in the United States; conditions under which citizenship automatically acquired

"Sec. 320. (a) A child born outside of the United States automatically becomes a citizen of the United States when all of the following conditions have been fulfilled:

"(1) At least one parent of the child is a citizen of the United States, whether by birth or naturalization.

"(2) The child is under the age of eighteen years.

"(3) The child is residing in the United States in the legal and physical custody of the citizen parent pursuant to a lawful admission for permanent residence. . . .

### **TITLE II—PROTECTIONS FOR CERTAIN ALIENS VOTING BASED ON REASONABLE BELIEF OF CITIZENSHIP**

**SEC. 201. PROTECTIONS FROM FINDING OF BAD MORAL CHARACTER, REMOVAL FROM THE UNITED STATES, AND CRIMINAL PENALTIES.**

(a) Protection From Being Considered Not of Good Moral Character.—

(1) In general.—Section 101(f) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101(f)) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“In the case of an alien who makes a false statement or claim of citizenship, or who registers to vote or votes in a Federal, State, or local election (including an initiative, recall, or referendum) in violation of a lawful restriction of such registration or voting to citizens, if each natural parent of the alien (or, in the case of an adopted alien, each adoptive parent of the alien) is or was a citizen (whether by birth or naturalization), the alien permanently resided in the United States prior to attaining the age of 16, and the alien reasonably believed at the time of such statement, claim, or violation that he or she was a citizen, no finding that the alien is, or was, not of good moral character may be made based on it.” . . . .

“(D) Unlawful voters.—

“(I) In general.—Any alien who has voted in violation of any Federal, State, or local constitutional provision, statute, ordinance, or regulation is inadmissible.

“(ii) Exception.—In the case of an alien who voted in a Federal, State, or local election (including an initiative, recall, or referendum) in violation of a lawful restriction of voting to citizens, if each natural parent of the alien (or, in the case of an adopted alien, each adoptive parent of the alien) is or was a citizen (whether by birth or naturalization), the alien permanently resided in the United States prior to attaining the age of 16, and the alien reasonably believed at the time of such violation that he or she was a citizen, the alien shall not be considered to be inadmissible under any provision of this subsection based on such violation.” . . . .

(C) Protection From Being Considered Deportable.—

(1) Unlawful voting.—Section 237(a)(6) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1227(a)(6)) is amended to read as follows:

“(6) Unlawful voters.—

“(A) In general.—Any alien who has voted in violation of any Federal, State, or local constitutional provision, statute, ordinance, or regulation is deportable.

(B) Exception.—In the case of an alien who voted in a Federal, State, or local election (including an initiative, recall, or referendum) in violation of a lawful restriction of voting to citizens, if each natural parent of the alien (or, in the case of an adopted alien, each adoptive parent of the alien) is or was a citizen (whether by birth or naturalization), the alien permanently resided in the United States prior to attaining the age of 16, and the alien

reasonably believed at the time of such violation that he or she was a citizen, the alien shall not be considered to be deportable under any provision of this subsection based on such violation.”

(2) Falsely claiming citizenship.—Section 237(a)(3)(D) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1227(a)(3)(D)) is amended to read as follows:

“(D) Falsely claiming citizenship.

“(I) In general.—Any alien who falsely represents, or has falsely represented, himself to be a citizen of the United States for any purpose or benefit under this Act (including section 274A) or any Federal or State law is deportable.

“(ii) Exception.—In the case of an alien making a representation described in clause (I), if each natural parent of the alien (or, in the case of an adopted alien, each adoptive parent of the alien) is or was a citizen (whether by birth or naturalization), the alien permanently resided in the United States prior to attaining the age of 16, and the alien reasonably believed at the time of making such representation that he or she was a citizen, the alien shall not be considered to be deportable under any provision of this subsection based on such representation.”

Source: Public Law 106-395, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, available online at [www.naic.acf.hhs.gov](http://www.naic.acf.hhs.gov)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman

# Adopted Children and Stepchildren: 2000

Issued October 2003

Census 2000 Special Reports

CENSR-6RV

## INTRODUCTION

Although many data sources describe the living arrangements and characteristics of children in general, few are large enough to permit the analysis of children by whether they are the biological, adopted, or stepchildren of the householder. Census 2000 included “adopted son/daughter” for the first time in the decennial census as a category of relationship to the householder separate from “natural born son/daughter” and “stepson/stepdaughter” (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> The adoption category includes various types of adoption, such as: adoption of biologically related and unrelated children, adoption of stepchildren, adoption through private and public agencies, domestic and international adoptions, and independent and informal adoptions. Census 2000 is the principal source of data on adopted children and their families on a national level.<sup>2</sup> See the Other Sources of Data and Data Quality

<sup>1</sup> The “householder” is a person in whose name the housing unit is owned, being bought, or rented.

<sup>2</sup> The National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, a service of the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’

Figure 1.

### Reproduction of the Question on Relationship to Householder from Census 2000

#### 2 How is this person related to Person 1?

Mark  ONE box.

- Husband/wife
- Natural-born son/daughter
- Adopted son/daughter
- Stepson/stepdaughter
- Brother/sister
- Father/mother
- Grandchild
- Parent-in-law
- Son-in-law/daughter-in-law
- Other relative — *Print exact relationship.*

If NOT RELATED to Person 1:

- Roomer, boarder
- Housemate, roommate
- Unmarried partner
- Foster child
- Other nonrelative

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 questionnaire.

sections of this report for more information about national level data on adopted children and stepchildren.

This report presents information on the characteristics of the 2.1 million adopted children and 4.4 million stepchildren of

Administration for Children and Families, states that there is no current public or private attempt to collect comprehensive national data on adoption, despite sporadic attempts over the last 50 years (See [www.calib.com/naic/stats](http://www.calib.com/naic/stats)).

By  
Rose M. Kreider

Table 1.  
**Number of Children of Householder by Type of Relationship and Age: 2000**

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf))

| Relationship                                   | Total, all ages | Under 18 years |            |            |            |            | 18 years and over |            |             |
|--|-----------------|----------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------------|------------|-------------|
|  |                 | Total          | Under 6    | 6 to 11    | 12 to 14   | 15 to 17   | Total             | 18 to 24   | 25 and over |
| <b>Total children of householder</b> . . . . . | 83,714,107      | 64,651,959     | 20,120,106 | 22,803,985 | 11,200,237 | 10,527,631 | 19,062,148        | 11,185,934 | 7,876,214   |
| Adopted children . . . . .                     | 2,058,915       | 1,586,004      | 389,296    | 598,326    | 316,636    | 281,746    | 472,911           | 273,957    | 198,954     |
| Stepchildren . . . . .                         | 4,384,581       | 3,292,301      | 328,378    | 1,271,122  | 847,130    | 845,671    | 1,092,280         | 778,441    | 313,839     |
| Biological children . . . . .                  | 77,270,611      | 59,773,654     | 19,402,432 | 20,934,537 | 10,036,471 | 9,400,214  | 17,496,957        | 10,133,536 | 7,363,421   |
| <b>Percent of age group</b> . . . . .          | 100.0           | 100.0          | 100.0      | 100.0      | 100.0      | 100.0      | 100.0             | 100.0      | 100.0       |
| Adopted children . . . . .                     | 2.5             | 2.5            | 1.9        | 2.6        | 2.8        | 2.7        | 2.5               | 2.4        | 2.5         |
| Stepchildren . . . . .                         | 5.2             | 5.1            | 1.6        | 5.6        | 7.6        | 8.0        | 5.7               | 7.0        | 4.0         |
| Biological children . . . . .                  | 92.3            | 92.5           | 96.4       | 91.8       | 89.6       | 89.3       | 91.8              | 90.6       | 93.5        |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 special tabulation.

householders as estimated from the Census 2000 sample, which collected data from approximately 1 out of every 6 households. Together, these children represented approximately 8 percent of the 84 million sons and daughters of householders in 2000.

### HOW ARE CHILDREN IDENTIFIED IN CENSUS 2000?

Biological children, adopted children, and stepchildren are identified in Census 2000 by the answer to the question, "How is this person related to person 1?" Person 1 is always the householder: someone who owns or rents the home. The results shown in this report reflect only people who were identified as children of the householder and were living in the household at the time of the census, rather than all children currently living with their parents. For example, if a married couple lived in the household of one of their parents, their children would be reported as the grandchildren of the householder. Because of situations like this, Census 2000 data cannot provide a comprehensive count of all adopted children and

stepchildren in the United States.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, national-level data on adopted children and stepchildren are rare, and the large sample size of Census 2000 makes it the most complete data source on the characteristics of these children and their families and households. The Other Sources of Data section of this report describes several other sources of data on adoption and adopted children.

Because people may have different understandings of what constitutes an "adoptive" or "step" parent-child relationship, Census 2000 data include a variety of types of adoptive and step relationships. These data do not define whether an adoption was of a relative or a nonrelative, or whether the child was adopted through a public agency, a private agency, or

independently. Because of this, we cannot distinguish among children who were adopted by their step-parents, children adopted by their biological grandparents or other relatives, and children adopted by other people to whom they are not biologically related.<sup>4</sup> Since Census 2000 respondents selected from the relationship categories shown in Figure 1, people recorded as adopted children of the householder may not necessarily be legally adopted.

Informal adoptions are more common among some cultural groups than others, as people differ widely in the way they view family relationships and the process of adoption. For example, a qualitative study prepared for the U.S. Census Bureau found that informal

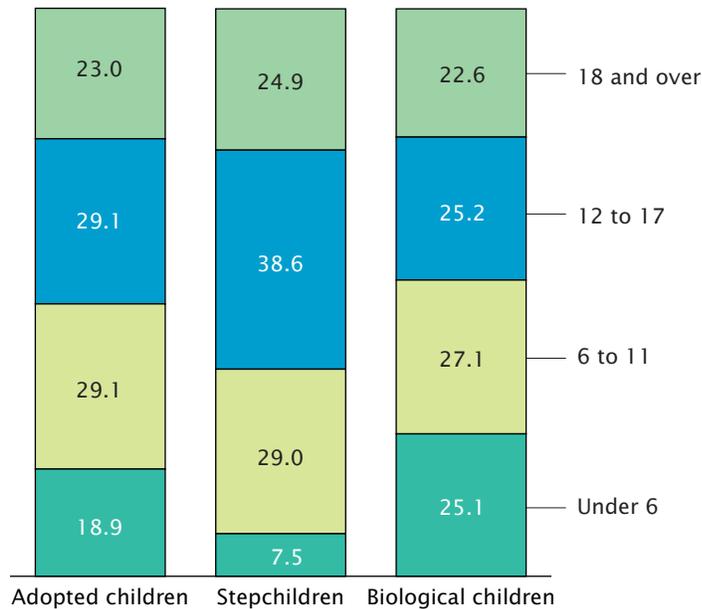
<sup>3</sup> It is estimated that Census 2000 may have identified only about two-thirds of all stepchildren living with at least one stepparent because of the manner in which the data were collected. For this reason, characteristics of the stepchildren shown in this report may not represent all stepchildren. See the Data Quality section of this report.

The text of this report discusses data for the United States, including the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico are shown in Table 2 and Figure 3.

<sup>4</sup> An estimate for 1992, made from court records, was that about 42 percent of all adoptions were by stepparents or a relative. See Victor Flango and Carol Flango. "How Many Children Were Adopted in 1992," *Child Welfare*, 1995, Vol. LXXIV, No. 5 (Sept.-Oct.), pp. 1018-1024. A 1996 survey of all 50 states and the District of Columbia conducted by the National Council for Adoption, estimated that 50 percent of domestic adoptions were by someone related to the child, including stepparents. See Paul J. Placek. "National Adoption Data," *Adoption Factbook III*, National Council for Adoption: Washington, DC. 1999. pp 24-68.

Figure 2.  
**Percent Distribution of Children of the Householder by Type of Relationship and Age: 2000**

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf))



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 special tabulation.

adoption of biological grandchildren was common in Inupiaq communities in Alaska.<sup>5</sup> Informal adoptions are also more common among Blacks and Hispanics.<sup>6</sup>

In a similar manner, in Census 2000, householders who listed stepchildren as living in their

households may not always be married to the person who is the biological parent of the stepchild. Most of the 271,000 unmarried male householders who reported having stepchildren in their households also had a female unmarried partner (198,000). It seems unlikely that so many men would have the biological child of their former spouse living with them, and more likely that the “stepchild” is the biological child of the unmarried partner with whom they are currently living. Since the English language does not have a more precise word to describe this kind of relationship, some respondents may have decided to report their partner’s child as their stepchild, even though they are not married to the child’s biological parent.

## HOW MANY ADOPTED CHILDREN AND STEPCHILDREN OF THE HOUSEHOLDER ARE THERE?

In 2000, 1.6 million adopted children of the householder were under age 18, making up 2.5 percent of all children of the householder under 18 (see Table 1). An additional 473,000 adopted children of the householder were aged 18 and over, again representing 2.5 percent of all children of the householder of that age group. In 2000, there were more than twice as many stepchildren (4.4 million) as adopted children (2.1 million),<sup>7</sup> with stepchildren representing 5 percent of children of the householder.

The distribution of children in different age groups by type of relationship reveals marked differences associated with how the children became members of the household. The age distribution of biological children of the householder up to age 18 is primarily a consequence of the number of babies born each year, which has been relatively constant since the early 1980s.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the proportions of biological children in each of the three 6-year age groups shown in Figure 2 differ slightly (25 to 27 percent). Percentages were smaller for both adopted children (19 percent) and stepchildren (8 percent) than for biological children (25 percent) under 6 years compared with the older age groups (see Figure 2). These differences probably reflect

<sup>7</sup> The estimates in this report are based on responses from a sample of the population. As with all surveys, estimates may vary from the actual values because of sampling variation or other factors. All comparisons made in this report have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90-percent confidence level unless otherwise noted.

<sup>8</sup> After age 18, leaving home for school, jobs, military service, or to start a household strongly affects the number of children living with their parents, regardless of the type of parent-child relationship.

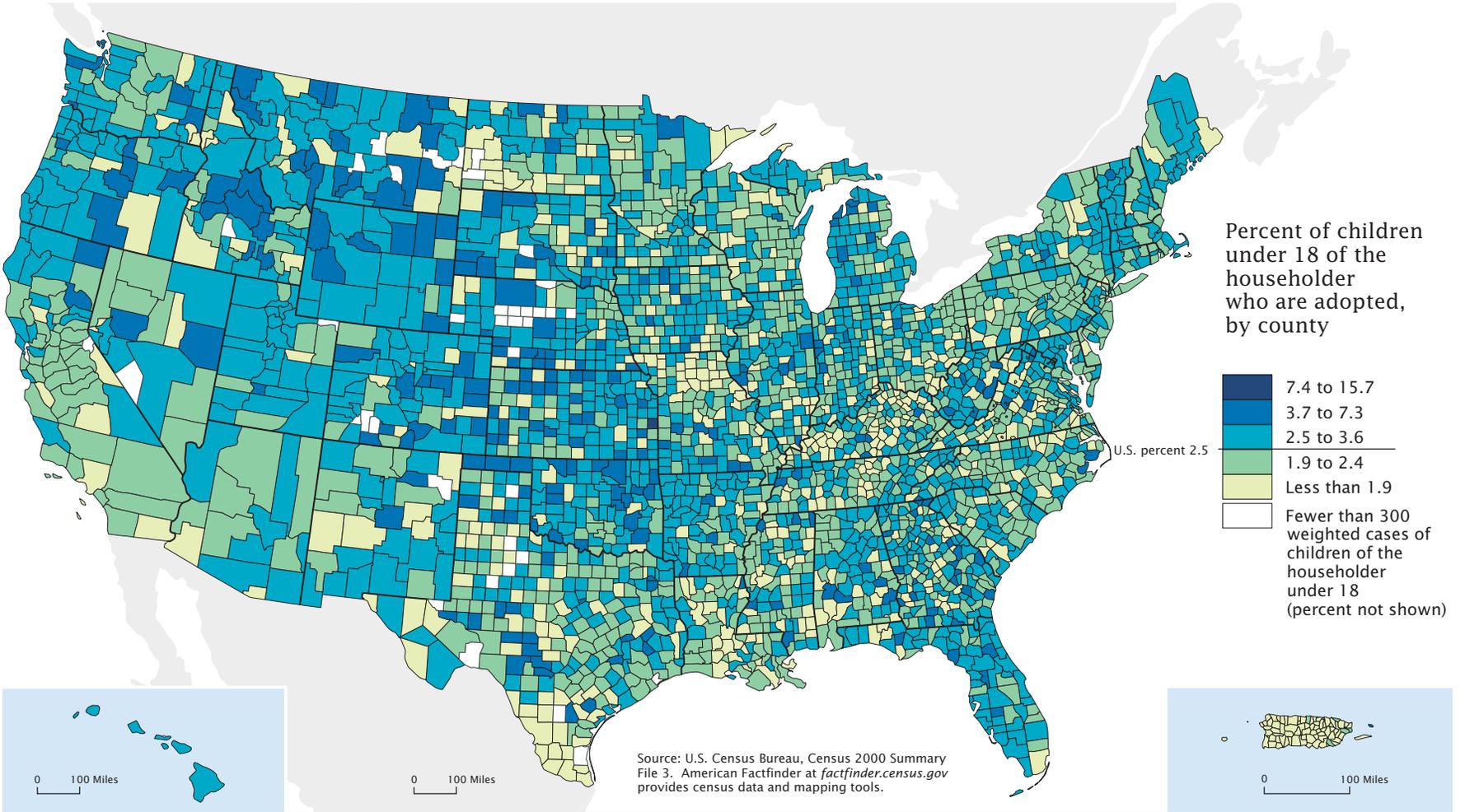
Table 2.

## Number and Percent of Children of the Householder by Type of Relationship for the United States, Regions, and States, and for Puerto Rico: 2000

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf))

| Area                           | Total children of householder | Under 18 years       |                  |            |                  |            |                     |             | 18 years and over |                  |                     |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|------------------|------------|------------------|------------|---------------------|-------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------------|
|                                |                               | Total under 18 years | Adopted children |            | Stepchildren     |            | Biological children |             | Adopted children  | Stepchildren     | Biological children |
|                                |                               |                      | Number           | Per cent   | Number           | Per cent   | Number              | Per cent    |                   |                  |                     |
| <b>United States</b>           | <b>83,714,107</b>             | <b>64,651,959</b>    | <b>1,586,004</b> | <b>2.5</b> | <b>3,292,301</b> | <b>5.1</b> | <b>59,773,654</b>   | <b>92.5</b> | <b>472,911</b>    | <b>1,092,280</b> | <b>17,496,957</b>   |
| <b>Region</b>                  |                               |                      |                  |            |                  |            |                     |             |                   |                  |                     |
| Northeast . . . . .            | 15,966,707                    | 11,793,062           | 284,242          | 2.4        | 392,629          | 3.3        | 11,116,191          | 94.3        | 94,409            | 178,845          | 3,900,391           |
| Midwest . . . . .              | 19,304,860                    | 15,234,402           | 389,096          | 2.6        | 794,509          | 5.2        | 14,050,797          | 92.2        | 103,303           | 240,760          | 3,726,395           |
| South . . . . .                | 29,194,157                    | 22,576,013           | 548,297          | 2.4        | 1,372,665        | 6.1        | 20,655,051          | 91.5        | 170,876           | 425,354          | 6,021,914           |
| West . . . . .                 | 19,248,383                    | 15,048,482           | 364,369          | 2.4        | 732,498          | 4.9        | 13,951,615          | 92.7        | 104,323           | 247,321          | 3,848,257           |
| <b>State</b>                   |                               |                      |                  |            |                  |            |                     |             |                   |                  |                     |
| Alabama . . . . .              | 1,310,310                     | 995,282              | 24,944           | 2.5        | 67,226           | 6.8        | 903,112             | 90.7        | 8,488             | 20,185           | 286,355             |
| Alaska . . . . .               | 206,852                       | 175,315              | 6,910            | 3.9        | 10,395           | 5.9        | 158,010             | 90.1        | 1,474             | 1,971            | 28,092              |
| Arizona . . . . .              | 1,499,746                     | 1,197,953            | 28,966           | 2.4        | 65,857           | 5.5        | 1,103,130           | 92.1        | 8,412             | 19,565           | 273,816             |
| Arkansas . . . . .             | 763,410                       | 604,462              | 15,973           | 2.6        | 51,579           | 8.5        | 536,910             | 88.8        | 4,393             | 12,281           | 142,274             |
| California . . . . .           | 10,561,507                    | 8,027,573            | 167,190          | 2.1        | 335,760          | 4.2        | 7,524,623           | 93.7        | 54,516            | 137,137          | 2,342,281           |
| Colorado . . . . .             | 1,221,797                     | 1,006,573            | 29,438           | 2.9        | 55,097           | 5.5        | 922,038             | 91.6        | 6,386             | 14,667           | 194,171             |
| Connecticut . . . . .          | 1,005,700                     | 775,214              | 19,239           | 2.5        | 25,378           | 3.3        | 730,597             | 94.2        | 4,989             | 10,533           | 214,964             |
| Delaware . . . . .             | 224,792                       | 172,427              | 3,452            | 2.0        | 8,265            | 4.8        | 160,710             | 93.2        | 1,276             | 3,301            | 47,788              |
| District of Columbia . . . . . | 129,440                       | 87,890               | 2,649            | 3.0        | 1,870            | 2.1        | 83,371              | 94.9        | 1,105             | 1,298            | 39,147              |
| Florida . . . . .              | 4,194,729                     | 3,204,362            | 82,179           | 2.6        | 182,391          | 5.7        | 2,939,792           | 91.7        | 27,052            | 65,609           | 897,706             |
| Georgia . . . . .              | 2,452,510                     | 1,903,475            | 49,194           | 2.6        | 118,721          | 6.2        | 1,735,560           | 91.2        | 14,139            | 37,669           | 497,227             |
| Hawaii . . . . .               | 353,159                       | 238,287              | 6,941            | 2.9        | 9,664            | 4.1        | 221,682             | 93.0        | 2,917             | 4,152            | 107,803             |
| Idaho . . . . .                | 408,521                       | 344,494              | 9,562            | 2.8        | 21,649           | 6.3        | 313,283             | 90.9        | 1,946             | 5,034            | 57,047              |
| Illinois . . . . .             | 3,824,955                     | 2,886,152            | 73,638           | 2.6        | 121,241          | 4.2        | 2,691,273           | 93.2        | 21,819            | 47,778           | 869,206             |
| Indiana . . . . .              | 1,808,429                     | 1,441,338            | 37,004           | 2.6        | 96,497           | 6.7        | 1,307,837           | 90.7        | 10,194            | 26,335           | 330,562             |
| Iowa . . . . .                 | 834,338                       | 688,589              | 18,569           | 2.7        | 37,030           | 5.4        | 632,990             | 91.9        | 3,983             | 8,872            | 132,894             |
| Kansas . . . . .               | 796,248                       | 662,249              | 19,733           | 3.0        | 41,068           | 6.2        | 601,448             | 90.8        | 4,286             | 8,884            | 120,829             |
| Kentucky . . . . .             | 1,166,663                     | 906,933              | 20,661           | 2.3        | 61,112           | 6.7        | 825,160             | 91.0        | 6,067             | 17,453           | 236,210             |
| Louisiana . . . . .            | 1,407,726                     | 1,051,564            | 22,827           | 2.2        | 66,997           | 6.4        | 961,740             | 91.5        | 8,259             | 20,734           | 327,169             |
| Maine . . . . .                | 343,588                       | 280,763              | 7,137            | 2.5        | 14,345           | 5.1        | 259,281             | 92.3        | 1,786             | 3,988            | 57,051              |
| Maryland . . . . .             | 1,576,113                     | 1,197,553            | 32,269           | 2.7        | 50,985           | 4.3        | 1,114,299           | 93.0        | 9,609             | 22,156           | 346,795             |
| Massachusetts . . . . .        | 1,850,225                     | 1,383,945            | 35,647           | 2.6        | 36,899           | 2.7        | 1,311,399           | 94.8        | 11,525            | 17,986           | 436,769             |
| Michigan . . . . .             | 3,046,209                     | 2,356,202            | 61,232           | 2.6        | 122,038          | 5.2        | 2,172,932           | 92.2        | 17,165            | 41,648           | 631,194             |
| Minnesota . . . . .            | 1,478,812                     | 1,215,739            | 31,378           | 2.6        | 49,522           | 4.1        | 1,134,839           | 93.3        | 7,181             | 13,248           | 242,644             |
| Mississippi . . . . .          | 886,323                       | 660,190              | 16,300           | 2.5        | 44,414           | 6.7        | 599,476             | 90.8        | 5,802             | 13,743           | 206,588             |
| Missouri . . . . .             | 1,635,329                     | 1,300,281            | 33,156           | 2.5        | 82,974           | 6.4        | 1,184,151           | 91.1        | 8,802             | 23,916           | 302,330             |
| Montana . . . . .              | 255,301                       | 212,401              | 6,803            | 3.2        | 12,321           | 5.8        | 193,277             | 91.0        | 1,386             | 2,609            | 38,905              |
| Nebraska . . . . .             | 507,177                       | 421,429              | 11,812           | 2.8        | 19,903           | 4.7        | 389,714             | 92.5        | 2,698             | 4,488            | 78,562              |
| Nevada . . . . .               | 561,558                       | 452,493              | 10,588           | 2.3        | 29,919           | 6.6        | 411,986             | 91.0        | 3,226             | 8,831            | 97,008              |
| New Hampshire . . . . .        | 358,340                       | 290,564              | 6,864            | 2.4        | 13,074           | 4.5        | 270,626             | 93.1        | 1,702             | 4,486            | 61,588              |
| New Jersey . . . . .           | 2,600,871                     | 1,881,428            | 42,614           | 2.3        | 57,172           | 3.0        | 1,781,642           | 94.7        | 16,320            | 31,576           | 671,547             |
| New Mexico . . . . .           | 568,987                       | 447,024              | 11,764           | 2.6        | 25,880           | 5.8        | 409,380             | 91.6        | 3,007             | 6,407            | 112,549             |
| New York . . . . .             | 5,768,499                     | 4,153,245            | 100,736          | 2.4        | 120,112          | 2.9        | 3,932,397           | 94.7        | 35,577            | 61,241           | 1,518,436           |
| North Carolina . . . . .       | 2,229,789                     | 1,753,973            | 42,911           | 2.4        | 103,062          | 5.9        | 1,608,000           | 91.7        | 11,388            | 29,397           | 435,031             |
| North Dakota . . . . .         | 182,579                       | 152,943              | 3,647            | 2.4        | 6,619            | 4.3        | 142,677             | 93.3        | 953               | 1,301            | 27,382              |
| Ohio . . . . .                 | 3,384,920                     | 2,643,807            | 62,653           | 2.4        | 148,767          | 5.6        | 2,432,387           | 92.0        | 17,680            | 46,413           | 677,020             |
| Oklahoma . . . . .             | 989,854                       | 798,929              | 23,518           | 2.9        | 63,632           | 8.0        | 711,779             | 89.1        | 6,463             | 15,372           | 169,090             |
| Oregon . . . . .               | 940,376                       | 770,173              | 23,901           | 3.1        | 46,559           | 6.0        | 699,713             | 90.9        | 6,213             | 13,373           | 150,617             |
| Pennsylvania . . . . .         | 3,566,476                     | 2,659,562            | 62,328           | 2.3        | 110,611          | 4.2        | 2,486,623           | 93.5        | 19,823            | 44,126           | 842,965             |
| Rhode Island . . . . .         | 304,639                       | 229,017              | 5,496            | 2.4        | 8,423            | 3.7        | 215,098             | 93.9        | 1,767             | 3,338            | 70,517              |
| South Carolina . . . . .       | 1,158,863                     | 881,583              | 22,027           | 2.5        | 52,353           | 5.9        | 807,203             | 91.6        | 7,484             | 15,748           | 254,048             |
| South Dakota . . . . .         | 222,873                       | 186,772              | 5,691            | 3.0        | 8,886            | 4.8        | 172,195             | 92.2        | 1,155             | 1,774            | 33,172              |
| Tennessee . . . . .            | 1,619,371                     | 1,244,838            | 30,980           | 2.5        | 87,747           | 7.0        | 1,126,111           | 90.5        | 9,791             | 26,280           | 338,462             |
| Texas . . . . .                | 6,590,734                     | 5,178,912            | 110,275          | 2.1        | 308,074          | 5.9        | 4,760,563           | 91.9        | 34,643            | 90,596           | 1,286,583           |
| Utah . . . . .                 | 831,039                       | 664,965              | 19,430           | 2.9        | 32,176           | 4.8        | 613,359             | 92.2        | 4,646             | 9,977            | 151,451             |
| Vermont . . . . .              | 168,369                       | 139,324              | 4,181            | 3.0        | 6,615            | 4.7        | 128,528             | 92.3        | 920               | 1,571            | 26,554              |
| Virginia . . . . .             | 2,000,289                     | 1,567,983            | 38,289           | 2.4        | 79,118           | 5.0        | 1,450,576           | 92.5        | 11,849            | 26,287           | 394,170             |
| Washington . . . . .           | 1,698,284                     | 1,392,445            | 38,879           | 2.8        | 79,452           | 5.7        | 1,274,114           | 91.5        | 9,491             | 21,955           | 274,393             |
| West Virginia . . . . .        | 493,241                       | 365,657              | 9,849            | 2.7        | 25,119           | 6.9        | 330,689             | 90.4        | 3,068             | 7,245            | 117,271             |
| Wisconsin . . . . .            | 1,582,991                     | 1,278,901            | 30,583           | 2.4        | 59,964           | 4.7        | 1,188,354           | 92.9        | 7,387             | 16,103           | 280,600             |
| Wyoming . . . . .              | 141,256                       | 118,786              | 3,997            | 3.4        | 7,769            | 6.5        | 107,020             | 90.1        | 703               | 1,643            | 20,124              |
| <b>Puerto Rico . . . . .</b>   | <b>1,435,136</b>              | <b>937,408</b>       | <b>10,696</b>    | <b>1.1</b> | <b>36,236</b>    | <b>3.9</b> | <b>890,476</b>      | <b>95.0</b> | <b>5,081</b>      | <b>14,733</b>    | <b>477,914</b>      |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 special tabulation.



the time it takes to finalize the adoption process, as well as the decreasing number of infants in the United States in need of adoption,<sup>9</sup> and the fact that children who are adopted by their stepparents would likely be at least several years old, having come from a previous marital union. For all three types of children, similar proportions were aged 18 and over, about 23 percent for adopted children and stepchildren and 25 percent for biological children.

## WHERE DO ADOPTED CHILDREN LIVE?

The proportion of children under 18 who were adopted—who make up three-quarters of adopted children of all ages—hardly varied by region or state in 2000 (see Table 2).<sup>10</sup> The percent in the Midwest (2.6 percent) was slightly higher than in the other three regions (each 2.4 percent). By state, this percentage ranged from about 2.0 in Delaware, California, Texas, and Louisiana to 3.9 percent in Alaska. As previously noted, informal adoption has been found to be common among some Alaskan Native groups,<sup>11</sup> which may

have contributed to the higher percentage in Alaska.

Although the state inset maps in Figure 3 seem to indicate that a relatively higher percentage of adopted children were found in a broad geographic band ranging diagonally across the country from Florida to Washington, it should be noted that both the levels and the range of these percentages are only a few percentage points. The most important observation about geographic patterns in the percentage of children who were adopted is that adoption is a family-building process which takes place in all states in about the same proportions. As mentioned previously, counties in Alaska with the highest percentages of children of the householder who were adopted likely reflect Alaskan Native communities in which the meaning and practice of adoption may differ from that in other communities. The fact that Census 2000 data include various types of adoption, each of which may have its own geographic pattern, may also contribute to the lack of a distinct geographic pattern when all types of adoptions are considered jointly.

## WHERE DO STEPCHILDREN LIVE?

Nationally, 5 percent of children of the householder under age 18 in 2000 were stepchildren. At the regional level, percentages of children of the householder under 18 who were stepchildren varied more than the corresponding percentages for adopted children, ranging from 3.3 percent in the Northeast to 6.1 percent in the South, with both the Midwest and the West at about the national average of 5.1 percent. For children under 18, the state with the highest percentage of children of the householder who were stepchildren was

Arkansas (8.5 percent), followed by Oklahoma (8.0 percent) and Tennessee (7.0 percent). Two states with percentages just under 3 percent were Massachusetts (2.7 percent) and New York (2.9 percent). Two percent of the children of the householder under 18 in the District of Columbia were stepchildren. The differences in these state percentages are affected by the likelihood that parents remarry after divorce, whether the child lives with the father or the mother after a divorce, and the gender of the householder in remarried-couple families. Since most children continue to live with their mothers rather than their fathers, remarried-couple households with the husband as the householder will tend to create more householder-stepchild relationships than remarried couples with the wife as the householder.<sup>12</sup>

## PROFILE OF CHILDREN OF THE HOUSEHOLDER

### Demographic Patterns

In the last several years, legislation has been passed which increased financial assistance for adoptive families (e.g., Adoption Tax Credits, the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program) and removed some of the barriers to international and interracial adoptions (e.g., Child Citizenship Act of 2000, Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994). The fact that Census 2000 collected the current age of the adopted child and not the age at adoption prevents determining if the number of adopted children has increased over time. However, the presence of approximately 42,000 adopted children less than a year old living with

<sup>9</sup> Anjani Chandra, Joyce Abma, Penelope Maza, and Christine Bachrach. *Adoption, Adoption Seeking, and Relinquishment for Adoption in the United States*. Vital and Health Statistics, No. 306, National Center for Health Statistics. Hyattsville, MD, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> The Northeast region includes the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The Midwest region includes the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The South region includes the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia, a state equivalent. The West region includes the states of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

<sup>11</sup> Amy Craver. "Complex Inupiaq Eskimo Households and Relationships in Two Northwest Alaska Rural Communities," Alaska Native Science Commission. University of Alaska, Anchorage, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> The percentage of children of the householder under 18 in married-couple households with male householders, by state, was also strongly correlated ( $r=.47$ ) with the percentage of children of the householder who were stepchildren.

Table 3.  
**Selected Characteristics of Householder's Children Under 18 by Type of Relationship and Sex of Child: 2000**

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf))

| Characteristic of child                                | Adopted children |         |         | Stepchildren |           |           | Biological children |            |            |
|--|------------------|---------|---------|--------------|-----------|-----------|---------------------|------------|------------|
|  | Total            | Male    | Female  | Total        | Male      | Female    | Total               | Male       | Female     |
| <b>Total</b> .....                                     | 1,586,004        | 750,528 | 835,476 | 3,292,301    | 1,654,766 | 1,637,535 | 59,773,654          | 30,740,753 | 29,032,901 |
| <b>Age</b>   |                  |         |         |              |           |           |                     |            |            |
| Under 1 year .....                                     | 41,795           | 19,447  | 22,348  | 12,384       | 6,345     | 6,039     | 3,148,542           | 1,617,368  | 1,531,174  |
| 1 year .....   | 55,857           | 25,310  | 30,547  | 21,266       | 10,903    | 10,363    | 3,173,342           | 1,628,187  | 1,545,155  |
| 2 years .....  | 63,250           | 28,549  | 34,701  | 36,000       | 18,179    | 17,821    | 3,167,328           | 1,624,648  | 1,542,680  |
| 3 years .....  | 71,211           | 32,071  | 39,140  | 57,986       | 29,152    | 28,834    | 3,227,496           | 1,656,621  | 1,570,875  |
| 4 years .....  | 74,717           | 33,832  | 40,885  | 86,298       | 43,319    | 42,979    | 3,316,803           | 1,705,905  | 1,610,898  |
| 5 years .....  | 82,466           | 38,334  | 44,132  | 114,444      | 57,944    | 56,500    | 3,368,921           | 1,734,680  | 1,634,241  |
| 6 years .....  | 85,298           | 40,123  | 45,175  | 142,935      | 72,735    | 70,200    | 3,400,350           | 1,746,453  | 1,653,897  |
| 7 years .....  | 92,634           | 44,325  | 48,309  | 174,308      | 88,620    | 85,688    | 3,464,985           | 1,777,536  | 1,687,449  |
| 8 years .....  | 100,144          | 47,771  | 52,373  | 205,419      | 103,502   | 101,917   | 3,506,676           | 1,796,739  | 1,709,937  |
| 9 years .....  | 106,403          | 50,491  | 55,912  | 231,797      | 117,489   | 114,308   | 3,581,011           | 1,842,840  | 1,738,171  |
| 10 years .....   | 106,626          | 51,320  | 55,306  | 254,456      | 128,274   | 126,182   | 3,555,349           | 1,829,177  | 1,726,172  |
| 11 years .....   | 107,221          | 51,908  | 55,313  | 262,207      | 130,685   | 131,522   | 3,426,166           | 1,762,824  | 1,663,342  |
| 12 years .....   | 106,116          | 51,161  | 54,955  | 272,989      | 138,432   | 134,557   | 3,374,253           | 1,735,147  | 1,639,106  |
| 13 years .....   | 105,336          | 50,856  | 54,480  | 281,502      | 140,111   | 141,391   | 3,321,218           | 1,709,523  | 1,611,695  |
| 14 years .....   | 105,184          | 49,662  | 55,522  | 292,639      | 146,624   | 146,015   | 3,341,000           | 1,722,068  | 1,618,932  |
| 15 years .....   | 98,249           | 46,715  | 51,534  | 289,992      | 144,965   | 145,027   | 3,218,126           | 1,655,653  | 1,562,473  |
| 16 years .....   | 93,859           | 45,319  | 48,540  | 281,016      | 139,357   | 141,659   | 3,118,713           | 1,608,455  | 1,510,258  |
| 17 years .....   | 89,638           | 43,334  | 46,304  | 274,663      | 138,130   | 136,533   | 3,063,375           | 1,586,929  | 1,476,446  |
| <b>Race and Hispanic Origin</b>                        |                  |         |         |              |           |           |                     |            |            |
| White alone .....                                      | 1,017,666        | 489,824 | 527,842 | 2,482,249    | 1,248,522 | 1,233,727 | 42,358,683          | 21,836,836 | 20,521,847 |
| Black or African American alone .....                  | 254,161          | 122,378 | 131,783 | 402,821      | 200,649   | 202,172   | 7,911,317           | 4,021,896  | 3,889,421  |
| American Indian and Alaska Native alone .....          | 25,681           | 12,603  | 13,078  | 39,822       | 19,931    | 19,891    | 597,780             | 305,186    | 292,594    |
| Asian alone .....                                      | 116,909          | 43,285  | 73,624  | 38,905       | 19,203    | 19,702    | 2,069,271           | 1,076,538  | 992,733    |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone ..... | 4,184            | 2,034   | 2,150   | 4,272        | 2,113     | 2,159     | 88,019              | 45,590     | 42,429     |
| Some other race alone .....                            | 89,894           | 42,480  | 47,414  | 205,221      | 105,233   | 99,988    | 4,373,885           | 2,240,392  | 2,133,493  |
| Two or more races .....                                | 77,509           | 37,924  | 39,585  | 119,011      | 59,115    | 59,896    | 2,374,699           | 1,214,315  | 1,160,384  |
| Hispanic or Latino (of any race) .....                 | 215,909          | 102,463 | 113,446 | 479,101      | 244,243   | 234,858   | 9,720,023           | 4,986,524  | 4,733,499  |
| White alone, not Hispanic or Latino .....              | 918,044          | 442,330 | 475,714 | 2,261,667    | 1,135,942 | 1,125,725 | 37,957,788          | 19,573,548 | 18,384,240 |
| <b>Nativity and English Ability</b>                    |                  |         |         |              |           |           |                     |            |            |
| Native .....   | 1,386,868        | 666,452 | 720,416 | 3,159,566    | 1,587,476 | 1,572,090 | 57,461,010          | 29,543,996 | 27,917,014 |
| Foreign born .....                                     | 199,136          | 84,076  | 115,060 | 132,735      | 67,290    | 65,445    | 2,312,644           | 1,196,757  | 1,115,887  |
| Foreign born aged 5 to 17 ...                          | 147,073          | 65,711  | 81,362  | 127,771      | 64,943    | 62,828    | 2,076,420           | 1,074,967  | 1,001,453  |
| Speaks non-English language at home <sup>1</sup> ..... | 45,372           | 21,127  | 24,245  | 107,271      | 54,531    | 52,740    | 1,836,079           | 951,318    | 884,761    |
| Speaks English very well .....                         | 25,138           | 11,194  | 13,944  | 57,474       | 29,029    | 28,445    | 999,482             | 508,057    | 491,425    |
| <b>Disability Status<sup>1</sup></b>                   |                  |         |         |              |           |           |                     |            |            |
| Aged 5 to 17 .....                                     | 1,279,174        | 611,319 | 667,855 | 3,078,367    | 1,546,868 | 1,531,499 | 43,740,143          | 22,508,024 | 21,232,119 |
| At least one disability .....                          | 150,451          | 88,977  | 61,474  | 213,663      | 137,353   | 76,310    | 2,279,024           | 1,456,646  | 822,378    |
| Sensory disability .....                               | 18,930           | 9,713   | 9,217   | 34,488       | 18,379    | 16,109    | 404,988             | 222,937    | 182,051    |
| Physical disability .....                              | 19,595           | 10,782  | 8,813   | 21,814       | 12,611    | 9,203     | 360,976             | 210,348    | 150,628    |
| Mental disability <sup>2</sup> .....                   | 132,700          | 80,694  | 52,006  | 174,842      | 117,942   | 56,900    | 1,768,187           | 1,190,175  | 578,012    |
| Self-care disability .....                             | 20,706           | 10,526  | 10,180  | 30,471       | 16,376    | 14,095    | 417,677             | 229,138    | 188,539    |
| Multiple disabilities <sup>3</sup> .....               | 27,498           | 15,334  | 12,164  | 33,863       | 19,855    | 14,008    | 463,179             | 277,620    | 185,559    |
| <b>In Poverty</b> .....                                | 187,018          | 87,998  | 99,020  | 342,435      | 174,111   | 168,324   | 9,578,757           | 4,887,268  | 4,691,489  |

<sup>1</sup>These questions were asked only of people aged 5 and over.

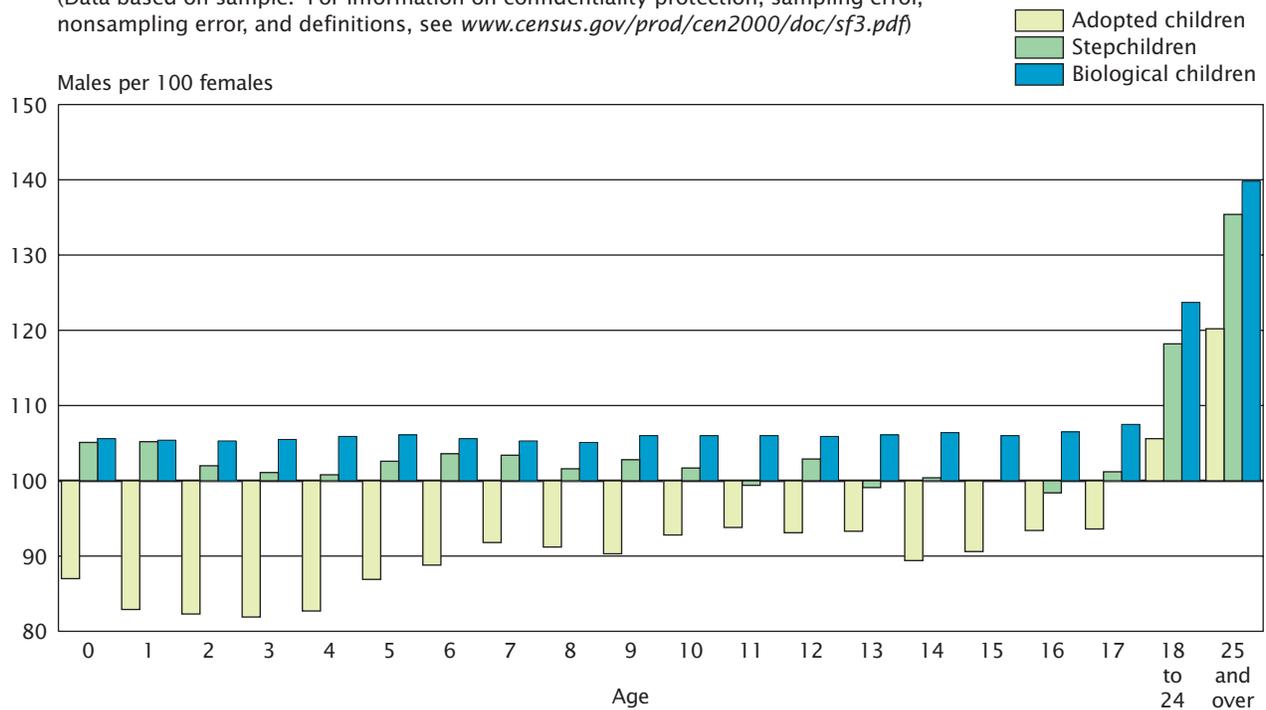
<sup>2</sup>The question asks if the person has difficulty learning, remembering, or concentrating.

<sup>3</sup>This includes children with any combination of two or more of the disabilities listed above.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 special tabulation.

Figure 4.  
**Sex Ratio for Children of the Householder by Age of Child: 2000**

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf))



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 special tabulation.

householders means, that at least this number of infants were adopted in the 1-year period prior to the census (see Table 3).

The number of stepchildren was larger at each single year of age until age 14. In comparison, the relative lack of variation in the number of biological children at each age reflects roughly equal numbers of annual births during the preceding two decades. The relative increases by age shown for adopted children and stepchildren reflect the length of the adoption process for adopted children and the intervals between parental marriage, childbearing, divorce, and remarriage for stepchildren.

In addition to different age patterns, the sex ratio (i.e., the number of males per 100 females) shows

variations among adopted, biological, and stepchildren. For children under 18, the sex ratio was highest for biological children (106), followed by stepchildren (101) and adopted children (90). The sex ratio for biological children reflects the fact that there are more male births than female births, and that, at older ages, girls leave home earlier than boys, reflecting in part the earlier average age at first marriage for women than for men.

More girls than boys are adopted, for several reasons. First, women in general express a preference for adopting girls,<sup>13</sup> and single women more frequently have adopted girls

<sup>13</sup> Anjani Chandra, Joyce Abma, Penelope Maza, and Christine Bachrach. *Adoption, Adoption Seeking, and Relinquishment for Adoption in the United States*. Vital and Health Statistics, No. 306, National Center for Health Statistics. Hyattsville, MD, 1999.

than boys.<sup>14</sup> Also, a majority of the children available for adoption from other countries that are leading sources for adopted children are girls.<sup>15</sup>

Figure 4 displays the sex ratio of biological, adopted, and stepchildren of the householder by age. Age is shown in single years

<sup>14</sup> Victor Groze. "Adoption and single parents: a review." *Child Welfare*, 1991. Vol. 70, No. 3, pp. 321-332.

<sup>15</sup> Families With Children from China (FWCC) states that about 95 percent of the children in China waiting for adoption are girls. Also, see Sten Johansson and Ola Nygren. "The Missing Girls of China: A New Demographic Account" *Population and Development Review*. 1991, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 35-51, which discusses the sex ratio of adopted children within China. Data from Census 2000 show that 93 percent of the adopted children who were born in China were girls. In Census 2000 data, 57 percent of the adopted children born in Korea are girls. The sex ratio for the adopted children who were born in India is also relatively low, since 65 percent of these children were girls.

up to age 17, and then in two age groups: 18 to 24 years and 25 and over. The sex ratio, the number of males per 100 females, has a value of 100 when there are equal numbers of boys and girls; a value above 100 indicates there are more boys than girls and a value below 100 indicates more girls than boys. Figure 4 shows that, for all ages under 18, there were more adopted girls than boys at each year of age, particularly for children under 6 years, for whom the sex ratio was 90 or less. For adopted children aged 18 and over, the ratio was greater than 100, indicating that adopted children who continued to live in their parents' households were more likely to be boys than girls, paralleling the case for biological and stepchildren. The sex ratio for biological children was fairly constant for children under 18 years, and then jumped dramatically, showing that boys were more likely to live in their parents' households as adults.

The sex ratio for stepchildren under 18 hovered relatively close to 100, in contrast with that for biological and adopted children.

### Race, Ethnicity, and Nativity Characteristics

Census 2000 allowed respondents to choose more than one race. With the exception of the Two or more races group, all race groups discussed in this report refer to people who indicated *only one* racial identity among the six major categories: White, Black or African American, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and Some other race.<sup>16</sup> The use of the single-race population in this report does not

<sup>16</sup> For further information on each of the six major race groups and the Two or more races population, see reports from the Census 2000 Brief series (C2KBR/01), available on the Census 2000 Web site at [www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs.html).

imply that it is the preferred method of presenting or analyzing data. The Census Bureau uses a variety of approaches.<sup>17</sup>

In 2000, White (and no other race), not Hispanic children made up the majority of all categories of children of householders under 18: about 58 percent of adopted children, 64 percent of biological children, and 69 percent of stepchildren (see Table 4). A higher percentage of adopted children under 18 were Black or African American (16 percent) than the percentage of biological children (13 percent) and the percentage of stepchildren (12 percent).<sup>18</sup> This higher percentage may be due in part to the fact that the percentage of children in the child welfare system who are Black is higher than the percentage of children in the overall population who are Black,<sup>19</sup> and may also reflect a higher number of informal adoptions in African American communities. Although the percentage of children under 18 who were American Indian and Alaska Native is small, a higher percentage of adopted children were American Indian and Alaska Native (1.6 percent) than the percentage of biological (1.0 percent) or stepchildren (1.2 percent) who are American

<sup>17</sup> This report draws heavily on Summary File 3, a Census 2000 product that can be accessed through American FactFinder, available from the Census Bureau's Web site, [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov). Information on people who reported more than one race, such as "White **and** American Indian and Alaska Native" or "Asian **and** Black or African American" can be found in Summary File 4, also available through American FactFinder. About 2.6 percent of people reported more than one race.

<sup>18</sup> Hereafter, this report uses the term Black to refer to people who are Black or African American, the term Pacific Islander to refer to people who are Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and the term Hispanic to refer to people who are Hispanic or Latino.

<sup>19</sup> National Adoption Center Web site at [www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org). The National Adoption Center is a service of the Children's Bureau, of the Administration for Children and Families, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Indian and Alaska Native, which may be related to informal adoptions in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

The percentage of adopted children under 18 who were Asian (7.4 percent) is higher than the percentage of biological (3.5 percent) and stepchildren (1.2 percent) who were Asian. This is due largely to the fact that nearly half (49 percent) of all foreign-born adopted children were born in Asian countries. A slightly lower percentage of adopted children than stepchildren or biological children under 18 were Hispanic (14 percent compared with 15 percent and 16 percent, respectively).<sup>20</sup>

Tables 3 and 4 also show the number and percentage of children of the householder who were foreign born and the number who spoke English "very well" among those 5 to 17 years who spoke a language other than English at home. About 4 percent of children under 18 who were stepchildren or biological children in 2000 were foreign born.<sup>21</sup> The corresponding percentage was considerably higher for adopted children—11 percent for boys and 14 percent for girls. The higher percentage for girls was heavily influenced by the number of foreign-born adopted children who were Asian, because the

<sup>20</sup> Because Hispanics may be of any race, data in this report for Hispanics overlap with data for racial groups. Based on Census 2000 sample data, the proportion Hispanic was 8.0 percent for the White alone population, 2.0 percent for the Black alone population, 14.6 percent for the American Indian and Alaska Native alone population, 1.0 percent for the Asian alone population, 9.5 percent for the Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone population, 97.1 percent for the Some other race alone population, and 31.1 percent for the Two or more races population.

<sup>21</sup> These percentages, 4.0 percent for stepchildren and 3.9 percent for biological children, differ statistically but not substantively.

Table 4.

### Percent Distribution of Selected Characteristics of Householder's Children Under 18 by Type of Relationship and Sex of Child: 2000

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf))

| Characteristic of child                                | Adopted children |       |        | Stepchildren |       |        | Biological children |       |        |
|--|------------------|-------|--------|--------------|-------|--------|---------------------|-------|--------|
|  | Total            | Male  | Female | Total        | Male  | Female | Total               | Male  | Female |
| <b>Total</b> .....                                     | 100.0            | 100.0 | 100.0  | 100.0        | 100.0 | 100.0  | 100.0               | 100.0 | 100.0  |
| <b>Age</b>   |                  |       |        |              |       |        |                     |       |        |
| Under 1 year .....                                     | 2.6              | 2.6   | 2.7    | 0.4          | 0.4   | 0.4    | 5.3                 | 5.3   | 5.3    |
| 1 year .....   | 3.5              | 3.4   | 3.7    | 0.6          | 0.7   | 0.6    | 5.3                 | 5.3   | 5.3    |
| 2 years .....  | 4.0              | 3.8   | 4.2    | 1.1          | 1.1   | 1.1    | 5.3                 | 5.3   | 5.3    |
| 3 years .....  | 4.5              | 4.3   | 4.7    | 1.8          | 1.8   | 1.8    | 5.4                 | 5.4   | 5.4    |
| 4 years .....  | 4.7              | 4.5   | 4.9    | 2.6          | 2.6   | 2.6    | 5.5                 | 5.5   | 5.5    |
| 5 years .....  | 5.2              | 5.1   | 5.3    | 3.5          | 3.5   | 3.5    | 5.6                 | 5.6   | 5.6    |
| 6 years .....  | 5.4              | 5.3   | 5.4    | 4.3          | 4.4   | 4.3    | 5.7                 | 5.7   | 5.7    |
| 7 years .....  | 5.8              | 5.9   | 5.8    | 5.3          | 5.4   | 5.2    | 5.8                 | 5.8   | 5.8    |
| 8 years .....  | 6.3              | 6.4   | 6.3    | 6.2          | 6.3   | 6.2    | 5.9                 | 5.8   | 5.9    |
| 9 years .....  | 6.7              | 6.7   | 6.7    | 7.0          | 7.1   | 7.0    | 6.0                 | 6.0   | 6.0    |
| 10 years .....   | 6.7              | 6.8   | 6.6    | 7.7          | 7.8   | 7.7    | 5.9                 | 6.0   | 5.9    |
| 11 years .....   | 6.8              | 6.9   | 6.6    | 8.0          | 7.9   | 8.0    | 5.7                 | 5.7   | 5.7    |
| 12 years .....   | 6.7              | 6.8   | 6.6    | 8.3          | 8.4   | 8.2    | 5.6                 | 5.6   | 5.6    |
| 13 years .....   | 6.6              | 6.8   | 6.5    | 8.6          | 8.5   | 8.6    | 5.6                 | 5.6   | 5.6    |
| 14 years .....   | 6.6              | 6.6   | 6.6    | 8.9          | 8.9   | 8.9    | 5.6                 | 5.6   | 5.6    |
| 15 years .....   | 6.2              | 6.2   | 6.2    | 8.8          | 8.8   | 8.9    | 5.4                 | 5.4   | 5.4    |
| 16 years .....   | 5.9              | 6.0   | 5.8    | 8.5          | 8.4   | 8.7    | 5.2                 | 5.2   | 5.2    |
| 17 years .....   | 5.7              | 5.8   | 5.5    | 8.3          | 8.3   | 8.3    | 5.1                 | 5.2   | 5.1    |
| <b>Race and Hispanic Origin</b>                        |                  |       |        |              |       |        |                     |       |        |
| White alone .....                                      | 64.2             | 65.3  | 63.2   | 75.4         | 75.5  | 75.3   | 70.9                | 71.0  | 70.7   |
| Black or African American alone .....                  | 16.0             | 16.3  | 15.8   | 12.2         | 12.1  | 12.3   | 13.2                | 13.1  | 13.4   |
| American Indian and Alaska Native alone .....          | 1.6              | 1.7   | 1.6    | 1.2          | 1.2   | 1.2    | 1.0                 | 1.0   | 1.0    |
| Asian alone .....                                      | 7.4              | 5.8   | 8.8    | 1.2          | 1.2   | 1.2    | 3.5                 | 3.5   | 3.4    |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone ..... | 0.3              | 0.3   | 0.3    | 0.1          | 0.1   | 0.1    | 0.1                 | 0.1   | 0.1    |
| Some other race alone .....                            | 5.7              | 5.7   | 5.7    | 6.2          | 6.4   | 6.1    | 7.3                 | 7.3   | 7.3    |
| Two or more races .....                                | 4.9              | 5.1   | 4.7    | 3.6          | 3.6   | 3.7    | 4.0                 | 4.0   | 4.0    |
| Hispanic or Latino (of any race) .....                 | 13.6             | 13.7  | 13.6   | 14.6         | 14.8  | 14.3   | 16.3                | 16.2  | 16.3   |
| White alone, not Hispanic or Latino .....              | 57.9             | 58.9  | 56.9   | 68.7         | 68.6  | 68.7   | 63.5                | 63.7  | 63.3   |
| <b>Nativity and English Ability</b>                    |                  |       |        |              |       |        |                     |       |        |
| Native .....   | 87.4             | 88.8  | 86.2   | 96.0         | 95.9  | 96.0   | 96.1                | 96.1  | 96.2   |
| Foreign born .....                                     | 12.6             | 11.2  | 13.8   | 4.0          | 4.1   | 4.0    | 3.9                 | 3.9   | 3.8    |
| Foreign born aged 5 to 17 ...                          | 100.0            | 100.0 | 100.0  | 100.0        | 100.0 | 100.0  | 100.0               | 100.0 | 100.0  |
| Speaks non-English language at home <sup>1</sup> ..... | 30.8             | 32.2  | 29.8   | 84.0         | 84.0  | 83.9   | 88.4                | 88.5  | 88.3   |
| Speaks English very well .....                         | 17.1             | 17.0  | 17.1   | 45.0         | 44.7  | 45.3   | 48.1                | 47.3  | 49.1   |
| <b>Disability Status<sup>1</sup></b>                   |                  |       |        |              |       |        |                     |       |        |
| Aged 5 to 17 .....                                     | 100.0            | 100.0 | 100.0  | 100.0        | 100.0 | 100.0  | 100.0               | 100.0 | 100.0  |
| At least one disability .....                          | 11.8             | 14.6  | 9.2    | 6.9          | 8.9   | 5.0    | 5.2                 | 6.5   | 3.9    |
| Sensory disability .....                               | 1.5              | 1.6   | 1.4    | 1.1          | 1.2   | 1.1    | 0.9                 | 1.0   | 0.9    |
| Physical disability .....                              | 1.5              | 1.8   | 1.3    | 0.7          | 0.8   | 0.6    | 0.8                 | 0.9   | 0.7    |
| Mental disability <sup>2</sup> .....                   | 10.4             | 13.2  | 7.8    | 5.7          | 7.6   | 3.7    | 4.0                 | 5.3   | 2.7    |
| Self-care disability .....                             | 1.6              | 1.7   | 1.5    | 1.0          | 1.1   | 0.9    | 1.0                 | 1.0   | 0.9    |
| Multiple disabilities <sup>3</sup> .....               | 2.1              | 2.5   | 1.8    | 1.1          | 1.3   | 0.9    | 1.1                 | 1.2   | 0.9    |
| <b>In Poverty</b> .....                                | 11.8             | 11.7  | 11.9   | 10.4         | 10.5  | 10.3   | 16.0                | 15.9  | 16.2   |

<sup>1</sup>These questions were asked only of people aged 5 and over.

<sup>2</sup>The question asks if the person has difficulty learning, remembering, or concentrating.

<sup>3</sup>This includes children with any combination of two or more of the disabilities listed above.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 special tabulation.

majority of adopted Asian children were girls.

While most foreign-born biological and stepchildren under age 18 (88 percent and 84 percent, respectively) spoke a language other than English at home, this was not the case for foreign-born adopted children. Thirty percent of foreign-born adopted girls and 32 percent of foreign-born adopted boys under 18 spoke a language other than English at home. Many of the foreign-born adopted children were likely adopted at a young age, before they could speak any language fluently, and since their parents often speak only English, they are more likely to do so as well. Of those who spoke a language other than English, the proportion who spoke English “very well” was over half for all children, at about 54 percent.

### **Disability and Poverty Status of Children**

The Census 2000 long form provided basic information about physical and mental limitations that children may have. For each person aged 5 and over, information was collected on hearing or vision difficulties (sensory disabilities); conditions which limited basic activities (physical disabilities); difficulty in learning, remembering, or concentrating (mental disabilities); and difficulty in getting dressed, bathing, or getting around inside the house (self-care disabilities). People answered these questions as they perceived the capabilities of the individual, regardless of whether the condition fit any medical or legal definitions of a disability.

Table 4 indicates that a higher proportion of adopted children under 18 than of biological and stepchildren under 18 had at least

one disability.<sup>22</sup> This was true for both boys (15 percent for adopted, compared with 9 percent for stepchildren and 7 percent for biological children) and girls (9 percent for adopted, compared with 5 percent of stepchildren and 4 percent for biological children). The most commonly reported disability was difficulty learning, remembering, or concentrating, which is categorized in the table under the term “mental disability.” Parents who reported this difficulty for their children were likely reporting conditions such as learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, as well as other conditions. This category may also include children who suffer the effects of maternal drug abuse, fetal alcohol syndrome, or any medical condition that affects the child’s mental capabilities.

About 3 percent of biological girls under 18 were reported to have difficulty learning, remembering, or concentrating, as were about 5 percent of biological boys under 18. The percentages for stepchildren were higher, at 4 percent for girls and about 8 percent for boys. Adopted children had the highest

<sup>22</sup> The word “disability” as used in this report refers to people who answered “yes” to Census 2000 long form question 16, part a or b, or question 17, part a or b. Question 16 reads: “Does this person have any of the following long-lasting conditions: a. Blindness, deafness, or a severe vision or hearing impairment? b. A condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting or carrying?”

The first two parts of Question 17 read: “Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition lasting 6 months or more, does this person have any difficulty in doing any of the following activities: a. Learning, remembering, or concentrating? b. Dressing, bathing, or getting around inside the home? Since most of the people identified as children of the householder were under 18, the answers to question 17, parts c and d, were not considered for this report since they asked about difficulty going outside the home alone, and difficulty working, and were not asked of people below age 16.

percentages, at 8 percent for girls and 13 percent for boys under 18.

The percentage of children under 18 who had multiple disabilities (more than one of the categories listed) ranged only from 0.9 percent for biological and stepdaughters to 2.5 percent for adopted boys. Although the categories available for analysis do not have exact medical definitions, it appears that adoptive families face significant challenges in dealing with the needs of their children.

While more adopted children under 18 had disabilities, they tended to live in families that were better off economically than their biological counterparts. Table 4 shows that about 12 percent of adopted children of the householder were in poverty, compared with 16 percent for biological children. Stepchildren under 18 recorded the lowest proportion living in poverty (10 percent).

### **Foreign-Born Adopted Children**

Some prospective adoptive parents may decide to adopt a foreign-born child if adopting a child in the United States may take longer. Adopting from a foreign country with a well-organized program often assures parents they will receive a child within a fairly dependable timeline, generally about a year. For this reason and others, the adoption of foreign-born children has increased. The number of immigrant visas issued to orphans coming to the United States for adoption increased from about 7,000 in 1990 to nearly 18,000 in 2000.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Totals from U.S. State Department Web site at: [www.travel.state.gov/orphan\\_numbers.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/orphan_numbers.html). For more information about the increase in international adoptions, see: Peter Selman. “Intercountry adoption in the new millennium; the ‘quiet migration’ revisited” *Population Research and Policy Review*, 2002, Vol. 21, pp. 205-225.

Table 5.  
**Adopted Children of the Householder by Place of Birth and Age: 2000**

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf))

| Nativity and place of birth        | Total adopted children of householder | Under 18 years |         |         |          |          | 18 years and over |          |             |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|---------|---------|----------|----------|-------------------|----------|-------------|
|                                    |                                       | Total          | Under 6 | 6 to 11 | 12 to 14 | 15 to 17 | Total             | 18 to 24 | 25 and over |
| <b>Total</b> .....                 | 2,058,915                             | 1,586,004      | 389,296 | 598,326 | 316,636  | 281,746  | 472,911           | 273,957  | 198,954     |
| Native .....                       | 1,801,123                             | 1,386,868      | 326,134 | 536,531 | 278,795  | 245,408  | 414,255           | 238,670  | 175,585     |
| Foreign born <sup>1</sup> .....    | 257,792                               | 199,136        | 63,162  | 61,795  | 37,841   | 36,338   | 58,656            | 35,287   | 23,369      |
| Europe <sup>2</sup> .....          | 42,370                                | 36,800         | 16,955  | 14,144  | 3,175    | 2,526    | 5,570             | 2,449    | 3,121       |
| Russia .....                       | 20,208                                | 19,631         | 11,825  | 6,271   | 1,002    | 533      | 577               | 459      | 118         |
| Romania .....                      | 6,329                                 | 6,183          | 2,113   | 3,426   | 468      | 176      | 146               | 111      | 35          |
| Ukraine .....                      | 2,764                                 | 2,328          | 904     | 921     | 258      | 245      | 436               | 280      | 156         |
| Asia <sup>2</sup> .....            | 122,899                               | 98,368         | 34,332  | 23,478  | 20,694   | 19,864   | 24,531            | 15,316   | 9,215       |
| China .....                        | 22,410                                | 21,053         | 17,681  | 2,425   | 514      | 433      | 1,357             | 644      | 713         |
| India .....                        | 9,579                                 | 7,793          | 1,712   | 2,437   | 2,070    | 1,574    | 1,786             | 1,294    | 492         |
| Korea .....                        | 56,825                                | 47,555         | 9,159   | 12,132  | 13,474   | 12,790   | 9,270             | 7,066    | 2,204       |
| Philippines .....                  | 9,828                                 | 6,286          | 659     | 2,053   | 1,628    | 1,946    | 3,542             | 2,125    | 1,417       |
| Vietnam .....                      | 7,377                                 | 4,291          | 2,183   | 855     | 570      | 683      | 3,086             | 1,041    | 2,045       |
| Africa .....                       | 4,307                                 | 3,111          | 549     | 1,109   | 820      | 633      | 1,196             | 741      | 455         |
| Latin America <sup>2</sup> .....   | 83,940                                | 58,166         | 10,681  | 22,152  | 12,672   | 12,661   | 25,774            | 16,186   | 9,588       |
| Central America <sup>2</sup> ..... | 47,659                                | 32,476         | 6,868   | 10,774  | 7,018    | 7,816    | 15,183            | 9,702    | 5,481       |
| Guatemala .....                    | 8,428                                 | 7,357          | 3,644   | 2,229   | 712      | 772      | 1,071             | 741      | 330         |
| Mexico .....                       | 28,090                                | 18,201         | 2,655   | 6,333   | 4,454    | 4,759    | 9,889             | 5,972    | 3,917       |
| El Salvador .....                  | 4,475                                 | 2,254          | 125     | 575     | 581      | 973      | 2,221             | 1,702    | 519         |
| South America <sup>2</sup> .....   | 25,981                                | 20,354         | 3,110   | 9,453   | 4,335    | 3,456    | 5,627             | 4,040    | 1,587       |
| Colombia .....                     | 9,656                                 | 7,054          | 1,235   | 2,685   | 1,588    | 1,546    | 2,602             | 2,073    | 529         |
| Northern America .....             | 2,797                                 | 1,576          | 113     | 630     | 351      | 482      | 1,221             | 373      | 848         |

<sup>1</sup>Foreign born includes 1,479 children born in Oceania and 0 children "born at sea," which are not shown separately.

<sup>2</sup>Includes areas not shown separately.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 special tabulation.

Because of the large sample size of Census 2000, a detailed examination of the place of birth of foreign-born adopted children can be shown in Table 5. The number of children from selected countries or regions is shown by the age of the child, which may suggest change over time in the most important birth countries.

In 2000, 13 percent of adopted children of householders of all ages were foreign born. Nearly half (48 percent) of the foreign-born adopted children were born in Asia, about one-third (33 percent) in Latin America, and about one-sixth (16 percent) in Europe. An examination of the age differences in the proportion of foreign-born adopted children who were born in Europe

suggests that their numbers may have increased in recent years. While about 10 percent of all foreign-born adopted children aged 18 and over were born in Europe, the proportion was 23 percent for children aged 6 to 11 and 27 percent for those under 6. A large component of all European-born adopted children under 6 was from Russia and Romania. Eighty-two percent of European-born adopted children under 6 in 2000 were from these two countries, compared with 69 percent of their counterparts aged 6 to 11, and only 13 percent for those 18 and over. Children under 12 in 2000 would have been born in 1989 or later, so they would have been very young when the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, or were born in the subsequent years.

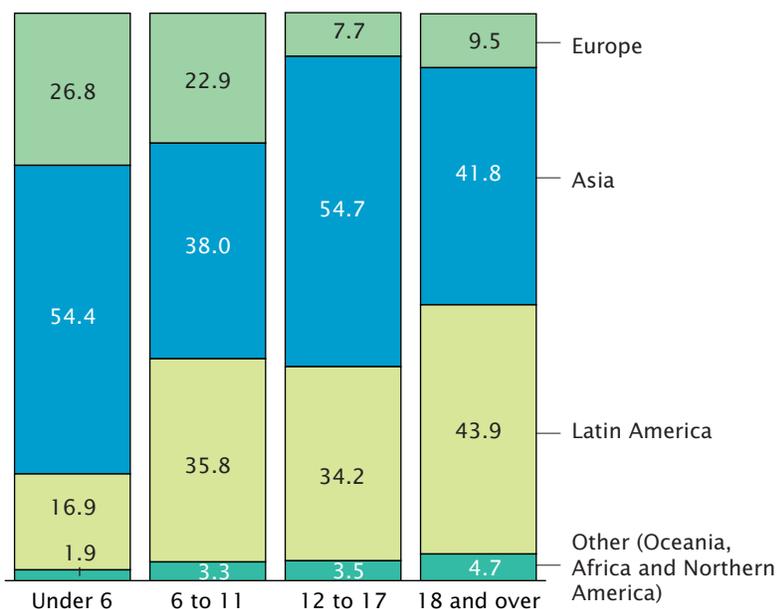
The resulting economic and social changes left large numbers of children available for adoption.<sup>24</sup>

Korea was the largest single-country source of foreign-born adopted children, providing about 57,000 children or a little over one-fifth (22 percent) of all foreign-born adopted children. This proportion is significantly lower for children under 6 (15 percent) than for children 6 to 11 (20 percent) or children 12 to 17 (35 percent). The percentage of foreign-born adopted children who were born in China was less than 3 percent of all foreign-born adopted children

<sup>24</sup> Peter Selman. "Intercountry adoption in the new millennium; the 'quiet migration' revisited" *Population Research and Policy Review*, 2002, Vol. 21, pp 205-225.

Figure 5.  
**Percent Distribution of Foreign-Born Adopted Children of the Householder by Age of Child and Place of Birth: 2000**

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf))



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 special tabulations.

aged 6 and over but 28 percent of those under 6. One consequence of enforcement of the one-child population policy in China is the abandonment of girls because of the cultural preference for sons.<sup>25</sup> Since the early 1990s, when China began to allow large numbers of these girls to be adopted by foreigners, an increasing number have been adopted by U.S. citizens. The U.S. State Department recorded only 61 immigrant visas issued to orphans coming to the United States from China in 1991, but 5,053 in 2000.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Kay Johnson, Huang Banghan, and Wang Liyao. "Infant Abandonment and Adoption in China" *Population and Development Review*, 1998, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp. 469-510.

<sup>26</sup> Totals from U.S. State Department web site at: [www.travel.state.gov/orphan\\_numbers.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/orphan_numbers.html). Also see the Families With Children from China web site at [fwcc.org/statistics.html](http://fwcc.org/statistics.html).

After Asia, Latin America was the second largest region of origin for foreign-born adopted children of the householder, numbering about 84,000 children or about one-third of all foreign-born adopted children. The largest source country in this region was Mexico, which accounted for one-third of all adopted children from Latin America. Unlike the children born in China, the Mexican children were evidently not predominantly orphans being adopted by U.S. citizens. The State Department recorded only between 50 and 200 immigrant visas issued to Mexican children per year during the 1990s.<sup>27</sup> Thus, many of these

<sup>27</sup> Totals from U.S. State Department Web site at: [www.travel.state.gov/orphan\\_numbers.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/orphan_numbers.html).

children may have been adopted informally by relatives.<sup>28</sup> Inter-marriage between non-Hispanic Whites and Hispanics is relatively common; so the adoption of stepchildren in these marriages may also help account for the large number of foreign-born adopted children born in Mexico.<sup>29</sup> About 37 percent of the foreign-born adopted children born in South America were born in Colombia, which has experienced social turmoil and war for decades.

## PROFILE OF THE HOUSEHOLDERS OF ADOPTED CHILDREN AND STEPCHILDREN

### Race and Hispanic Origin of the Householder

While the previous sections of this report have examined the characteristics of adopted and stepchildren, the following sections present estimates of the numbers of such children by the characteristics of the householder and the type of household in which the children lived. Table 6 shows that there was less variation by type of relationship in the race and Hispanic origin of the householder than there was in the race and origin of the children themselves. The percentage of children under 18 who lived with a non-Hispanic White householder was substantively the same for both adopted (71 percent) and stepchildren (72 percent), and somewhat lower for biological children (65 percent). The

<sup>28</sup> Hamm describes informal adoption as perhaps more common among Hispanics than formal adoption, stating that children may be raised by relatives. Maria Suarez Hamm. "Latino Adoption Issues," *Adoption Factbook III*. National Council for Adoption: Washington, DC. 1999, pp. 257-260.

<sup>29</sup> See Census 2000, PHC-T-19, *Hispanic Origin and Race of Coupled Households: 2000* and Tavia Simmons and Martin O'Connell. *Married-Couple and Unmarried-Partner Households: 2000*. Census 2000 Special Reports, CENSR-5. U.S. Census Bureau: Washington, DC, 2003.

Table 6.  
**Children of the Householder by Type of Relationship, Age, and Selected Characteristics of the Householder: 2000**

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf))

| Characteristic of householder  | Adopted children |          |                   | Stepchildren   |          |                   | Biological children |          |                   |
|--|------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|----------|-------------------|---------------------|----------|-------------------|
|  | Under 18 years   |          | 18 years and over | Under 18 years |          | 18 years and over | Under 18 years      |          | 18 years and over |
|  | Number           | Per-cent | Number            | Percent        | Per-cent | Number            | Number              | Per-cent | Number            |
| <b>Total</b> .....   | 1,586,004        | 100.0    | 472,911           | 3,292,301      | 100.0    | 1,092,280         | 59,773,654          | 100.0    | 17,496,957        |
| <b>Race and Hispanic Origin of Householder</b>                         |                  |          |                   |                |          |                   |                     |          |                   |
| White alone .....  | 1,198,959        | 75.6     | 352,816           | 2,536,082      | 77.0     | 822,080           | 43,017,780          | 72.0     | 11,973,603        |
| Black or African American alone .....                                  | 231,459          | 14.6     | 71,945            | 415,460        | 12.6     | 157,226           | 7,980,985           | 13.4     | 2,918,756         |
| American Indian and Alaska Native alone ..                             | 18,595           | 1.2      | 4,910             | 39,721         | 1.2      | 10,615            | 608,129             | 1.0      | 179,191           |
| Asian alone .....  | 36,153           | 2.3      | 14,936            | 33,206         | 1.0      | 17,001            | 2,181,674           | 3.6      | 832,388           |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone .....                 | 2,666            | 0.2      | 887               | 4,077          | 0.1      | 1,566             | 98,016              | 0.2      | 29,230            |
| Some other race alone .....  | 66,894           | 4.2      | 18,351            | 193,040        | 5.9      | 61,073            | 4,429,909           | 7.4      | 1,154,466         |
| Two or more races .....  | 31,278           | 2.0      | 9,066             | 70,715         | 2.1      | 22,719            | 1,457,161           | 2.4      | 409,323           |
| Hispanic or Latino (of any race) .....                                 | 149,786          | 9.4      | 45,365            | 408,548        | 12.4     | 137,523           | 9,255,817           | 15.5     | 2,574,084         |
| White alone, not Hispanic or Latino .....                              | 1,129,821        | 71.2     | 329,914           | 2,355,608      | 71.5     | 757,754           | 38,927,446          | 65.1     | 10,750,574        |
| <b>Child and Householder Race/Origin Difference</b>                    |                  |          |                   |                |          |                   |                     |          |                   |
| Child is different race than householder <sup>1</sup> .....            | 271,454          | 17.1     | 49,705            | 356,441        | 10.8     | 105,957           | 4,010,538           | 6.7      | 893,039           |
| Child is different Hispanic origin than householder <sup>2</sup> ..... | 105,097          | 6.6      | 20,227            | 217,987        | 6.6      | 59,496            | 1,384,636           | 2.3      | 241,516           |
| <b>Living Arrangement of the Householder</b>                           |                  |          |                   |                |          |                   |                     |          |                   |
| Married couple households .....  | 1,237,784        | 78.0     | 308,522           | 2,904,701      | 88.2     | 980,191           | 44,121,622          | 73.8     | 10,497,970        |
| Male householder—no spouse present .....                               | 78,698           | 5.0      | 43,156            | 314,828        | 9.6      | 79,947            | 3,066,778           | 5.1      | 1,248,035         |
| With an unmarried partner .....  | 28,641           | 1.8      | 4,172             | 264,404        | 8.0      | 36,716            | 1,335,277           | 2.2      | 128,384           |
| No unmarried partner present .....                                     | 50,057           | 3.2      | 38,984            | 50,424         | 1.5      | 43,231            | 1,731,501           | 2.9      | 1,119,651         |
| Married—spouse absent .....  | 5,393            | 0.3      | 4,208             | 10,227         | 0.3      | 7,154             | 189,624             | 0.3      | 130,739           |
| Divorced or widowed .....  | 27,798           | 1.8      | 28,198            | 19,725         | 0.6      | 27,285            | 1,027,436           | 1.7      | 844,662           |
| Separated .....  | 6,337            | 0.4      | 2,596             | 6,167          | 0.2      | 4,903             | 254,107             | 0.4      | 99,307            |
| Never married .....  | 10,529           | 0.7      | 3,982             | 14,305         | 0.4      | 3,889             | 260,334             | 0.4      | 44,943            |
| Female householder—no spouse present ..                                | 269,522          | 17.0     | 121,233           | 72,772         | 2.2      | 32,142            | 12,585,254          | 21.1     | 5,750,952         |
| With an unmarried partner .....  | 29,052           | 1.8      | 4,379             | 42,487         | 1.3      | 8,052             | 1,703,394           | 2.8      | 241,489           |
| No unmarried partner present .....                                     | 240,470          | 15.2     | 116,854           | 30,285         | 0.9      | 24,090            | 10,881,860          | 18.2     | 5,509,463         |
| Married—spouse absent .....  | 11,547           | 0.7      | 4,285             | 6,112          | 0.2      | 2,510             | 614,014             | 1.0      | 215,233           |
| Divorced or widowed .....  | 126,564          | 8.0      | 93,039            | 11,000         | 0.3      | 16,529            | 4,786,081           | 8.0      | 4,224,528         |
| Separated .....  | 33,637           | 2.1      | 9,053             | 5,249          | 0.2      | 2,688             | 1,900,471           | 3.2      | 567,930           |
| Never married .....  | 68,722           | 4.3      | 10,477            | 7,924          | 0.2      | 2,363             | 3,581,294           | 6.0      | 501,772           |
| <b>Average age of householder (in years) ....</b>                      | 43.1             | (X)      | 57.0              | 37.7           | (X)      | 48.6              | 38.0                | (X)      | 54.8              |
| <b>Average Age Difference (in years)</b>                               |                  |          |                   |                |          |                   |                     |          |                   |
| Between householder and child .....                                    | 33.7             | (X)      | 29.5              | 28.1           | (X)      | 24.8              | 26.4                | (X)      | 30.8              |
| Between spouse <sup>3</sup> of householder and child .....             | 31.7             | (X)      | 28.4              | 26.3           | (X)      | 23.1              | 24.0                | (X)      | 28.2              |
| Between partner <sup>4</sup> of householder and child ..               | 27.8             | (X)      | 24.9              | 23.0           | (X)      | 21.3              | 23.0                | (X)      | 24.0              |

X Not applicable.

<sup>1</sup>Child and householder do not report the same group, where race groups are: White alone, Black alone, American Indian and Alaska Native alone, Asian alone, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander alone, Some Other Race alone, or either the child or householder reports multiple race groups.

<sup>2</sup>Child is Hispanic and householder is not Hispanic, or vice versa.

<sup>3</sup>For households containing a spouse of householder.

<sup>4</sup>For households containing an unmarried partner of the householder.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 special tabulation.

range in the percentages of children under 18 who lived with a Black householder was relatively small: 13 percent of biological and stepchildren, compared with 15 percent of adopted children. A higher percentage of biological children (4 percent) than adopted children (2 percent) and stepchildren (1 percent) lived with an Asian householder. This difference may be due in part to the fact that Asians are less likely to divorce and so would not be as likely to remarry and have stepchildren.<sup>30</sup>

Table 6 also shows the percentage of children under 18 who differed in race or Hispanic origin from the householder. Adopted children had the highest percentages who were of different races from the householder: 17 percent for those under 18, and 11 percent for those 18 and over. About 11 percent of stepchildren under 18, and 10 percent of those 18 and over were of different races than the householder, compared with 7 percent and 5 percent of biological children under 18 years and 18 and over, respectively.<sup>31</sup>

About the same percentage of adopted and stepchildren under 18 years were Hispanic while the householder was not, or vice versa

(7 percent). The corresponding percentage for biological children was lower, 2 percent. Second and later marriages are more likely to involve spouses of different race and Hispanic origin;<sup>32</sup> so it is not surprising that a higher percentage of stepchildren than biological children were of a different race or Hispanic origin than their householder parent.

### Living Arrangements and Age of the Householder

Since Census 2000 relationship data were collected in reference to the householder, the living arrangements experienced by children can be analyzed by the presence or absence of a spouse or unmarried partner of the householder. Table 6 shows that the percentage of adopted children under 18 who lived with two married parents (78 percent) was higher than the percentage of biological children (74 percent) but lower than the percentage of stepchildren (88 percent). This contrast can be predicted because most stepchildren become stepchildren when one of their biological parents remarries.

Although Census 2000 data cannot tell us if single-parent<sup>33</sup> adoptions are increasing, data in Table 6 present the current living arrangements of single parents and whether they were formerly married, never married, or were living with an unmarried partner when the census was taken. The marital status and living arrangements of parents at the time of the census may have been different than when they adopted their

children. About 5 percent of adopted and biological children under 18 lived with a male householder who had no spouse present.<sup>34</sup> For stepchildren, this percentage was 10 percent. The stepfathers of about 84 percent of stepchildren who lived with single fathers were living with an unmarried partner. These children may be the biological children of the partners of these men. Web sites for stepfamilies frequently refer to the children of an adult's partner as his or her stepchildren.<sup>35</sup>

The percentage of children under 18 who lived with a female householder who had no spouse present varied widely, from 2 percent for stepchildren, to 17 percent for adopted children, to 21 percent for biological children. Except for the mothers of stepchildren, proportionally few of these women had an unmarried partner. Just over half of the adopted children under 18 with an unmarried mother who had no partner present had a divorced or widowed mother. Five percent of the adopted children and 6 percent of the biological children under 18 lived with a never-married mother or father who was not living with a partner.

The lower section of Table 6 shows the average age of the householder; and the age gap between the child and the householder, the spouse, or the partner of the householder. For

<sup>30</sup> Rose M. Kreider and Jason M. Fields. *Number, Timing, and Duration of Marriages and Divorces: Fall 1996*. Current Population Reports, P70-80. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2002.

<sup>31</sup> Biological children may differ in race from the householder under this classification method if their parents are of two different races, and the child is reported as being one race. Also, if the child has one parent who is White and one parent who is Black, the child may be reported as White and Black, in which case they would be included in the "Two or more races" category, and thus differ from the householder. Additionally, all those in the "Two or more races" category are automatically included in the "child is different race than householder" category.

<sup>32</sup> Belinda M. Tucker and Claudia Mitchell-Kernan. "New Trends in Black American Interracial Marriage: The Social Structural Context," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 1990, Vol. 52, pp. 209-218.

<sup>33</sup> Single as used here includes people who are never married, separated, divorced and widowed.

<sup>34</sup> The difference between these two numbers is statistically significant, but the numbers are substantively the same.

<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that less than one percent of stepchildren are living with householders who have never been married. This could have resulted from imputations of marital status at later stages in the editing process (marital status was not on the 100-percent form when relationship data were edited) or as mentioned, lack of a proper way of describing a parent-child relationship between householder and child of a current or former unmarried partner.

Table 7.  
**Children of the Householder by Type of Relationship and Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Householder: 2000**

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf))

| Characteristic of householder                       | Adopted children |         |                   | Stepchildren   |         |                   | Biological children |         |                   |
|---|------------------|---------|-------------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|---------------------|---------|-------------------|
|   | Under 18 years   |         | 18 years and over | Under 18 years |         | 18 years and over | Under 18 years      |         | 18 years and over |
|   | Number           | Percent | Number            | Number         | Percent | Number            | Number              | Percent | Number            |
| <b>Total</b> .....                                  | 1,586,004        | 100.0   | 472,911           | 3,292,301      | 100.0   | 1,092,280         | 59,773,654          | 100.0   | 17,496,957        |
| <b>Household Income in 1999</b>                     |                  |         |                   |                |         |                   |                     |         |                   |
| \$0 or less .....                                   | 14,829           | 0.9     | 1,870             | 14,825         | 0.5     | 2,597             | 662,300             | 1.1     | 90,047            |
| \$1- \$9,999 .....                                  | 71,340           | 4.5     | 12,582            | 77,572         | 2.4     | 13,348            | 3,624,677           | 6.1     | 569,049           |
| \$10,000-\$14,999 .....                             | 51,469           | 3.2     | 12,698            | 87,492         | 2.7     | 14,750            | 2,768,130           | 4.6     | 551,735           |
| \$15,000-\$24,999 .....                             | 128,769          | 8.1     | 35,311            | 290,371        | 8.8     | 50,879            | 6,366,324           | 10.7    | 1,430,426         |
| \$25,000-\$34,999 .....                             | 155,711          | 9.8     | 42,926            | 417,565        | 12.7    | 79,037            | 6,935,222           | 11.6    | 1,717,875         |
| \$35,000-\$49,999 .....                             | 253,548          | 16.0    | 70,369            | 690,279        | 21.0    | 157,027           | 10,062,178          | 16.8    | 2,747,803         |
| \$50,000-\$74,999 .....                             | 376,080          | 23.7    | 111,649           | 904,601        | 27.5    | 299,749           | 13,412,763          | 22.4    | 4,107,784         |
| \$75,000-\$99,999 .....                             | 224,247          | 14.1    | 79,119            | 426,277        | 12.9    | 219,416           | 7,254,553           | 12.1    | 2,796,532         |
| \$100,000-\$149,999 .....                           | 183,138          | 11.5    | 69,239            | 261,558        | 7.9     | 180,917           | 5,350,650           | 9.0     | 2,378,937         |
| \$150,000-\$199,999 .....                           | 56,281           | 3.5     | 19,408            | 62,852         | 1.9     | 43,691            | 1,537,731           | 2.6     | 624,813           |
| \$200,000 or more .....                             | 70,592           | 4.5     | 17,740            | 58,909         | 1.8     | 30,869            | 1,799,126           | 3.0     | 481,956           |
| Median household income <sup>1</sup> .....          | 56,138           | (X)     | 62,300            | 50,900         | (X)     | 68,182            | 48,200              | (X)     | 58,000            |
| <b>Educational Attainment of the Householder</b>    |                  |         |                   |                |         |                   |                     |         |                   |
| Less than high school .....                         | 226,646          | 14.3    | 107,058           | 568,065        | 17.3    | 225,382           | 10,741,542          | 18.0    | 4,805,826         |
| High school graduate .....                          | 359,142          | 22.6    | 120,705           | 1,132,925      | 34.4    | 346,954           | 15,808,215          | 26.4    | 5,071,387         |
| Some college .....                                  | 470,571          | 29.7    | 125,637           | 1,074,775      | 32.6    | 326,678           | 17,769,199          | 29.7    | 4,470,681         |
| Bachelor's degree .....                             | 288,435          | 18.2    | 65,255            | 354,485        | 10.8    | 124,596           | 9,630,917           | 16.1    | 1,891,050         |
| Graduate or professional school degree .....        | 241,210          | 15.2    | 54,256            | 162,051        | 4.9     | 68,670            | 5,823,781           | 9.7     | 1,258,013         |
| <b>Labor Force Participation of the Householder</b> |                  |         |                   |                |         |                   |                     |         |                   |
| In labor force .....                                | 1,337,279        | 84.3    | 305,636           | 2,955,585      | 89.8    | 883,913           | 51,366,467          | 85.9    | 11,716,118        |
| Employed .....                                      | 1,296,434        | 81.7    | 296,554           | 2,852,656      | 86.6    | 858,970           | 49,260,767          | 82.4    | 11,294,769        |
| Unemployed .....                                    | 40,845           | 2.6     | 9,082             | 102,929        | 3.1     | 24,943            | 2,105,700           | 3.5     | 421,349           |
| Not in labor force .....                            | 248,725          | 15.7    | 167,275           | 336,716        | 10.2    | 208,367           | 8,407,187           | 14.1    | 5,780,839         |
| <b>Tenure</b>                                       |                  |         |                   |                |         |                   |                     |         |                   |
| Owns home .....                                     | 1,233,692        | 77.8    | 392,679           | 2,200,742      | 66.8    | 869,716           | 39,950,491          | 66.8    | 13,521,745        |
| Rents home <sup>2</sup> .....                       | 352,312          | 22.2    | 80,232            | 1,091,559      | 33.2    | 222,564           | 19,823,163          | 33.2    | 3,975,212         |

X Not applicable.

<sup>1</sup>Median calculated from a continuous distribution using SAS version 8 statistical software.

<sup>2</sup>Includes those who occupy without cash payment.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 special tabulation.

children under 18, the householders of biological and stepchildren were, on average, 38 years old, while householders of adopted children were about 5 years older (43 years). This age difference is not surprising since the adoption process often takes time, and people who adopted in order to build their families tend to be older, especially if they adopted children after trying to have biological children. Adoptive

parents who are also the biological grandparents of the child would tend to be older as well. Previous research has found that adoptive mothers also tend to be older.<sup>36</sup>

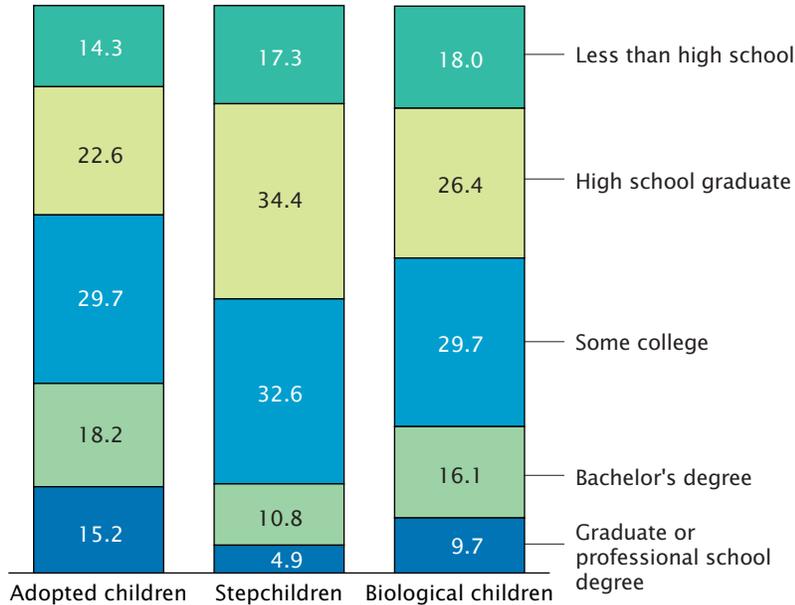
Not surprisingly, adopted children under 18 on average had a larger age difference with their householder than did biological and stepchildren.

<sup>36</sup> See Anjani Chandra, Joyce Abma, Penelope Maza, and Christine Bachrach. *Adoption, Adoption Seeking, and Relinquishment for Adoption in the United States*. Vital and Health Statistics, No. 306. National Center for Health Statistics. Hyattsville, MD, 1999; and Jeanne Moorman and Donald

Hernandez. "Married Couple Families With Step, Adopted and Biological Children," *Demography*, 1989, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 267-277; and Christine Bachrach. "Children in Families: Characteristics of Biological, Step, and Adopted Children," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 1983, Vol. 45, pp. 171-179.

Figure 6.  
**Percent of Children of the Householder Under 18 by Educational Attainment of the Householder: 2000**

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf))



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 special tabulation.

Adopted children also lived with householders who were more educated than the householders of either stepchildren or biological children (see Figure 6). Eighteen percent of adopted children under 18 lived with a householder with a bachelor's degree, compared with 16 percent of biological children and 11 percent of stepchildren. While 15 percent of adopted children under 18 lived with a householder with at least a graduate or professional school degree, just 10 percent of biological children and 5 percent of stepchildren did.

### Labor Force and Homeownership

The labor force participation rates of the householder of adopted and biological children under 18 were roughly similar: 84 percent of adopted children and 86 percent of biological children lived with a householder who was in the labor force. A slightly higher percentage of stepchildren lived with a householder who was in the labor force: 90 percent. Among children of householders in the labor force, a slightly lower percentage of adopted children (3.1 percent) lived with householders who were unemployed than stepchildren (3.5 percent) or biological children (4.1 percent).

Another indicator of socioeconomic well being is whether a family owns its home. Again, adopted children appear to be in households which were economically more advantaged than those of stepchildren and biological children, since a higher percentage lived with householders who owned rather than rented their homes. While 78 percent of adopted children under 18 years old lived with householders who owned their homes, the corresponding

### Household Income and Educational Attainment of the Householder

Table 7 profiles children by the socioeconomic characteristics of the householder. Adoptive mothers have been found to be more educated and to have higher incomes than biological mothers.<sup>37</sup> Census 2000 data support these findings and show that, for children under 18, adopted children lived in households that had higher incomes than those of either stepchildren or biological children. One-third of adopted children under 18 lived in households with incomes of \$75,000 or more, compared with 25 percent of

stepchildren and 27 percent of biological children. Eight percent of adopted children under 18 lived in households with incomes of \$150,000 or more, higher than either stepchildren (4 percent) or biological children (6 percent). Comparing median household income for these groups is another way to consider their relative affluence. While the median household income for adopted children under 18 (\$56,000) was higher than that of both biological children (\$48,000) and stepchildren (\$51,000), among children of the householder who were 18 years old and over, stepchildren had the highest household incomes, at about \$68,000, compared with \$62,000 for adopted children, and \$58,000 for biological children.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Table 8.

**Characteristics of Households Containing Children of the Householder: 2000**

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf))

| Characteristic  | Number     | Percent |
|---|------------|---------|
| <b>Total households with children of householder</b> .....    | 45,490,049 | 100.0   |
| <b>Households by type of children</b> .....                   | 45,490,049 | 100.0   |
| Adopted children only .....                                   | 816,678    | 1.8     |
| Stepchildren only .....                                       | 1,485,201  | 3.3     |
| Biological children only .....                                | 40,657,816 | 89.4    |
| Adopted and biological children .....                         | 808,432    | 1.8     |
| Adopted children and stepchildren .....                       | 29,575     | 0.1     |
| Biological children and stepchildren .....                    | 1,659,924  | 3.6     |
| Biological children, adopted children, and stepchildren ..... | 32,423     | 0.1     |
| <b>Households with adopted children</b> .....                 | 1,687,108  | 3.7     |
| One .....   | 1,383,149  | 3.0     |
| Two .....   | 247,600    | 0.5     |
| Three or more .....   | 56,359     | 0.1     |
| <b>Three generation households<sup>1</sup></b> .....          | 3,832,527  | 8.4     |
| Contains adopted children .....                               | 166,058    | 0.4     |
| Does not contain adopted children .....                       | 3,666,469  | 8.1     |
| <b>Racial composition of the household</b> .....              | 45,490,049 | 100.0   |
| All household members of same race .....                      | 41,127,347 | 90.4    |
| Contains adopted children .....                               | 1,378,981  | 3.0     |
| Does not contain adopted children .....                       | 39,748,366 | 87.4    |
| Contains members of different races <sup>2</sup> .....        | 4,362,702  | 9.6     |
| Contains adopted children .....                               | 308,127    | 0.7     |
| Does not contain adopted children .....                       | 4,054,575  | 8.9     |
| <b>Hispanic origin composition of the household</b> .....     | 45,490,049 | 100.0   |
| All household members of same origin .....                    | 43,294,398 | 95.2    |
| Contains adopted children .....                               | 1,545,441  | 3.4     |
| Does not contain adopted children .....                       | 41,748,957 | 91.8    |
| Contains members of differing origin <sup>3</sup> .....       | 2,195,651  | 4.8     |
| Contains adopted children .....                               | 141,667    | 0.3     |
| Does not contain adopted children .....                       | 2,053,984  | 4.5     |

<sup>1</sup>Householder had both a parent/parent-in-law and a child in the household, or householder had both a child and grandchild in the household.

<sup>2</sup>Not all household members report the same group, where race groups are: White alone, Black alone, American Indian and Alaska Native alone, Asian alone, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander alone, Some Other Race alone, or at least one household member reports multiple race groups.

<sup>3</sup>Household contains members who are Hispanic and members who are non-Hispanic.

Note: Households with sons and daughters of any age of the householder.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 special tabulation.

percentage for both biological and stepchildren under 18 was 67 percent. For children 18 and over, the gap between the percentage of adopted, biological, and stepchildren who lived in owned homes was smaller, but it was still 3 percentage points higher than for stepchildren and 5 percentage points higher than for biological children.

### HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION: TYPES OF CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLDS

How many households have adopted children and what combinations of children live in households? Of the 45.5 million households in 2000 that contained householders' children of any age, most (89 percent) contained biological children only; about 3 percent of these households contained stepchildren only; and another

4 percent contained both biological and stepchildren (see Table 8). Another 2 percent contained only adopted children of the householder and an additional 2 percent contained both adopted and biological children.<sup>38</sup> Only 0.1 percent of all households with children of the

<sup>38</sup> The difference between the percentage of households that contain adopted children only and the percentage of households that contain adopted and biological children is not statistically significant.

Table 9.  
**Households With Stepchildren Under 18 by Householder's Living Arrangements: 2000**

(Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf))

| Living arrangements and marital status of the householder | Sex of stepparent |         |         |         |
|---|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|
|   | Male              |         | Female  |         |
|   | Number            | Percent | Number  | Percent |
| <b>Total households with stepchildren</b> .....           | 2,281,620         | 100.0   | 147,242 | 100.0   |
| Married .....   | 2,063,999         | 90.5    | 94,674  | 64.3    |
| Not married .....   | 217,621           | 9.5     | 52,568  | 35.7    |
| Has unmarried partner .....                               | 184,965           | 8.1     | 32,293  | 21.9    |
| Never married .....                                       | 99,754            | 4.4     | 14,982  | 10.2    |
| Formerly married .....                                    | 85,211            | 3.7     | 17,311  | 11.8    |
| Possible partner <sup>1</sup> .....                       | 12,448            | 0.5     | 2,798   | 1.9     |
| Never married .....                                       | 5,534             | 0.2     | 1,165   | 0.8     |
| Formerly married .....                                    | 6,914             | 0.3     | 1,633   | 1.1     |
| No partner .....  | 20,208            | 0.9     | 17,477  | 11.9    |
| Never married .....                                       | 5,574             | 0.2     | 5,638   | 3.8     |
| Formerly married .....                                    | 14,634            | 0.6     | 11,839  | 8.0     |

<sup>1</sup>Possible partner is indicated when there is only one opposite sex unrelated unmarried adult at least 15 years old and within 15 years of the age of the householder, and there are no other adults present.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 special tabulation.

householder included biological children, adopted children, and stepchildren.

Among the 1.7 million households containing adopted children of the householder, 82 percent had just one adopted child, while 15 percent had two adopted children. Just 3 percent of these households had three or more adopted children. In addition, 166,000 households with an adopted child of the householder were three-generation households, including either a householder who had both a parent or parent-in-law and an adopted child, or a householder who had both an adopted child and a grandchild in the same household.

Table 8 shows the number of households with children of the householder that were composed of people of different races or were made up of both Hispanics and non-Hispanics. In the vast majority of these households (90 percent), all members were of the same race. Of the 1.7 million households with adopted children, about

308,000 (18 percent) contained members of different races. The adoption of foreign-born children by U.S. residents played a large role in creating these households. Of the 43.8 million households, which did not contain adopted children, 4.1 million (9 percent) included people of different race groups. Nearly all households with children of the householder were composed of either all Hispanic or all non-Hispanic members: 95 percent; 142,000 households with adopted children contained both Hispanic and non-Hispanic people, representing 8 percent of all households with adopted children.

### STEPCHILDREN: CHANGING USE OF THE TERM

Traditionally, the word "stepchild" was used to mean a child who came to be related to a person through marriage to the child's parent. However, as marriage, remarriage, and cohabitation patterns have changed, the words "stepchild" and "stepfamily" now may include some families that are

formed by cohabitation rather than marriage. For example, unmarried people may identify the biological child of their current partner as their stepchild, and may either have been previously married, or never married.<sup>39</sup> The living arrangements of householders who reported a stepchild living with them indicate usage of this more recent definition.

Table 9 shows the distribution of households with stepchildren who were under 18 years old by the sex, marital status, and living arrangements of the householder. Households are shown separately for male and female householders, since the distribution across the various types of living arrangements differs by the sex of the stepparent. Nearly all stepfathers

<sup>39</sup> See Andrew J. Cherlin and Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr. "Stepfamilies in the United States: A Reconsideration," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 1994, Vol. 20, pp. 359-381; and Larry L. Bumpass, R. Kelly Raley, and James A. Sweet. "The Changing Character of Stepfamilies: Nonmarital Childbearing" *Demography*, 1995, Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 425-436.

had a partner: 91 percent had a spouse and another 8 percent had an unmarried partner. A lower proportion of stepmothers had a partner: 64 percent had a spouse and 22 percent had an unmarried partner. Together, 217,000 stepparents who reported unmarried partners identified children under 18 in their households as stepchildren.<sup>40</sup> These children were likely the biological children of their current partner rather than the biological children of their ex-spouse. In fact, 54 percent of the stepfathers and 46 percent of the stepmothers who had an unmarried partner had never been married.

The proportions by sex of stepparents who had a possible partner in the household and were never married were similar: 44 percent of stepfathers and 42 percent of stepmothers. Lower proportions of stepparents who did not live with a partner were never married: 28 percent for stepfathers and 32 percent for stepmothers. These data reflect the changing usage of the terms “stepchild” and “stepfamily,” since they show that some householders considered themselves to be stepparents even though they were not married to the biological parent of the child in their household. Indeed, 51 percent of the currently unmarried stepfathers and 41 percent of the currently unmarried stepmothers had never been married.

<sup>40</sup> Besides the cases in which respondents reported household members as stepchildren of the householder even though the householder was unmarried, it is possible that some of these family situations were created when either the stepparent's marital status or the child's relationship to the householder was imputed. However, this affects only a small proportion of the cases. Just 7 percent of stepchildren who had a never-married householder received an imputed value for their relationship to the householder. Eleven percent of the never-married householders who reported having stepchildren had an imputed value for their marital status. So, the vast majority of households with unmarried stepparents were reported as such.

## OTHER SOURCES OF DATA

Several nationally representative surveys conducted by government agencies provide estimates of the number of adopted and stepchildren along with their families' characteristics. Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) data make it possible to identify whether a child lives with one or two parents and the type of parent—biological, step, adopted, or foster. The SIPP sample for the 1996 panel comprised about 37,000 households. For more information see the report “Living Arrangements of Children: 1996” at [www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/child/la-child.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/child/la-child.html). The National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) collected information from women aged 18 to 44 about whether they had ever adopted a child or sought to adopt a child. For more information see the NSFG Web site at [www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsfg.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsfg.htm).

The National Council for Adoption (NCF), a private nonprofit organization, has conducted several studies in which it contacted all 50 states and the District of Columbia to gain information about the number and type of adoptions within the state in 1982, 1986, 1992, and 1996. Data from the surveys, as well as an explanation of the survey methodology for the 1992 and 1996 surveys are included in the *Adoption Factbook III*, a comprehensive resource for information about adoption. See the NCF web site at [www.ncfa-usa.org](http://www.ncfa-usa.org) for more information.

A source for information on adoptions in the United States is the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), under which states are required to collect data on all adopted children placed by the state child welfare

agency and adopted children who are receiving assistance or services from the state agency directly or under contract with another agency, whether public or private. For more information, see [www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/dis/afcars](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/dis/afcars), the Web site for the Children's Bureau of the Administration for Children and Families.

A source for information on international adoptions is the U.S. State Department Web site: [www.travel.state.gov/adopt.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/adopt.html). A link on the site ([www.travel.state.gov/orphan\\_numbers.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/orphan_numbers.html)) provides counts of immigrant visas issued to orphans coming to the United States, presumably for adoption by U.S. citizens. This information is helpful in tracking the number of international adoptions by U.S. citizens, as well as the country of birth of the adopted children.

There are several comprehensive Web sites devoted to information about adoption. One site which also contains information about adoption statistics is the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (NAIC) at [www.calib.com/naic](http://www.calib.com/naic) a comprehensive resource on all aspects of adoption which is a service of the Children's Bureau of the Administration for Children and Families. The National Adoption Information Clearinghouse provides an overview of the sources of available data.

## DATA QUALITY

Census 2000 sample data provide the most comprehensive national data on adopted children available since 1975,<sup>41</sup> and include a larger sample of stepchildren than other

<sup>41</sup> The federal government collected data from states on finalized adoptions between 1944 and 1975. See Kathy Stolley, “Statistics on Adoption in the United States,” *The Future of Children*. 1993, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 1-42.

surveys as well. The ongoing Current Population Survey does not allow identification of the type of relationship between parents and children, and the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), has a sample of about 37,000 households. The National Survey of Family Growth interviews women about the attitudes they hold, plans they have made, and actions they have taken regarding adoption, but it does not provide information about adoptive families or adopted children. The National Health Interview Survey, which identifies the type of relationship between selected children and their parents, had a sample of about 39,000 households (in 2001).

The estimate of the number of adopted children under 18 years old using Census 2000 sample data is consistent with the estimate from 1996 data from the SIPP. The SIPP survey instrument collects information about each child under 18 years, regardless of whether they are a child of the householder. In the SIPP, for each child who has a parent present in the household, the respondent is asked to identify whether the parent is the biological, step, foster, or adoptive parent of the child. The number of adopted children under 18 estimated by SIPP 1996 was 1,484,000,<sup>42</sup> of which 98 percent were the children of the householder. Using the SIPP data as a guide, the Census 2000 estimate accounts for nearly all adopted children under 18. Long-form data from Census 2000 show 1,586,000 people under 18 years old who were designated as

<sup>42</sup> Jason Fields. *Living Arrangements of Children: Fall 1996*, Current Population Survey Reports, P70-74, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2001.

the adopted child of the householder.<sup>43</sup> The total number of adopted sons and daughters of the householder of any age was 2,059,000.

Regarding estimates of stepchildren, 1996 SIPP data showed 4.9 million stepchildren<sup>44</sup> under 18 were living with *at least one stepparent*, while Census 2000 long-form data showed 3.2 million children under 18 were the stepchild of the *householder*. Census 2000 data, then, may capture about two thirds of those children under 18 years old who lived with at least one stepparent. We would expect the Census 2000 estimate to be lower than that of the SIPP, since SIPP data indicate the presence and type of both of the child's parents, while Census 2000 identifies only the type of relationship of the child to the householder. Thus, when the child's stepparent is not the householder, we are unable to count this child as a stepchild. Some children who are listed in this report as biological children of the householder may also be the stepchildren of the spouse of the householder in his or her second marriage. Other children may have a stepparent who did not reside in the household in which the child was counted in Census 2000. Nationally representative surveys do not generally collect information about the relationship between household members and nonresident parents.

<sup>43</sup> All of the Census 2000 estimates in this report are made using sample data. Aggregate numbers of children of the householder and other totals may differ from the counts based on 100 percent Census 2000 data.

<sup>44</sup> Jason Fields. *Living Arrangements of Children: Fall 1996*, Current Population Survey Reports, P70-74, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2001.

## ACCURACY OF THE ESTIMATES

The data contained in this report are based on the sample of households who responded to the Census 2000 long form. Nationally, approximately 1 out of every 6 housing units was included in this sample. As a result, the sample estimates may differ somewhat from the 100-percent figures that would have been obtained if all housing units, people within those housing units, and people living in group quarters had been enumerated using the same questionnaires, instructions, enumerators, and so forth. The sample estimates also differ from the values that would have been obtained from different samples of housing units, people within those housing units, and people living in group quarters. The deviation of a sample estimate from the average of all possible samples is called the sampling error.

In addition to the variability that arises from the sampling procedures, both sample data and 100-percent data are subject to nonsampling error. Nonsampling error may be introduced during any of the various complex operations used to collect and process data. Such errors may include: not enumerating every household or every person in the population, failing to obtain all required information from the respondents, obtaining incorrect or inconsistent information, and recording information incorrectly. In addition, errors can occur during the field review of the enumerators' work, during clerical handling of the census questionnaires, or during the electronic processing of the questionnaires.

---

Nonsampling error may affect the data in two ways: (1) errors that are introduced randomly will increase the variability of the data and, therefore, should be reflected in the standard errors; and (2) errors that tend to be consistent in one direction will bias both sample and 100-percent data in that direction. For example, if respondents consistently tend to under report their incomes, then the resulting estimates of households or families by income category will tend to be understated for the higher income categories and overstated for the lower income categories. Such biases are not reflected in the standard errors.

While it is impossible to completely eliminate error from an operation as large and complex as the decennial census, the Census Bureau attempts to control the sources of such error during the data collection and processing operations. The primary sources of error and the programs instituted to control error in Census 2000 are described in detail in *Summary File 3 Technical Documentation* under Chapter 8, "Accuracy of the Data," located at [www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf).

All statements in this Census 2000 Special Report have undergone statistical testing and all comparisons are significant at the 90-percent confidence level, unless otherwise noted. The estimates in tables, maps, and other figures may vary from actual values due to sampling and nonsampling errors. As a result, estimates in one category may not be significantly different from estimates assigned to a different category. Further information on the accuracy of the data is located at [www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf). For further information on the computation and use of standard errors, contact the Decennial Statistical Studies Division at 301-763-4242.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the children's relationship to householders in the United States, visit the U.S. Census Bureau's Internet site at [www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/ms-la.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/ms-la.html). Data on children and on the relationship of various household members to the householder from Census 2000 Summary File 3 were released on a state-by-state basis during the summer of 2002. Census 2000 Summary File 3 data are available

on the Internet via [factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov) and for purchase on CD-ROM and on DVD.

For information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, sampling error, and definitions, also see [www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf) or contact our Customer Services Center at 301-763-INFO (4636).

Information on other population and housing topics is presented in the Census 2000 Briefs and Census 2000 Special Reports series, located on the U.S. Census Bureau's Web site at [www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs.html). These series present information on race, Hispanic origin, age, sex, household type, housing tenure, and other social, economic, and housing characteristics.

For more information about Census 2000, including data products, call our Customer Services Center at 301-763-INFO (4636), or e-mail [webmaster@census.gov](mailto:webmaster@census.gov).

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

*We would like to acknowledge the assistance of Kelly Holder in the preparation and development of tables in this report.*



## Viola Wertheim Bernard (1907-1998)



Viola W. Bernard, age 7

Viola Bernard was a pioneering social psychiatrist whose vision of mental health presumed fundamental links between the lives of communities and the lives of individuals. Causes such as civil rights, peace, and urban poverty, she believed, were determining factors in child and family welfare, and Bernard pursued them actively throughout her life. Her conviction that adoption was a critical mental health issue left an enduring mark on the adoption world while illustrating her theoretical loyalty to community psychiatry and her practical efforts to increase its influence.

A professional leader committed to exploring the powerful social forces that infused human behavior and relationships, Bernard believed that events within individuals, interactions between individuals, and relationships among social institutions were all interconnected, subject to scientific inquiry, and in urgent need of rational management. She was a dedicated clinician who also conducted research on the psychosocial dimensions of fertility and **infertility** and followed cases of adopted twins separated at birth in order to probe the **nature-nurture** problem. But it was her pursuit of liberal social justice that illuminated important developments in adoption history during the middle third of the twentieth century. Not least of these was the increase in numbers and kinds of children considered adoptable: **African-American** children, children with disabilities, children with **special needs**.

Bernard maintained a lengthy and entirely uncompensated relationship with Louise Wise Services, one of the country's **first specialized adoption agencies**. During her 40 years as Chief Psychiatric Consultant and her fifty years as Board Member, Bernard served as both godmother and gadfly to the agency, urging an array of practical and moral reforms.



Viola W. Bernard, at her graduation from Cornell Medical School in 1936



During World War II, Bernard housed European war refugees at her family's summer home, Sky Island Lodge, in Nyack, New York.



The result was the agency's transformation from a sectarian organization devoted to Jewish adoptions before World War II (when it was still called the Free Synagogue Child Adoption Committee) into a national innovator in services geared to children of color in the 1950s and 1960s. Along with **Justine Wise Polier** (whose mother, Louise Wise, was the agency's founder), Bernard worked to insure that the agency's staff was racially integrated and that its placements exemplified the goal of non-discrimination. She was proud that her agency established an Interracial Adoption Program in 1952 that actively recruited minority adoptive families and experimented early on with **transracial adoptions**. During the course of the **Indian Adoption Project**, Louise Wise Services placed more native children than any other private agency in the country.

Bernard's thinking about adoption was shaped by the particulars of her personal background and professional training. She was born in New York in 1907 to Jacob Wertheim, a wealthy German-Jewish businessman and philanthropist, and his second wife, Emma Stern. Like **Justine Wise Polier**, a childhood friend, Bernard benefited from educational privileges that were rare among American women at the time. After attending the Ethical Culture School in New York, she took college courses at Smith, Barnard, Johns Hopkins, and New York University. Bernard's life as a young adult was exceptional in other ways as well. She lived in an ashram, called the Clarkstown Country Club, where she practiced yoga and studied eastern philosophy long before these became fashionable. Through Clarkstown, she met and married Theos Casimir Bernard, a scholar of Tibetan Buddhism. The marriage lasted four years. Bernard never remarried or had children. She lived at 930 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan for most of her adult life, accompanied by a succession of beloved dogs.

In 1936, Bernard graduated from Cornell University Medical School. She then pursued a series of psychiatric residencies as well as training at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute.

Viola W. Bernard in 1977

She belonged to the first psychiatric generation after **Sigmund Freud** and maintained that Freud's psychodynamic theory was the source of crucial insights into **infertility**, adoptee identity, and the controversies that surrounded **confidentiality and sealed records** as well as **search and reunion**. Like her colleague and mentor, Marion Kenworthy, who helped bring psychiatric **social work** into being, Bernard was genuinely interested in how psychiatry might learn from other professions as well as what it might offer to them. Bernard's effort to make psychoanalysis more widely accessible—by establishing the country's first low-cost psychoanalytic clinic at Columbia University—was typical of her campaign to make mental health services much more widely available.

Bernard's long career was marked by professional distinction and social engagement with a wide range of causes, from civil rights and civil liberties to peace and nuclear disarmament. She was a founding member of the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, an important interest group within the American Psychiatric Association that anticipated the increasingly social and psychodynamic orientation of psychiatry during the postwar era. She was a vocal defender of Alger Hiss, target of one of the most notorious espionage cases of the early Cold War. Bernard herself was suspected of "un-American" activities and was investigated in 1951-1952 by the Federal Security Agency. Bernard signed the social science statement, "The Effects of Segregation and the Consequences of Desegregation," that influenced *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1954 landmark case that ended educational segregation in the United States. Bernard's wish to see racial barriers dismantled extended to her own profession as well. As an unofficial career counselor for minority psychiatrists, Bernard thought progress had occurred when she no longer knew every African-American psychiatrist in the United States personally. Moved by the famous exchange on war between **Sigmund Freud** and Albert Einstein, Bernard participated in the meetings of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, which were eventually awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Professional, political, and personal action were not distinct realms of activity for Bernard. In 1971-1972, she was elected Vice-President of the American Psychiatric Association on a historic opposition slate protesting the Vietnam War. In the world of child welfare advocacy, her affiliations included the Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, the Bureau of Child Guidance of the New York

City Board of Education, and the Wiltwyck School for Boys. During World War II, she allowed her summer home, in Nyack, New York, to be used by the American Friends Service Committee to house refugees from Nazi Germany. From 1956 through 1969, she directed the Division of Community and Social Psychiatry at Columbia University's medical school, where she oversaw a training program dedicated to carving out a large and multi-faceted jurisdiction for psychiatry. The administrative and organizational demands of social psychiatry, Bernard believed, were unavoidable, but they also created an occupational hazard of excessive distance between practitioners and the communities they served. It was appropriate for social psychiatrists to reform laws related to child and family mental health, for example, but legal advocacy might distract from the daily struggles of individuals unless it was consciously balanced with the ongoing practice of psychotherapy.

Known by close friends and family as "Vi," Bernard was by all accounts a very forceful personality: at once charismatic, opinionated, loyal, intimidating, admirable, and absolutely determined to achieve her goals. Her personal assistant for more than twenty-five years, Dr. Kathleen Kelly, calls her "unforgettable" and "a sparkling human being. "She was extremely exacting and demanding, and set very high standards for herself and everyone who worked with her." Dr. Perry Ottenberg, a friend and colleague of Bernard's who now serves as President of the private foundation she established, recalls that "Viola was cultured, raised in upper middle class wealth, a world traveler, yet spoiled her poodles, buried her ficus tree each winter with ceremony and served home made juices and strong alcoholic drinks."

Bernard's ideas about the relationship between personal and social psychology were as brilliant and complicated as she was. Bernard believed that everything was always related to everything else, and she dubbed her encompassing approach "ecological" before that term was popularized by environmentalists. Bernard's intellectual ambition was daunting and she wrote with great difficulty, "carving each word out of stone," according to her niece Joan Wofford. Students sometimes found it difficult to follow her elaborate, meandering train of thought. It is a testament to Bernard's formidable intellect and energy that she so often succeeded in solving problems and demanded equity so effectively on behalf of disadvantaged children and families.

Adoption epitomized the preventive psychiatry to which

Bernard devoted her entire career. Bringing children and adults together required diagnostic skill and professional collaboration, and Bernard valued both. But adoption was far more than a series of steps that resulted in the formation of new families. It was a life-altering and lifelong therapeutic process of “psychic rearrangement.” “The central social reality of adoption,” she wrote, “is its power to prevent misery and maldevelopment of children who lack families of their own.” Adoption contributed to the mental health of its participants by repairing the traumas of **infertility** and separation from parents while psychiatric insights into **illegitimacy** and clinical practices like mental tests and **home studies** insured the psychological viability of adoption.

Bernard knew that there were no guarantees in adoption. She recounted the story of eleven-year-old Sarah, whom she personally removed from a disastrous adoptive placement, as “one of the most painful tasks I have encountered,” “a psychiatric equivalent of radical surgery.” But Sarah’s case was exceptional, according to Bernard. Most placements conducted under the auspices of professional agencies were managed well. Children were observed closely, parents were selected carefully, and the result was “a remarkable human experience” that prevented a great many more problems than it caused. Bernard’s belief in the “affirmative” qualities of adoption was one reason why she objected so vigorously to the argument that adoption placed children at *greater* risk for **psychopathology**, a thesis advanced by **Marshall Schechter** and other clinicians during the 1960s. In the absence of convincing proof that adoption led to maladjustment, anything that undermined public confidence in adoption was a tragedy for public health and child welfare.

Bernard’s ideas shaped and reflected powerful trends in the adoption field, and in psychiatry, during the middle third of the twentieth century. Her career suggested how confident modern adoption reformers were in the promises of regulation, professionalization, scientific knowledge, and therapeutic approaches. “The guiding principle of modern adoption practice,” Bernard wrote, is “the application . . . of the best that is known about family living in general to the special circumstances of adoption.”

- [Viola W. Bernard, A Probable Case of Psychogenic Infertility, 1942](#)
- [How Should Agencies Handle the Rejection of Adoption Applicants? 1950](#)
- [Viola W. Bernard, "Application of Psychoanalytic Concepts to Adoption Agency Practice," 1953](#)
- [Viola W. Bernard, Can an Adopted Child Replace a Dead Child? 1961](#)
- [Viola W. Bernard, Review of a Manuscript About the Incidence of Psychiatric Problems in Adoptees, 1986](#)
- [Viola W. Bernard, "Adoption as a Model for Community/Social Child Psychiatry," 1998](#)



[Further reading by and about Viola Wertheim Bernard](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Anna Freud (1895-1982)



Anna Freud



In the Hampstead Nursery shelter during World War II, where Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham observed firsthand the damage done to children by separation and lack of attachment.

Anna Freud was the youngest child of [Sigmund Freud](#) and his wife Martha. As a young adult in 1918, she entered analysis with her father. By 1922, she had become a full-fledged member of the Vienna Psychoanalytical Society. She made her father's profession her own and child analysis her specialty. Anna Freud never married or had children. She was her father's constant companion, his colleague, and his nurse during the final years of his life. After the Nazis invaded Austria, the Freud family fled to England. Anna lived in the London house she shared with her father until her own death more than four decades later. Their home was then transformed into the Freud Museum.

Anna Freud's impact on adoption originated in her wartime studies of British children separated from their parents for their safety during the Nazi blitz. Freud and her lifelong friend, Dorothy Burlingham, observed babies and young children housed in three Hampstead Nurseries, all supported by the American philanthropy, Foster Parents' Plan for War Children. After the war ended, the nurseries were renamed the Hampstead Child Therapy Training Course and Clinic. After Anna Freud's death, they were renamed again and are now known as the Anna Freud Centre.

Freud and Burlingham summarized their war work in *Infants Without Families*. They described young children who sucked their thumbs obsessively, rocked mechanically, knocked their heads against floors and cribs, and displayed all kinds of strange and alarming behaviors in order to draw attention to themselves. According to Freud and Burlingham, what they saw proved that emotional contact was a powerful, natural drive and also that the "artificial families" institutionalized children formed could never satisfy that drive. The book reached two conclusions

increasingly evident in the general literature on development as well as in the specific field of **adoption science**. First, residential institutions were bad because they produced abnormal development in children. Second, attachment—especially to the mother—was the wellspring of healthy emotional development. Inability to attach spelled lifelong trouble.

The implication for children in need of adoption was not merely that families were better places to grow up than orphanages. That conclusion, after all, had been the force behind the longstanding movement toward **placing-out**. Freud and Burlingham began from the psychoanalytic premise that the instinctual (or “libidinal”) satisfaction necessary for all constructive human development took place within emotionally intensive parent-child relationships, or what Freudians called “object relations.” Consistent instinctual frustration—either through repeated interruptions in parenting or environments that were emotionally barren and devoid of parents—deprived children of the single most important resource they needed to grow up well: permanent emotional bonds. That was the theoretical reason why permanent placement was desirable as early in life as possible.

American Freudians, such as René Spitz, a pioneer in the field of infant psychiatry, offered even more evidence for the institutionally-caused syndrome called “hospitalism,” which he claimed laid the foundations for delinquency, **feeble-mindedness**, psychoses, and other **psychopathologies** during the first year of life. The studies Spitz conducted, and his 1943 film, “Grief: A Peril in Infancy,” bolstered the consensus that early attachment to the mother was a developmental imperative, ignored at great peril.

But so did non-Freudian research. Psychologist **Harry Harlow’s famous experiments** raising baby monkeys with “surrogate mothers” proved that secure emotional attachment to a mother-like figure was a pre-requisite for normal development in non-human animals. The babies assigned to wire mesh mothers were adequately fed, but their needs for psychological nurture and tactile comfort were ignored, and they consequently displayed behaviors resembling autism. Babies assigned to terry cloth mothers, in contrast, appeared to develop far more normally. Why? Their psyches had been nourished along with their bodies.

By midcentury, a chorus of developmentalists endorsed direct placements of infants and newborns in their adoptive homes, agreed that permanent damage could be done

during critical periods of infancy and early childhood, and championed the notion that mothering labor was primarily psychological rather than physiological. If a terry cloth surrogate offered more tactile and emotional nourishment to a baby monkey than a wire mesh surrogate, then loving adoptive parents were surely capable of bonding as completely with their children as **birth parents**. Concerns about genetic influence on how children turned out never disappeared entirely. But research that drew on both Freudian and other paradigms gravitated sharply toward nurture rather than nature by the middle of the twentieth century.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Anna Freud traveled frequently to the United States, where she lectured on children and psychoanalysis. Courses she offered at Yale Law School led to a collaboration with Joseph Goldstein and Albert Solnit that was, in many ways, the culmination of therapeutic trends in adoption and a manifesto for the party of nurture. *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child* (1973) also illustrated how profoundly the psychology, law, and practice of child placement had changed since the time when adoption was avoided at all costs and considered particularly unwise for babies and young children.

In their book, Freud and her co-authors argued that children's fundamental need for ongoing and reliable emotional ties should trump other considerations in adjudicating cases where child placement and custody decisions were in conflict. They prioritized swift and permanent decisions, for example, not only because delays were detrimental, but out of respect for children's own foreshortened sense of time. Instead of suggesting that legal and social work professionals try to create "ideal" families, they stressed humility. Courts could not manage human relationships. Science could not predict how children would turn out. Preventing harm, on the other hand, was a reasonable goal. In adoption, as well as other placement and custody cases, it was appropriate to "provide the least detrimental available alternative for safeguarding the child's growth and development."

Above all, they called for protecting the continuity of primary relationships in children's lives, a guideline that stressed the preservation of ties to the main source of nurture: the "psychological parent." This key term was defined as follows: "A psychological parent is one who, on a continuing, day-to-day basis, through interaction, companionship, interplay, and mutuality, fulfills the child's psychological needs for a parent, as well as the child's

physical needs. The psychological parent may be a biological, adoptive, foster, or common-law parent, or any other person. There is no presumption in favor of any of these after the initial assignment at birth." The psychological child-parent relationship, they concluded, was "the prototype of true human relationship." At its core was a child who was wanted as well as loved. No absent or deeply ambivalent adult could function as a psychological parent, regardless of genetic or legal relationship to the child.

The psychoanalytic tradition represented by [Sigmund Freud](#) and Anna Freud decisively shaped modern adoption. Starting with the complex relational hothouse in which human animals developed into socialized individuals, psychoanalytically inclined professionals and parents—as well as formally trained analysts—paid close attention to unconscious motivations, the role of fantasy, and the determining power of early attachment or its absence.

These left an indelible mark on adoption that is evident to this day, even though Freudian theories can be (and have been) used to prove that adoptive kinship is either psychologically suspect or perfectly equal.

## Document Excerpts

- [Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham, \*Infants Without Families\*, 1944](#)
- [Joseph Goldstein, Anna Freud, and Albert J. Solnit, \*Beyond the Best Interests of the Child\*, 1973](#)



[Further reading by and about Anna Freud](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Sophie van Senden Theis (1885-1957)



Sophie van Senden Theis (left) bringing Martha to [Jessie Taft](#) (right). Also pictured are Bobby Ueland (the adopted son of Elsa Ueland, another leading social worker) and Taft's adopted son, Everett

Sophie van Senden Theis was the first genuine adoption professional and researcher in the history of the United States. She was best known for her pioneering outcome study, *How Foster Children Turn Out*, published in 1924, in which Theis documented what had become of 910 children placed in homes by the New York State Charities Aid Association between 1898 and 1922. It was the first large-scale inquiry of its kind, became the prototype for many later outcome studies, and is still cited as a landmark in the history of adoption research.

Theis worked for the NYSCAA for forty-five years, from 1907 until her retirement in 1952, and served as the Executive Director of its Child Adoption Committee for thirty-six of those years. She graduated from Vassar College in 1907, at a moment when the professionalization of [social work](#) was imaginable but formal training in the field barely existed. From the very beginning of her career, Theis set out to communicate whatever she knew about desirable adoption procedures to her colleagues and a broader public while also warning them about the risks of unregulated family-making.

Theis was a firm believer in adoption modernization and the empirical research, specialized training, and [minimum standards](#) that went along with it. Her agency embraced mental tests as placement aids early on but Theis always cautioned against simple-minded hereditarianism. Early on in her career, she agreed that only "normal" children were qualified for family life and even suggested that families who insisted on adopting children with bad histories should sign binding agreements promising to return them if and when abnormal characteristics appeared. In general, however, Theis was less influenced by [eugenics](#) than most of her peers. She trusted that children would take

advantage of opportunities for love and belonging and expressed confidence in adoption as an institution long before most other child welfare professionals.

Along with her NYSCAA colleague Constance Goodrich, Theis published one of the first training manuals for professional child-placers in 1921. It moved step-by-step through the process, devoting chapters to the selection of children and homes, placement, supervision, and replacement. Full of details from her own agency's case records, *The Child in the Foster Home* taught by example. It offered concrete help to workers confused about when to reject applications for children, what to do about placing siblings, and how to handle the touchy issue of **telling**, a parental responsibility that adopters often resisted against the best advice of agency staff. The philosophy the manual conveyed anticipated many features of therapeutic adoption. It stressed casework, psychological diagnosis, and close attention to personality and its adjustment.

Theis never married, which was far from unusual among well-educated, reform-minded women of her day. She encouraged **single women** and female couples to adopt and personally facilitated the placement of two children with **Jessie Taft** and her partner, Virginia Robinson. This illustrated that definitions of acceptable and legitimate family were relatively more diverse and flexible early in the twentieth century than they became later on.

After her retirement from the NYSCAA, Theis became the Executive Secretary and Treasurer of the Doris Duke Foundation. She died in 1957.

## Document Excerpt

- [Sophie van Senden Theis and Constance Goodrich, \*The Child in the Foster Home\*, 1921](#)



[Further reading by and about Sophie van Senden Theis](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman

[Timeline](#)[People & Organizations](#)[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)[Topics in Adoption History](#)[Further Reading](#)[Document Archives](#)[Site Index](#)

## Ida Parker, *Fit and Proper?*, 1927

One of the largest early efforts to compile basic information about adoption patterns took place in Massachusetts, also the first state in the country to pass a modern adoption law. The [Massachusetts Adoption of Children Act of 1851](#) required judges to ensure that each and every adoption was “fit and proper,” although it did not specify exactly how judges were supposed to do this. Seven decades later, social researcher Ida Parker embarked on a study to determine if the laudable goal of [child welfare](#) was actually being achieved. She concluded that it was not. There was far too much variability and error in procedure and far too little regulation. The picture of adoption that emerged confirmed reformers’ belief that adoption was a risky procedure likely to result in tragedy, delinquency, and maladjustment. Adoptions that were neither fit nor proper were a major social problem.

The study, conducted by the Boston Council of Social Agencies, examined all adoption records in the probate courts of six counties (including the state’s most populous counties, Suffolk and Norfolk) between July 1, 1922 and December 31, 1925. It tallied the number of adoptions taking place and asked who was being adopted, by whom, and how. Parker’s [statistical findings](#) were based on 872 cases. Of these, she examined 100 in detail to discover what happened to children after legal adoption but she avoided contacting either children or parents personally, as [outcome studies](#) did. “Care has been taken to injure no one by carrying the inquiry too far,” she noted, indicating how sensitive adoption was at this time and also how unreliable adoptive parents were about [telling](#) their children.

What did the study find? Parker estimated that approximately 1000 adoptions were granted in Massachusetts annually. A majority involved [illegitimate](#) babies from families who were reported to have very bad reputations and long histories of mental deficiency and criminality. Adoptions typically occurred when children were young: the majority were under five and almost 19 percent were less than one. Most were arranged by birth mothers with the help of doctors, midwives, or newspaper advertisements rather than qualified social agencies. Birth fathers were generally absent and consented to adoption in only a handful of cases. Many more children were adopted by strangers than by natal relatives.

Without the safeguards of expert investigations and mental tests, these adoptions were **eugenic** nightmares. "This is not the human stock which people contemplating adoption desire but many times, though by no means always, it is what they secure. . . Normal families of good stock seldom give away their children even in the face of poverty, death, or other adversity." According to Parker, the adults involved in adoption were often as unfit as the children. This fact made it even more urgent for courts to have new methods of "sifting the wheat from the chaff."

Like other Progressive reformers, Ida Parker was convinced that empirical field studies would support the case for **minimum standards** such as mandatory investigations and post-placement probationary periods. "The facts show that adoption may bring tragedy or great happiness to child and to adoptive family. Properly safe-guarded adoption may be a social asset as well as a social expedient. How much longer must helpless children of Massachusetts wait for their State to extend that measure of protection against unsuitable adoption which they so sorely need?"

## Document Excerpt

- Ida Parker, *Fit and Proper?*, 1927

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Helen Lucile Pearson, "Child Adoption in Indiana," 1925

In Indianapolis in 1917, Helen Pearson intervened to set aside an adoption in which an irresponsible husband had gotten rid of his wife and sick baby, but kept an older child by violently coercing his wife into surrendering the older child to him for adoption. All that was required was for Pearson to provide the judge with the facts of the case. This experience convinced Pearson that children and families desperately needed safeguards and **minimum standards** in adoption. Her study of the Indiana adoption law was dedicated to eradicating "promiscuous" placements and introducing "proper systematic supervision of this transaction which is so serious to human lives." Hers was a typical **field study**. It equated research with reform.

Pearson found that the state of Indiana did not take adoption regulation seriously and this placed children and adults at risk. Investigations were not mandated. Probationary periods of six months to one year were not required. Adoptions arranged through advertising were not prohibited. And the state's inheritance laws, which allowed adoptees to inherit from both natural and adoptive parents, were confusing. Bringing Indiana's law into conformity with the most progressive adoption laws in the country was urgently needed in order to protect the state's children.

Like other **field studies**, this one offered county-by-county **statistics** that clarified for the first time the numbers of adoptions taking place and shed some light on who was involved and how they were arranged. By analyzing all 636 adoptions finalized in the state during 1923, Pearson revealed that almost half of all children were placed privately, at very young ages, with strangers by unqualified persons. These adoptions took place quickly, with little, if any, exchange of information, and entirely lacked the investigatory and supervisory oversight that trained social workers brought to the adoption process. According to Pearson, most of these placements were full of mistakes that would lead to failure and tragedy.

Pearson supplemented her quantitative data with cases she trusted to illustrate that insufficient public regulation was responsible for faulty adoptions. "Billy" was the second **illegitimate** child of a feeble-minded and institutionalized mother, adopted by a couple who knew nothing at all of

his background. Three-month-old "Dorothy" was easily adopted by a prostitute and raised in a brothel. At fifteen, "Thelma's" adoption amounted to nothing more than labor exploitation. In none of these cases had Indiana's judges or courts objected.

"Can we not admit that the conditions brought out by this study need attention by the state? If the life of one child or that of one parent, natural or adoptive, is ruined through the state's lack of foresight, the matter is worthy of attention."

## Document Excerpt

- Helen Lucile Pearson, "Child Adoption in Indiana," 1925

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Catherine S. Amatruda and Joseph V. Baldwin, "Current Adoption Practices," 1951

Were the outcomes of professionally arranged adoptions better than the outcomes of independent adoptions? This was one of the most widely cited comparative studies claiming to show that they were. It was conducted by two physicians, Catherine Amatruda (a Yale colleague of [Arnold Gesell's](#)) and Joseph Baldwin, after the passage in 1943 of a Connecticut law requiring that all adoptions be investigated by a social agency. Mandatory inquiries of this kind were examples of the [minimum standards](#) that reformers had been advocating for decades, although this particular statute was considered inadequate because it did not require that investigations occur before children were placed.

The study compared 100 independently-placed babies with 100 babies whose adoptions had been arranged by agencies. Only data gathered at the time of placement was used, which meant that this research did not technically qualify as outcome research at all. There were both practical and ideological reasons for this. The researchers may have believed that it was too soon to follow up on outcomes since only a few years had passed. But they also assumed that adoptions judged "good" at the time of placement would necessary prove "good" later on. This ignored two key issues that later studies explored: reliability and validity. Research on reliability asked whether a meaningful consensus existed about the characteristics of "good" (or "bad") placements. Research on validity tested whether initial placement decisions, reliable or not, accurately predicted outcomes measured later on.

Amatruda and Baldwin found that each group of 100 adoptions contained roughly the same proportion of "good" and "bad" babies and families. Good children were identified on the basis of normal developmental and mental testing, and so were babies categorized as "poor adoption risks," a division that exemplified the hold [eugenics](#) still had on thinking about adoption qualifications at midcentury. Good homes met "modest standards" that parents offer "a reasonable modicum of security and stability, a happy home life and a decent up-bringing for the child." Homes that did not do so—because of divorce, alcoholism, criminal records, drug addiction, or domestic violence—were categorized as "unsuitable." The ratio in each group under study was three (good) to one (bad).

Agency adoptions were not distinguished by access to better human material. What made them different—and better—was their record of matching like with like. Agency placements made mistakes in **matching** only eight percent of the time, whereas independent adoptions mismatched twenty-eight percent of the children and parents. Good children were much likelier to end up in bad homes and vice-versa when professionals were absent from the adoption process. These findings, according to Amatruda and Baldwin, were empirical proof that “social agencies do better adoption placements than does the well-intentioned or expedient laity.” The naturalness of **matching** was so self-evident that Amatruda and Baldwin never wondered whether “low quality” children might need “high quality” homes. **Matching** itself was their measure of success.

Like other research substantiating the superiority of professionally managed adoptions, the larger goal was to decrease the avoidable risks that desperate birth mothers and foolish adopters frequently took by making it harder for them to arrange unregulated, non-agency adoptions. In 1957, six years after this research was published, Connecticut became the second state in the country (after Delaware) to ban independent adoptions altogether.

## Document Excerpt

- Catherine S. Amatruda and Joseph V. Baldwin, “Current Adoption Practices,” 1951

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## David Fanshel, *Far From the Reservation*, 1972

This longitudinal study was one of the first to systematically explore the outcomes of **transracial adoptions**. Beginning in 1960, Fanshel followed 97 families that had adopted children through the **Indian Adoption Project**, more than one-quarter of all the children placed between 1958 and 1967. Researchers interviewed parents in fifteen different states at approximately one-year intervals, but made no effort to interview or assess children directly. Most of the children had been two years old or younger at the time of adoption and were not yet teenagers when the study ended. No control group of same-race adoptees or non-adopted children was used for comparison. The study provided detailed tables and statistical correlations, as all outcome studies did, and used the instrument that Helen Witmer and her colleagues had devised to measure the quality of adoptive homes in their study of independent adoptions in Florida. *Far from the Reservation* also offered a wealth of narrative detail that illuminated what these adoptions meant to the parents involved.

*Far From the Reservation* was published at a moment of racial polarization and vehement criticism of **transracial adoptions**. Its main author was David Fanshel, who was one of the most prominent child welfare researchers in the postwar decades. Although Fanshel was white, he had been one of the first to tackle the question of discrimination in adoption services in his 1957 report, *A Study in Negro Adoption*. Fifteen years later, Fanshel still believed deeply in the promise of empirical research to improve **transracial adoptions**, but the changed historical context in which he worked shaped his interpretation of research findings.

Fanshel found that factors often identified as strongly correlated with outcomes were not as noticeable in these adoptions. Age at placement, for example, had been considered crucial ever since **Sophie van Senden Theis'** 1924 study, *How Foster Children Turn Out*, showed that children placed earlier turned out much better. In Native American adoptions, the influence of age appeared weak, outweighed by other variables, the health status of the birth mother in particular. In addition, many professionals and researchers assumed that white couples committed to racial equality were the most likely to adopt non-white children and succeed as parents. *Far*

*From the Reservation* suggested that this was not the case. Parents' social attitudes—about civil rights, politics, and religion—did not matter except negatively. Families that were more socially concerned and active had more problems with their adopted children. Why would this be the case? Fanshel had no idea.

The study's summary measure of outcomes, The Child Progress Scale, showed that 78 percent of all the adoptees were adequately or excellently adjusted. Only one in ten children had problems that raised serious doubts about their future well-being. This was very good news. It indicated that transracial adoptions could be arranged on a solid foundation of objective knowledge that they would turn out well rather than a subjective hope that they might. The study reassured its audience that transracial placements posed little risk to the physical or emotional well-being of individual children and Fanshel agreed that these adoptions had "saved many of these children from lives of utter ruination."

Yet he did not equate evidence of good outcomes with endorsement of **transracial adoptions**. It was a mistake to consider the lives of Native American children one at a time, apart from the future of their tribes, Fanshel wrote. "It seems clear that the fate of most Indian children is tied to the struggle of Indian people in the United States for survival and social justice. Their ultimate salvation rests upon the success of that struggle. . . . It is my belief that only the Indian people have the right to determine whether their children can be placed in white homes. . . . Even with the benign outcomes reported here, it may be that Indian leaders would rather see their children share the fate of their fellow Indians than lose them in the white world. It is for the Indian people to decide."

Studies that documented very good outcomes empirically were still not answers some of the most basic questions. Were **transracial adoptions** wise? Were they right? Who had the right to decide?

## Document Excerpt

- *David Fanshel, Far From the Reservation, 1972*

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)



Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Benson Jaffee and David Fanshel, *How They Fared in Adoption, 1970*

This [outcome study](#), conducted during the 1960s, followed up on 100 adoptions arranged by four New York agencies decades earlier, between 1931 and 1940. The study is interesting not only because it surveyed very long-term outcomes, but because thinking about adoption had changed so much in the intervening period. For example, the researchers were preoccupied with factors such as [infertility](#) and the unique struggles that adopters faced in feeling entitled to their children. This understandably incorporated the emphasis on difference that was featured in recent works of adoption theory, like *Shared Fate*, and in therapeutic perspectives on adoption that reached their peak after midcentury. Yet when the adoptions studied here were initially arranged, during the 1930s, [infertility](#) and its psychological consequences had been minor considerations, if they had been considerations at all.

Jaffee and Fanshel nevertheless set out to explore and measure adults' "ability to undertake parental role obligations without neurotic conflict." They hypothesized that attitudes toward child-rearing were a sensitive barometer of parental psychology and would be strongly correlated with outcomes. Stricter parents (who resorted to spanking, for instance, and rarely left their children alone) were less able to handle separation. This illustrated that they had not overcome the handicaps of adoptive parenthood. On the other hand, parents who took more risks and allowed their children more freedom (by hiring more babysitters, for instance) had vanquished "the psychological insult" of [infertility](#). They had achieved authentic parenthood.

Contrary to their hypothesis, the data that Fanshel and Jaffee gathered suggested that the degree of strictness had little to do with adoption outcomes. Money rather than psychology determined the extent of substitute care. The study utilized extensive tape-recorded interviews that were then coded and manipulated electronically. The researchers also examined original case records and devised an instrument that interviewers used to evaluate parents' overall feelings about adoption and [infertility](#). The study focused on school performance, quality of past and present child-parent relationships, health, vocational history, heterosexual

adjustment, and parental satisfaction. Outcomes were summarized, an Overall Adjustment Score was calculated, and the 100 adoptees were divided into three groups: "low-problem," "middle-range," and "high-problem."

The researchers assumed that difference in adoption made all the difference, so it astonished them that most of the parents they interviewed (73 percent) insisted that the problems they had encountered had nothing to do with adoption. Even parents of "high-problem" children were unlikely to blame adoption itself for whatever had gone wrong.

There were other surprises too. Age at placement, which had declined steadily during the previous four decades because of studies like *How Foster Children Turn Out* and adopters' demand for babies, did not influence outcomes as the researchers expected. In fact, "high-problem" children in the sample had been placed younger than "low-problem" children.

Jaffee and Fanshel were also perplexed to discover that **telling** did not emerge as a significant variable (Marshall Schechter's "**Observations on Adopted Children**" predicted that it would.) While the vast majority of parents had told the children about their adoptive status, they varied widely in when they told, how they told, and how often (if ever) they returned to the topic. Few parents had given children full and honest information about **illegitimacy**, for example, and many deliberately withheld embarrassing details. Seven tables that presented statistical correlations related to **telling** revealed that none of this mattered. Only one thing appeared to influence outcomes. Adoptees who expressed more curiosity about their natal backgrounds were more highly clustered in the "high-problem" group. This finding confirmed a view that was widespread at the time. Indifference to genealogy was a sign of success. Adoptees who gave little or no thought to the facts of their birth had turned out well.

*How They Fared in Adoption* demonstrated a paradox in the evolution of outcome studies over time. As researchers utilized more sophisticated design and statistical methodology to control for variance, they also became more reluctant to make causal claims and less confident that knowledge would translate into progress. Studies that set out to banish uncertainty from family-formation were more and more likely to conclude that little could be known for sure.

## Document Excerpt

- Benson Jaffee and David Fanshel, *How They Fared in Adoption*, 1970

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Ruth W. Lawton and J. Prentice Murphy, "A Study of Results of a Child-Placing Society," 1915

Even before [outcome studies](#) became an established research genre with the publication of *How Foster Children Turn Out*, some agencies involved in [placing-out](#) tried to follow up on their own cases. What had become of the children formerly in their care? Finding out served two important and related purposes. It would improve the practices that shaped child and family life by establishing the need for [minimum standards](#) and it would define [social work](#) as a job worthy of being designated a profession.

In this early study, the Boston Children's Aid Society tracked its own work. Dismayed by the haphazard techniques used to place children and appalled by family-making failures, the agency added a researcher, Ruth Lawton, to its staff in 1913 in hopes that empirical inquiry "might be able to establish certain standards by which we could measure our own work." She found the agency's own records distressingly thin, containing too few details to be of value. "Many of the children were taken on meagre information, often engaging us in the task of fitting round pegs into square holes, and in some cases exposing communities to great dangers from the acts of exceedingly difficult children." The first step toward [minimum standards](#) was invariably to standardize record-keeping. The point was to obtain more information and keep it more meticulously.

The agency itself was not new, having been founded in the mid-nineteenth century, but its dedication to placing children in families was only a decade old. The agency hoped that solid research would vindicate its recent commitment to family rather than orphanage care. Lawton found that by October 1913, the agency had placed a total of 129 children in a total of 498 homes, an average of almost four placements per child. A substantial number of the placements (37 percent) were supposed to be temporary, but there was a high rate of replacement for children in need of permanent homes. ("Disruption" was not a term that denoted failed adoptions until the 1970s.) After placement, supervisory visits occurred on average four or five times per year, with girls visited more frequently than boys. Supervision was inconsistent as well as infrequent. Staff turnover was high because the work was hard and salaries were low.

The Boston Children's Aid Society endorsed thorough physical examinations and mental tests for every child in need of placement. But in actual practice, only 37 physical and 4 mental exams had been administered to all 129 children prior to placement. The agency, which prided itself on being in the professional vanguard, was surprised and embarrassed by this evidence of shoddy and disappointing work. It never doubted, however, that more and better research was the key to realizing its rhetoric about **child welfare** in practice as well as in theory.

## Document Excerpt

- Ruth W. Lawton and J. Prentice Murphy, "A Study of Results of a Child-Placing Society," 1915

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Margaret A. Valk, "Adjustment of Korean-American Children in Their American Adoptive Homes," 1957

This was an early effort to track the outcomes of mixed-race [international adoptions](#) arranged under the auspices of the International Social Service, American Branch. Until the late 1950s, children born in Europe predominated in [international adoptions](#), but by 1961, 59 percent of "immigrant orphans" admitted to the United States came from Asia. Korea was by far the single most important sending country" and these adoptions were widely publicized in magazine stories about children fathered by U.S. military personnel, the activities of [Bertha and Harry Holt](#), and the debate over [proxy adoptions](#).

Unlike most [international adoptions](#) at the time, which were arranged by [proxy](#), this study documented what had happened to 93 children whose adoptions involved American agencies cooperating with the Korean government. All of the children had American fathers and were therefore considered mixed-race: 14 were "Korean-Negro," 75 were "Korean-Caucasian," and the remaining 4 children had fathers of Mexican or American Indian descent. (Children of "pure" Korean parentage were not included in this study.) In spite of the fact that these were [transracial adoptions](#), agencies tried not to violate [matching](#) any more than necessary. They placed half-white children in white homes and half-black children in black homes.

Valk's outcome information was based on progress reports provided by local agencies, letters from adoptive parents, and conversations with the social workers supervising these placements. The report included both demographic [statistics](#) and [narrative](#) detail.

Most of the adoptees had been transferred to American families from orphanages in Korea, where they had lived since infancy. More than half of the "Negro" adopters were professionals, especially teachers and ministers, as were a substantial minority (40 percent) of the "Caucasian" adopters. Most of the families had incomes described as "modest," earning \$4500-6500 annually, and half already had adopted children or children of their own. Humanitarian and religious motives for adoption were as typical as

they were striking.

Valk's description of the children's early adjustment featured sleep disturbances, eating disorders, and language problems, but these disappeared quickly, especially among children adopted at very young ages, as most had been. Children adopted at age six or older were rare, but there were a few reports about their special difficulties with physical affection, attributed to the fact that Korean children were unaccustomed to kisses and hugs from their parents. In general, even these older children made efficient transitions to American childhood. "At the present time, we can say that all indications are that these children and their adoptive parents are happy." Valk credited the involvement of professional agencies for the success of these placements and pleaded for an end to risky **proxy adoptions**, in which amateurs arranged adoptions, sight unseen.

Since almost all of the children had been living in their American adoptive homes for less than two years, it was still early to assess outcomes. The report ended by predicting that the children would probably encounter "adverse attitudes" in the future, "especially during the courtship period," and suggesting that parents who adopted Korean children would need more help negotiating adolescence than "parents of children whose national origin is not so obviously different." Concerns about the marital and reproductive destinies of all children adopted across racial and national lines were extremely common, suggesting the enduring legacy of **eugenics** in adoption history.

## Document Excerpt

- Margaret A. Valk, "Adjustment of Korean- American Children in Their American Adoptive Homes," 1957

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Helen Witmer et al, *Independent Adoptions: A Follow-Up Study, 1963*

This Florida study, co-sponsored by the state's Department of Public Welfare, the [U.S. Children's Bureau](#), and the Russell Sage Foundation, was the most ambitious of all outcome studies at midcentury. Like the widely cited Connecticut study by [Catherine Amatruda and Joseph Baldwin](#), the premise was that independent adoptions were more likely to fail than agency adoptions because they lacked professional expertise and took shortcuts around regulatory safeguards. In 1956 and 1957, researchers carefully tracked 484 independent adoptions finalized between 1944 and 1947. These represented almost one-third of all adoptions in the state during these years, at a time when agency placements were still uncommon.

Demographic data showed that the majority of Florida's independent adoptions—75 percent—occurred before children were one month of age and typically transferred [illegitimate](#) babies from young, unmarried women to older, long-married, [infertile](#) couples. This contrasted dramatically with agency policies at the time, which ruled out placements before six months as risky and unwise. The Florida study utilized original adoption records, extensive follow-up interviews with parents (mostly mothers), and a wide variety of school records and psychological test scores to measure outcomes.

Researchers wanted to know whether these adoptions improved upon nature, as they believed the law required. Were children unlucky enough to need new homes being placed in good ones?

But what exactly made a home good? Researchers argued that four factors were especially important: the marriage, the parent-child relationship, the mental health of the parents (especially the mother), and financial resources guaranteeing that children would not grow up in poverty. They used three kinds of evidence in order to measure the quality of homes and quantify outcomes: parents' self-reports, external ratings of home quality (on a 5-point grading scale from A to E), and external ratings of children's adjustment (on a 4-point scale from well adjusted to maladjusted). What they found was that parents were a lot happier with outcomes than observers who assessed their homes and their children. While 85 percent of parents expressed unqualified satisfaction, only 46 percent of homes were ranked excellent or good and only 70 percent of children were ranked well adjusted or fairly well adjusted. "The

outcome of the independent adoptions was not as good as that which the law aims to achieve," the authors concluded.

This criticism was not surprising. The superiority of professional placement was a standard theme in applied research on adoption. Much more unusual were two of the study's findings. First, the number of grossly unsuitable placements was extremely small. Second, even though up to one-third of children were placed in homes that earned poor grades of D or E, most turned out adequately or better anyway. If extremely bad adoptions rarely occurred and most poor homes did not produce bad outcomes consistently, the widely publicized view that independent adoptions were dangerous was obviously exaggerated, if not incorrect. How then would professionals persuade the public that their oversight was needed in order for **child welfare** to be protected? The authors tried to make the best of this blow to their case for regulation. "It would appear. . .that the overall picture of the homes is not as bad as some had feared, but not as good as those concerned about children think it could and should be."

Because the study suggested that non-professional adoptions posed no unusual dangers, even when children ended up in less than desirable families, the study accomplished exactly the opposite of what its authors intended. It was championed by advocates for independent adoption as proof of what they had known all along. Most adoptees turned out pretty well no matter how they were placed, or by whom.

## Document Excerpt

- Helen Witmer et al, *Independent Adoptions: A Follow-Up Study*, 1963

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Margaret Cobb, "The Mentality of Dependent Children," 1922

Margaret Cobb worked at the Yale University Clinic of Child Development, known as the "Psycho-Clinic" at the time this report was published. Her study was one of the first to use dependent, adoptable children to explore the relationship between nature, nurture, and intelligence. A summary of Cobb's work appeared in a 1923 book by [Arnold Gesell](#), *The Pre-School Child from the Standpoint of Public Hygiene and Education*. It was the first mention of adoption in Gesell's published work.

In her study, Cobb administered mental tests to 200 children referred to the Yale clinic by the Connecticut Department of Child Welfare. She also gathered as much information as possible about their family histories, early environments, and personal traits. The children, who ranged in age from four to eighteen years, resided in three separate institutions at the time of the study. Each was given a brief version of the Stanford-Binet test, which calculated I.Q. (Intelligence Quotient) by dividing each subject's "mental age" by his or her "chronological age." The point was to predict the children's educational and placement "outlooks."

Cobb's test results showed that dependent children, as a group, possessed inferior mentality. Their I.Q.s could be plotted on a curve that lagged behind a normal distribution of randomly chosen schoolchildren by about 20 points at all ages, from youngest to oldest. According to Cobb, the Connecticut children were disadvantaged by a combination of flawed heredity, chaotic early home environments, and their sometimes lengthy orphanage stays, but her capsule case histories suggested that the children's mental limitation was largely [eugenic](#) in character. They were genetically inclined to be "[feeble-minded](#)." Unlike later studies, which showed that institutional residence did positive harm to children's development, Cobb argued that institutions did not influence their intelligence but rather prevented them from becoming useful members of society.

In Gesell's rendition of Cobb's study, adoptability and educability were equated. This illustrated two things. First, many would-be adopters placed a premium on knowing something about children's future potential for schooling. Second, child-placers at the time worried about placement errors

called "under-placement" and "over-placement." (The first referred to giving bright children to dull parents. The second referred to giving dull children to bright parents.) Cobb concluded that a mere 2 percent of the sample had college potential, 7 percent could be expected to finish high school, 17 percent could do some high school work, 35 percent might benefit from vocational training after completing elementary school, 21 percent might finish the fifth or sixth grade, and 18 percent were unsuited for any kind of regular education but would benefit from special training.

**Nature-nurture studies** conducted by researchers at the Iowa Child Welfare Station in the 1930s would be the most famous to make an optimistic case for adoption by showing that early family placements literally increased children's I.Q.s. Cobb's report suggested that disappointment would result if child-placers ever lost sight of the mental limitations that were inherent in many available children. It was, Cobb noted, "a case of like breeding like."

## Document Excerpts

- [Margaret Cobb, "The Mentality of Dependent Children," 1922](#)
- [Arnold Gesell, "Pre-School Children Deprived of Parental Care," 1923](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

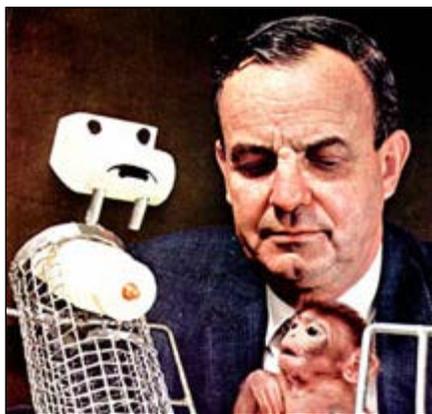
© Ellen Herman



## Harry F. Harlow, Monkey Love Experiments



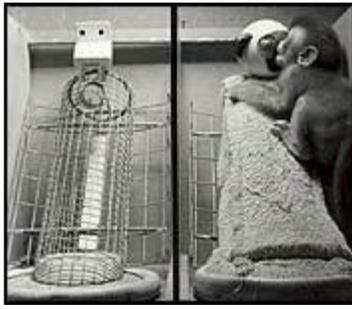
Harry Harlow with the mother surrogates he used to raise infant monkeys. The terrycloth mother is pictured above. The bare wire mother appears below.



The famous experiments that psychologist Harry Harlow conducted in the 1950s on maternal deprivation in rhesus monkeys were landmarks not only in primatology, but in the evolving science of attachment and loss. Harlow himself repeatedly compared his experimental subjects to children and press reports universally treated his findings as major statements about love and development in human beings. These monkey love experiments had powerful implications for any and all separations of mothers and infants, including adoption, as well as childrearing in general.

In his University of Wisconsin laboratory, Harlow probed the nature of love, aiming to illuminate its first causes and mechanisms in the relationships formed between infants and mothers. First, he showed that mother love was emotional rather than physiological, substantiating the adoption-friendly theory that continuity of care —“nurture”—was a far more determining factor in healthy psychological development than “nature.” Second, he showed that capacity for attachment was closely associated with critical periods in early life, after which it was difficult or impossible to compensate for the loss of initial emotional security. The critical period thesis confirmed the wisdom of placing infants with adoptive parents as shortly after birth as possible. Harlow’s work provided experimental evidence for prioritizing psychological over biological parenthood while underlining the developmental risks of adopting children beyond infancy. It normalized and pathologized adoption at the same time.

How did Harlow go about constructing his science of love? He separated infant monkeys from their mothers a few hours after birth, then arranged for the young animals to



Given a choice, infant monkeys invariably preferred surrogate mothers covered with soft terry cloth, and they spent a great deal of time cuddling with them (above), just as they would have with their real mothers (below).



be “raised” by two kinds of surrogate monkey mother machines, both equipped to dispense milk. One mother was made out of bare wire mesh. The other was a wire mother covered with soft terry cloth. Harlow’s first observation was that monkeys who had a choice of mothers spent far more time clinging to the terry cloth surrogates, even when their physical nourishment came from bottles mounted on the bare wire mothers. This suggested that infant love was no simple response to the satisfaction of physiological needs. Attachment was not primarily about hunger or thirst. It could not be reduced to nursing.

Then Harlow modified his experiment and made a second important observation. When he separated the infants into two groups and gave them no choice between the two types of mothers, all the monkeys drank equal amounts and grew physically at the same rate. But the similarities ended there. Monkeys who had soft, tactile contact with their terry cloth mothers behaved quite differently than monkeys whose mothers were made out of cold, hard wire. Harlow hypothesized that members of the first group benefitted from a psychological resource—emotional attachment—unavailable to members of the second. By providing reassurance and security to infants, cuddling kept normal development on track.

What exactly did Harlow see that convinced him emotional attachment made a decisive developmental difference? When the experimental subjects were frightened by strange, loud objects, such as teddy bears beating drums, monkeys raised by terry cloth surrogates made bodily contact with their mothers, rubbed against them, and eventually calmed down. Harlow theorized that they used their mothers as a “psychological base of operations,” allowing them to remain playful and inquisitive after the initial fright had subsided. In contrast, monkeys raised by wire mesh surrogates did not retreat to their mothers when scared. Instead, they threw themselves on the floor, clutched themselves, rocked back and forth, and screamed in terror. These activities closely resembled the behaviors of autistic and deprived children frequently observed in

institutions as well as the pathological behavior of adults confined to mental institutions, Harlow noted. The awesome power of attachment and loss over mental health and illness could hardly have been performed more dramatically.

In subsequent experiments, Harlow's monkeys proved that "better late than never" was not a slogan applicable to attachment. When Harlow placed his subjects in total isolation for the first eight months of life, denying them contact with other infants or with either type of surrogate mother, they were permanently damaged. Harlow and his colleagues repeated these experiments, subjecting infant monkeys to varied periods of motherlessness. They concluded that the impact of early maternal deprivation could be reversed in monkeys only if it had lasted less than 90 days, and estimated that the equivalent for humans was six months. After these critical periods, no amount of exposure to mothers or peers could alter the monkeys' abnormal behaviors and make up for the emotional damage that had already occurred. *When* emotional bonds were first established was the key to *whether* they could be established at all.

For experimentalists like Harlow, only developmental theories verified under controlled laboratory conditions deserved to be called scientific. Harlow was no **Freudian**. He criticized psychoanalysis for speculating on the basis of faulty memories, assuming that adult disorders necessarily originated in childhood experiences, and interpreting too literally the significance of breast-feeding. Yet Harlow's data confirmed the well known psychoanalytic emphasis on the mother-child relationship at the dawn of life, and his research reflected the repudiation of **eugenics** and the triumph of therapeutic approaches already well underway throughout the human sciences and clinical professions by midcentury.

Along with child analysts and researchers, including **Anna Freud** and René Spitz, Harry Harlow's experiments added scientific legitimacy to two powerful arguments: against institutional child care and in favor of psychological parenthood. Both suggested that the permanence associated with adoption was far superior to other arrangements when it came to safeguarding the future mental and emotional well-being of children in need of parents.

[**Estonian translation** of this page by Boris Kozlow]

## Document Excerpt

- Harry F. Harlow, "Love in Infant Monkeys," 1959



Further reading by and about Harry Harlow

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Birth Parents



These images from a 1905 *Cosmopolitan* article illustrate that “giving babies away” was both deeply shocking and, at the same time, closely associated with dramatic upward mobility. The picture below depicts several “waifs” whose clothing indicates they are waifs no longer. The baby, “found in ash-barrel,” ended up “in a millionaire’s home.” Cultural representations frequently contrasted the affluence and benevolence of adopters with the image of impoverished, desperate, and sometimes callous birth parents.



The term “birth parent” was embraced by adoption reformers in the 1970s. The term satisfied at least two important needs. It made visible the people that practices like **matching** and policies like **confidentiality and sealed records** had tried so hard to erase. But it did not simply turn the tables and erase adoptive parents, or underline their secondary status, as older **adoption terminology**, such as “natural” or “real” parent, would have done.

In practice, “birth parent” almost always meant “birth mother.” In the public imagination, birth mothers were presumed to be unmarried women whose unrestrained sexuality violated an important cultural rule: children needed and deserved married parents because legally sanctioned heterosexuality was the best and only “normal” way to make a family and socialize the next generation. Out-of-wedlock births deeply concerned Progressive-era advocates of **child welfare**, and the **U.S. Children’s Bureau** tackled the problem of **illegitimacy** with great determination. Even so, statistical analyses have shown that a majority of surrendering parents before 1940 were married. Family preservation was the favored ideology of early twentieth-century reformers, who believed that crises such as death, desertion, and chronic poverty should not force people to give their children away. Even unmarried women and their children, these professionals believed, should be kept together whenever possible.

The preference for natal kinship that made adoption a last resort was not based primarily on respect for birth parents and families. It frequently reflected **eugenic** beliefs that illegitimate children were hereditary lemons, destined to spread disease and **feeble-mindedness** to future generations, and also likely to end up in the hands of unscrupulous **baby farmers** and other black-market

adoption entrepreneurs. Before the Depression, only the amateur architects of the country's **first specialized adoption agencies** seriously advanced the idea that children born to unmarried parents would be better off adopted by strangers than remaining with their blood kin.

It was between 1940 and 1970 that adoption became a simultaneous solution for **illegitimacy** and **infertility**. With the rate of non-marital pregnancy rising among young, white, working- and middle-class women, it seemed entirely logical to transfer babies from single women and teenage girls to married couples unable to have children of their own. Out-of-wedlock births often estranged white women from their mortified families, and many wayward daughters were packed off to distant maternity homes to wait out their shameful pregnancies in silence and secrecy. Meanwhile, African-American women contended with the opposite presumption: because **illegitimacy** was perfectly acceptable in black communities, adoption was unnecessary. The result was widespread, systematic racial discrimination in child placement services. Legal adoptions by **African-Americans** were rare before 1945, although informal adoptions were not. Many black and minority children also needed permanent and fully legal families. This point was finally made by the **special needs** revolution that followed World War II.

By the 1960s, the vast majority of birth parents were unmarried, and the meaning of **illegitimacy** had changed dramatically. Early in the century, it was condemned as a moral failing. It confirmed that vulnerable women needed protection from sexually predatory men. Many unmarried women had become pregnant through no fault of their own, in other words, as in cases of domestic servants victimized by their male employers. Others were simply feeble-minded, promiscuous, or "vicious" by nature. In either case, adoption was not the answer.

This began to change with the spread of scientific interpretations of **illegitimacy** that drew upon the theories of **Sigmund Freud**. As early as the 1920s, leading psychiatrists like Marion Kenworthy argued that non-marital pregnancy was psychopathological, a symptom of profound personality problems and neuroses. By 1945, this view of unmarried mothers as mentally disturbed was widespread. At the same time it shifted the blame from men to women, it strengthened the conviction that illegitimate children were innocent. They might be rescued through adoption.

Several developments converged to give birth parents much more power in adoption after the 1960s. In 1973, *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion in the United States, and the number of healthy white infants available for placement began to drop. The sexual revolution also reduced the stigma of being a single parent, so that fewer and fewer unmarried women who decided to have children gave those children up. Finally, *Stanley v. Illinois* (1972) gave standing to birth fathers for the first time, according new legal rights to the most shadowy figure in adoption history. Inspired by the new era of adoption reform after 1970, by the mobilization among adult adoptees, and by the power of sharing their own **adoption narratives**, birth parents organized to advance their collective interests. **Concerned United Birthparents** is one example.

In spite of conservative resurgence since 1980, including right-wing movements to protect “family values” and defend heterosexual marriage, there is no going back. Birth parents are far more assertive and influential today than they were in the past, and less likely to be entirely cut off from the children to whom they gave life.

## Document Excerpts

- Katharine F. Lenroot, “Case Work with Unmarried Parents and Their Children,” 1925
- Charlotte Lowe, “Intelligence and Social Background of the Unmarried Mother,” 1927
- Kathleen d'Olier, “Case Work with the Unmarried Father,” 1937
- Maud Morlock, “Determination and Establishment of Paternity,” 1940
- The Case of Miss M, 1944-1945
- Leontine Young, “Personality Patterns in Unmarried Mothers,” 1945-1947
- *Stanley v. Illinois*, 1972



Further reading about Birth Parents

## Links

- Ann Fessler, “Everlasting”

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman

# The Adoption History Project

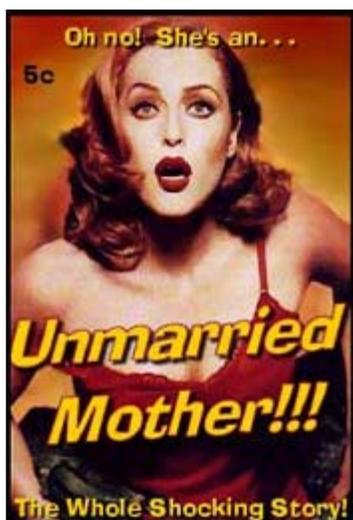


[Timeline](#)   
 [People & Organizations](#)   
 [Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)   
 [Topics in Adoption History](#)   
 [Further Reading](#)   
 [Document Archives](#)   
 [Site Index](#)

## Illegitimacy



"Out of innocent confusion... was born heartbreak!" These graphics advertised a 1949 film, "Not Wanted," directed and produced by Hollywood star Ida Lupino. The tragic story featured Sally Forrest (as the unmarried mother) and Keefe Brasselle. Compare this image to the satirical image below, which shows a character from the recent TV drama, "The X-Files." The contrast illustrates how dramatically attitudes toward illegitimacy have changed in recent decades. Before the 1960s, out-of-wedlock pregnancy was such a stigmatized subject that no one would have poked fun at it in this way. Unmarried mothers actually *were* shocking.



Illegitimacy is not a widely used word today, and young people may not even recognize it as an insult. The term designated unmarried mothers, unmarried fathers, and their unlucky children as deviants. All were called "illegitimate," and illegitimate children were sometimes also called "bastards." As a label, illegitimacy described their collective status as outcasts who were legally and socially inferior to members of legitimate families headed by married couples. Unmarried **birth parents** and children suffered penalties ranging from confinement in isolated maternity homes and dangerous **baby farms** to parental rejection and community disapproval. Before the 1960s, unmarried mothers were usually considered undeserving of the public benefits offered to impoverished widows and deserted wives. They were generally denied mothers' pensions, which virtually all states granted beginning in 1910, and Aid to Dependent Children, a federal program created by the Social Security Act of 1935. (Divorced women and non-white women were also excluded.) To be illegitimate was to be shamed and shunned.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the belief that children born out of wedlock posed significant social and public health problems was widespread. The **U.S. Children's Bureau**, for example, devoted a great deal of attention during its early years to combating infant mortality, and its research and programs in this area focused disproportionately on illegitimate children and their mothers. Why? These children were at higher risk than their legitimate counterparts for malnutrition, mediocre child care, maternal separation, and other hazards. Unmarried mothers were, by definition, unattached to male breadwinners and wage work was their only option for economic survival. The unskilled occupations in which they were concentrated, such as domestic service and wet-

nursing, ironically required them to care for others' children but made it very difficult for them to raise their own. Unmarried women and children may have been tainted with sexual immorality, but those who lived under the shadow of illegitimacy were endangered. They needed help, according to reformers and policy-makers, who insisted that alleviating the stigma associated with illegitimate birth status would do more to improve **child welfare** and family life than either contempt or condemnation.

**Eugenicists** were also dismayed by illegitimacy because they considered it a major factor in the reproduction of mental deficiency, disease, and anti-social behavior. According to their view, "**feeble-minded**" **children** were more likely to be born to unmarried women because illegitimate pregnancies were byproducts of retardation, insanity, epilepsy, or other mental defects. It is not surprising, therefore, that many native-born Americans of European heritage worried that their own decreasing fertility rates forecast "race suicide" and viewed child-bearing in other social groups with alarm. New immigrants, African-Americans, and members of impoverished rural white communities were implicated in the scandal of illegitimate births. The fact that poor and minority communities sometimes displayed greater acceptance of unmarried mothers was sometimes cited as a reason to deny children in these communities adoption services. In the case of **African-American children**, perceptions of cultural difference in regard to illegitimacy were compounded by patterns of legal segregation that impacted **child welfare** as surely as they did education, housing, employment, and voting.

The fact that illegitimate white children might be placed for adoption casually, with barely any regulation or oversight, worried child welfare reformers during the early twentieth century. Statistical studies have recently shown that a majority of **birth parents** before 1940 were married—which suggests that poverty, desertion, illness, and other family crises may have been as significant as illegitimacy in leading to surrender and placement. But many adopters preferred illegitimate babies and toddlers and went out of their way to obtain them. They believed that the dishonorable origins of illegitimate children made it less likely that natal relatives would ever come back to claim them or interfere in their lives. Such views led to the charge early in the century that adoption encouraged illegitimacy. Surrender, critics insisted, allowed unmarried men and women to avoid the consequences of sexual

indulgence: permanent responsibility for raising and supporting the children they conceived.

But the desperation of many unmarried mothers was impossible to ignore, and it inspired a curious combination of sympathy and scrutiny. Reformers who set out to professionalize **child welfare** services did not think that adoption was the answer to illegitimacy. They believed that preserving natal families was better, even when those families were incomplete, female-headed, and burdened by disgrace. They promoted state laws, such as the one passed in Maryland in 1916, which required women to nurse their babies and prohibited infant placements for a period of six months. This kind of regulation limited the choices available to unmarried mothers deliberately. The point was not only to choke off the adoption black market and reduce other risks involved in placing illegitimate infants, but to insure that the recipients of public protection were subjected to moral discipline and behavioral control. The authors of such laws believed the state's first priority was to protect the most vulnerable victims, and illegitimate babies were more vulnerable than their mothers, even when those mothers were vulnerable to sexual victimization.

Attitudes changed sharply during and after World War II. The war years brought increases in illegitimacy, including among married women whose pregnancies occurred while their husbands were stationed far away for periods exceeding nine months. After 1945, illegitimacy was reinterpreted as a sign of individual maladjustment and psychological disorder, and adoption consequently appeared a positive solution for many children. **Freudian** developmental theory contributed to this transition. Psychoanalysis reached the peak of its popularity after 1945, sexualizing childhood and adolescence while stressing the influence of unconscious sexual desires throughout the entire life course. Earlier in the century, figures such as Marion Kenworthy, **Jessie Taft**, and **Viola Bernard** had encouraged social workers, psychiatrists, and other helping professionals to consider nonmarital pregnancies as expressions of neurosis. Girls and women who had sex before or outside of marriage got pregnant on purpose, whether they knew it or not, according to the **Freudian** worldview. As a pathological and invariably unsuccessful attempt to resolve emotional problems in dysfunctional families of origin, illegitimacy became the property of psychology and science rather than morality and religion. By 1950, women could no longer rely on

sexual purity and difference from men as the foundations of their claims to virtue. It became much harder for women to claim innocence in cases of illegitimate pregnancy, and that made it much easier to view adoption as a good thing.

Demographic and cultural trends evident by midcentury also lessened resistance to separating babies from their unmarried mothers and boosted the reputation of early adoption. Unmarried mothers after midcentury were more likely to be white, middle-class adolescents, and their mortified families were determined to give these wayward daughters a second chance to find normal love and maternity through marriage. In the post-Nazi era, the nature-nurture debate swung decisively toward nurture, and one result was that eugenic anxieties about the perils of adopting illegitimate infants moved underground. After the exterminationist regime of National Socialism, which featured not only death camps but an ambitious sterilization program for the biologically unfit, talk about defective children and mothers had such abhorrent implications that it became unmentionable, if not entirely unthinkable. Instead of making them unadoptable, mental and physical disabilities gave children **special needs**. In theory, they qualified for family life even if they were still unwanted in practice.

Adoption professionals, who had worked so hard to keep natal families together just a few decades earlier, changed their minds about family preservation. Between 1940 and 1970, they acted on the belief that placing children with married, **infertile** couples would save them from doomed lives with unmarried, emotionally unstable mothers who could not offer them real love or security. **Matching** practices during this period, along with **confidentiality and sealed records**, reflected the hope that adoption might completely substitute one family for another, as if from scratch, severing forever the embarrassing ties between adoptees and their unmarried **birth parents**.

All of this changed again after the sexual revolution of the 1950s and 1960s, and after *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion in 1973. During the past three decades, the stigma associated with out-of-wedlock births—and nonmarital sexuality in general—has decreased dramatically. Teen pregnancy still causes periodic panic, but even very young mothers and their babies are no longer ridiculed as “illegitimates.”

That the meanings of illegitimacy and adoption could undergo such drastic change suggests a broader revolution

in modern American thought and culture. During the second half of the twentieth century, fixed and singular standards of conduct gave way under the pressure of social and intellectual movements that championed pluralism and diversity. In an age of civil rights, democracy required new tolerance for a wide spectrum of values. In spite of the powerful resurgence of religious fundamentalism and social conservatism in public life since the 1960s, there is no longer "one right way" to live, love, or bring families into being in the United States.

## Document Excerpts

- [Lewis Meriam to Hastings Hart, July 28, 1915](#)
- [U.S. Children's Bureau, Research on the Dangers of Illegitimacy, 1917](#)
- [Amey Eaton Watson, "The Illegitimate Family," 1918](#)
- [Katharine F. Lenroot, "Case Work with Unmarried Parents and Their Children," 1925](#)
- [Albert H. Stoneman, "Adoption of Illegitimate Children: The Peril of Ignorance," 1926](#)
- [Agnes K. Hanna, "The Interrelationship Between Illegitimacy and Adoption," 1937](#)
- [Maud Morlock, "Determination and Establishment of Paternity," 1940](#)
- [The Case of Miss M, 1944-1945](#)
- [Leontine Young, "Personality Patterns in Unmarried Mothers," 1945-1947](#)
- [How Do Adult Adoptees Feel About Illegitimacy? 1968](#)



[Further reading about Illegitimacy](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Infertility



John Rock, a pioneer in reproductive medicine, was the first scientist to fertilize human embryos *in vitro*, in a glass laboratory dish. He and Frederick Hanson also studied [the effect of adoption on fertility](#) and disputed the widespread claim that adoption might “cure” infertility by relieving psychological obstacles to conception.



Patent medicines for infertility, called “female weakness,” were used during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The rise of the [matching](#) paradigm linked infertility tightly to adoption. Because families made socially were supposed to look like families made by blood, taking in children born to others emerged as a solution for childless heterosexuals seeking to approximate, emotionally and legally, the family they could not produce themselves. Although childless couples have probably always been interested in adoption, the practice of giving preference to infertile couples evolved only in the twentieth century and was most pronounced around 1950. By then, infertility was so closely tied to adoption that applying to raise someone else’s child was considered an admission of reproductive failure. Adoption and “sterility,” as infertility was typically called before the 1960s, were practically synonymous.

There were also practical reasons for the close association between infertility and adoption. At a time when demand exceeded supply for healthy white infants, many professionals believed that limiting the pool of potential adopters to infertile couples was the fairest method of allocating children. It was not unusual for agencies to exclude from consideration couples who had or were capable of having children of their “own,” even if they had experienced multiple miscarriages or were suffering from “secondary” infertility (the inability to conceive after having one child).

In the era before reproductive technologies such as *in vitro* fertilization, infertility usually meant one of two things: permanent childlessness or adoption. In addition to being a qualification for adoptive parenthood, infertility was treated as a sensitive barometer of marital adjustment, a predictor of parental success, and a quality in need of interpretation. Because not being able to have children was considered just as abnormal as giving them away, infertility was at once a

logical feature of adoption and a source of potential problems in new families and **psychopathology** in adopted children. The first major theoretical treatment of adoption, *Shared Fate* (1964), made infertility the key to understanding adoption's social significance and cultural context.

At midcentury, much was made of the difference between "organic" infertility, which had a clear physiological explanation, and "psychogenic" infertility, which did not. The first was a tragic consequence of reproductively uncooperative bodies. The second was caused by the mind, and that made it far more sinister. Psychogenic infertility implied that men and women might be terrified of parenthood or hostile to it without knowing it. Women, in particular, were suspected of frigidity that might do serious harm to children. One of the primary goals of home studies was to explore the psychology of infertility. What did it mean to applicants for adoption? Had they tried hard to overcome it? Had their pain and anger about it been resolved? Such insistent probing surely added to the burden of grief and self-blame already felt by many infertile couples.

The belief that adoption might cure infertility by inducing pregnancy endured throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first in spite of empirical evidence to the contrary. It has been sustained by desperation, anecdote, and **Freudian** theories that blamed infertility on resistance and speculated that adoption could dissolve unconscious barriers to conception and pregnancy. The fact that little or no credible evidence existed to prove this suggests that therapeutic perspectives on adoption were—and still are—powerful.

**Special needs adoptions, African-American adoptions, single parent adoptions**, lesbian and gay adoptions, and other adoptions that expanded the borders of family belonging began gradually to untie the knot between infertility and adoption. If more kinds of children were adoptable, then more kinds of families were needed to adopt them. Demographic patterns suggest that working-class families, older adopters, and parents with children of their "own" were often more tolerant of difference and more open to "making room for one more" than childless infertile couples, who still desired healthy, white infants.

Its close association with infertility exposes a poignant feature of modern adoption. Adoption has been a last resort, a way to make families only after the normal,

preferred, method of biogenetic reproduction has been tried and failed.

## Document Excerpts

- Confidential Medical Report on Fertility Status of Prospective Adoptive Couple, early 1940s
- The "R" Family Case (Catholic Charities), 1941
- An Agency Considers Its Policies on Infertility, 1943
- Helene Deutsch, "Adoptive Mothers," 1945
- Dorothy Hutchinson, "Factors to Consider in Family Study," late 1940s
- Frederick Hanson and John Rock, "The Effect of Adoption on Fertility and Other Reproductive Functions," 1950
- Richard Frank, "What the Adoption Worker Should Know About Infertility," 1956



[Further reading about Infertility](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Archival Sources

Detailed source information for all documents and images on the site can be found on the pages where they are located. The list below acknowledges the libraries and archives from which unpublished material was drawn.

Child Welfare League of America Papers, [Social Welfare History Archives](#), University of Minnesota

Viola W. Bernard Papers, [Archives and Special Collections](#), [Augustus C. Long Library](#), [Columbia University](#)

Arnold Gesell Papers, [Library of Congress](#), [Manuscript Division](#)

Hillcrest Children's Center Papers, [Library of Congress](#), [Manuscript Division](#)

Dorothy Hutchinson Papers, [Butler Library](#), [Columbia University](#), [Rare Book and Manuscript Library](#)

International Social Service, American Branch Papers, [Social Welfare History Archives](#), University of Minnesota

National Urban League Papers, [Library of Congress](#), [Manuscript Division](#)

Justine Wise Polier Papers, [Schlesinger Library](#), Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University

Jessie Taft Papers, [Butler Library](#), [Columbia University](#), [Rare Book and Manuscript Library](#)

U.S. Children's Bureau Papers, [National Archives II](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

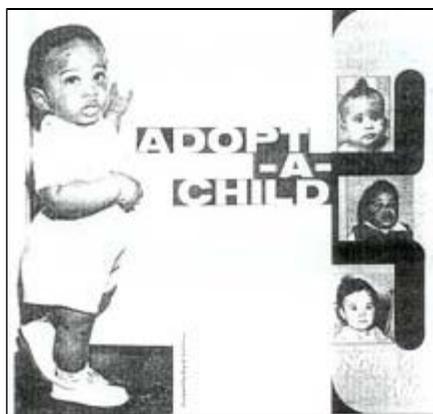
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

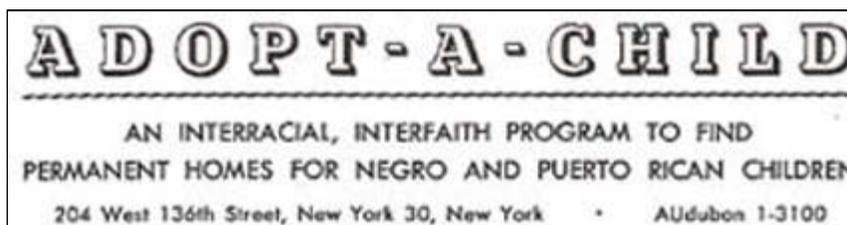
© Ellen Herman



## Adopt-A-Child, Confidential Report, December 19, 1955



From an Adopt-A-Child brochure designed to recruit African-American adoptive parents



### PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY ADOPT-A-CHILD IN ITS RELATIONSHIPS WITH AFFILIATED ADOPTION AGENCIES

#### I. Difference in definition of "Negro."

There is a sharp dichotomy between what a Negro considers to be a "Negro" and what a white person considers as "Negro."

In general, the former defines "Negro" in broad terms, not so much on physical likeness, but what the individual and his family, and the general community conceives him to be. Thus, an individual may be a biological or sociological Negro. The biological Negro possesses the general physical characteristics which are considered to be negroid, while the sociological Negro may have the physical characteristics of a Caucasian, but—because of a Negro foreparent—he/or the community identify him with the Negro race.

On the other hand, the white community initially identifies a Negro by the generally accepted physical characteristics of high color visibility, texture of hair, and features.

In most cases, when a Negro asks the question, "Will an adoption agency place a Negro child with a white family?", he is really referring to the placement of a child who is a sociological Negro. When the agency is confronted with this question, its mind-picture of a Negro child is one who is considered a "Negro" according to the general interpretation of our society.

There is another dimension to this paradox—the racial designation given to the Puerto Rican. Officially the Puerto Rican child is considered white despite recent or past acknowledgement of Negro parents or grandparents. Again, when a Negro asks, “Will an agency place a Puerto Rican or white child with a Negro family?”, he generally has in mind the Negro who is physically white or predominantly physically white.

It is common knowledge that the only legal barrier to adoption in New York State is religion. In spite of the agencies’ policy of “Blending” a child physically and emotionally with the adoptive parents, there is feeling in the Negro community that agencies apply extra-legal barriers when there is a difference in race. Therefore, a very fair Negro child, or family’s opportunities would be limited because of the agencies’ lack of awareness and understanding of the facts and the meaning of the varying attitudes toward “race” and culture.

Another aspect of the problem of “race” is related to the Negro’s dissatisfaction with his second-class status. Very often he will raise the foregoing questions to test the adoption agencies’ practice of democratic principles of fair play and equality of opportunity. Discussions in the Executive Committee meeting concerning the adoption agencies’ policy relating to the placement of Negro children with white families (and vice-versa) produced significant reactions. Some of the agency executives had strong objections to the encouragement of this practice. In their opinion, adoption was being used to foster integration. The adoption process was a very personal relationship and the personality of the child so important, that their involvement in the fight for integration was unfair to the family and to the child.

It is highly probable that these persons have confused the meaning of integration with their fear of racial amalgamation.

Although integration does not exclude amalgamation, this is a minor factor in the general concept of integration based on the Supreme Court decision. In this frame of reference, integration is conceived as the embodiment of our democratic ideals and practices.

Significantly, the fear of using “adoption to foster integration” is generally raised by a white member of the Executive Committee. A similar reaction is prevalent in the present struggle for unsegregated housing and schools. The question is asked by whites, “Would you want your daughter to marry a Negro?”

Finally, the interracial and white couples who wish to adopt racially mixed children are considered as “problems” by some of the agencies and are discouraged from pursuing adoptions. They are “encouraged

to withdraw"; a devious tactic used by the adoption agencies to eliminate a family gracefully. This will be discussed at another point.

## II. Need for greater flexibility in standards.

Although many of our adoption agencies have become more flexible in considering applicants for the adoptions of "hard to place" children, there is need for even greater flexibility of standards in light of the adverse socioeconomic circumstances faced by Negroes and Puerto Ricans. Low incomes, poor housing, overcrowding due to discrimination and segregation imposed by our society are but a few of the problems.

Thus, the working wife, families living in concentrated and congested areas, advanced age of couples applying for adoption are some of the realities which the adoption agencies must accept when considering Negro and Puerto Rican families for adoption. This does not refer to the lowering of necessary standards which relate to the health and emotional tone of the couple. It refers to the acceptance of the socio-economic realities in which people must live, and where we find them.

Source: Adopt-A-Child, Confidential Report, "Problems Encountered by Adopt-A-Child in Its Relationships With the Affiliated Adoption Agencies," December 19, 1955, National Urban League Papers, Box 1, Folder: "Adopt-A-Child, Reports," 1-3, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## An Agency Considers Its Policies on Infertility, 1943

*This excerpt, which describes one leading agency's thinking about **infertility** in the early 1940s, reveals several things. First, limiting adoption to infertile couples was closely connected to a shortage of the children in greatest demand: healthy, white infants. Second, professionals thought differently about different kinds of infertility. They contrasted childlessness due to "organic" causes with childlessness that was inexplicable, sometimes called "psychogenic," and therefore suspicious. Third, the agency concluded that couples who cooperated fully with requirements that their infertility be medically verified were more likely to suffer from "organic" infertility than couples who did not. This turned compliance with agency rules into a barometer of emotional adjustment and good parenting potential that was as important, in its own way, as infertility itself.*

Through the month Mrs. Brenner had been interpreting to new applicants that there were few babies to place in proportion to the number of families who were interested in adopting children and that we were therefore requiring medical procedure to determine whether or not families might be able to have children of their own. We were explaining to families that we were not in a position to place a baby in a home where the family might be able to have its own child. . . .

We then went on to a consideration of those situations in which applications had been withheld pending our handling of getting medical information. The first group to be considered was the thirteen families who did not get in touch with us after the interview to give us permission to go ahead in contacting their doctors. In the first of these situations, the husband was in the Army. The family had been married for three or four years and had been given assurance by their obstetrician that they could have their own child. In the second of these situations the family seemed to have the feeling that it would be possible for them to have their own child. In the third case, a woman had come in to apply and a very close friend of hers had been applying to the agency at the same time. Both this applicant and her friend had displayed a peculiar feeling of pressure that something must be done for them in particular. . . .

We then went on to discuss the ten situations in which applications had

been withheld pending medical routines and in which the families had been in touch with us so that we had procured medical information from their doctors. In the first of these situations the woman had had a series of miscarriages and the doctor indicated that there was a glandular condition and that he advised the family again[st] attempting to have a child. The next situation was one in which the family had originally written for an appointment on 10/28/42 and had not kept that appointment. They had come in again after arranging an appointment in December. In the interim period they had been able to get a baby privately. The baby had turned out to be a congenitally sick child who had to be returned to its parents. In the third of these situations, the prospective adoptive mother had never menstruated. The next family had presented a situation in which the couple had lost their own baby five years ago when he was seven months old. . . .

Our discussion of these two groupings, that is the families who had communicated with us to give us permission to get in touch with their doctors and those families who had not been in touch with us following the intake interview appointment for this purpose resulted in the following thinking: Dr. Bernard pointed out that there were certain common denominators in each group. It did seem that those families who had gone through with our procedure around procuring medical information presented situations in which there did seem to be more definite organic basis. In addition to this it seemed that they did have doctors who had pretty much let them know that they were not able to have children and had committed themselves to approving adoption for these families. They had had definite dramatic things happen to them, such as a number of abortions or the woman had not menstruated. The additional factor was that the doctor was an ally in these situations. They knew that their doctors would help them in their plan to adopt a child. Their inability to have a child was something which had already been emotionally accepted by them.

In the second group, that is those families who had not been in touch with us following the intake interview it did seem that their reasons for wanting to adopt a child were somewhat vaguer. In many of these situations the families seemed almost afraid of getting a definite answer from their doctors and did not know whether or not in approaching their doctors about adoption they would find him to be an enemy or an ally. The question developing out of this was whether this second group of families were people whose homes we would not want to use on the basis that they could not work this through for themselves. It was Mrs. Brenner's thinking that there were certain evidences of maladjustments in those families who did not get in touch with us to signify their interest in our going through with the medical routine.

We all agreed that some sifting process had been necessary in view of the large numbers of applications and our inability to use a good proportion of these homes and we discussed at this point whether this particular procedure seemed to be the most desirable one.

In thinking through the desirability of this procedure it did seem that it offered an advantage in that those people who went through with the medical procedure by and large had more organic basis for their inability to have a child and were therefore less likely to be emotionally maladjusted. They would be more maternal and could transfer their feeling to an adoptive child more easily. . . .

Source: Staff Meeting with Dr. Bernard, January 20, 1943, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 157, Folder 1, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Agency for International Development, Operation Babylift Report, 1975



*The section of this report on fatalities does not include the children or adults killed on April 4, 1975, when the first of the military transport planes involved in Operation Babylift crashed shortly after take-off from Saigon. For other views of Operation Babylift, see the text of the [New York Times ad](#) that ran on April 7, 1975, the ["Statement on the Immorality of Bringing South Vietnamese Orphans to the United States, April 4, 1975,"](#) and [Gloria Emerson, "Operation Babylift," 1975.](#)*

### **Background**

For the past several years, seven private international and U.S. adoption agencies (Holt International Children's Services—Holt; Traveler's Aid-International Social Services of America—TAISSA; Friends for All Children—FFAC; United States Catholic Conference—USCC; Friends of Children of Vietnam—FCVN; Pearl S. Buck Foundation—PBF; World Vision Relief Organization—WVRO), licensed by the Government of the Republic of Vietnam, have been arranging for the adoption of Vietnamese orphans in the U.S. While AID provided some general financial support for four of these agencies, the agencies themselves were responsible for selecting orphans qualified for adoption, obtaining unconditional releases from legal guardians, obtaining the consent of the Vietnamese Government, obtaining U.S. visas, and selecting qualified U.S. parents. State agencies and state courts must, of course, ultimately approve adoptions. From 1970 to 1974, over 1,400 adoptions of Vietnamese children in the United States had been arranged this way. . . .

Operation Babylift was initiated on April 2 in response to the emergency situation resulting from the communist military offensive in South Vietnam. Prospective adopting U.S. parents were concerned that Vietnamese orphans already selected for adoption, who might be physically endangered by active hostilities, would not be able to leave Vietnam expeditiously if normal, lengthy Vietnamese exit procedures and U.S. immigration procedures were followed. . . .

### **Orphans Processed**

Information obtained from the adoption agencies or processing centers indicates that a total of 2,547 orphans were processed under Operation Babylift. Of this total, 602 went on to other countries, leaving a total of 1,945 in the United States.

Information received from the adoption agencies brings out a number of interesting facts about the orphans processed: over 91% were under the age of eight; 57% were male and 43% female; and 20% or 451 orphans were racially mixed of which 173 (39.2% of the racially mixed) were of Black paternity. . . .

One disappointing figure is that only 34 (19.6%) of the 173 Black-fathered orphans were placed in Black homes. . . .

### **Deaths**

Of the 2,547 orphans processed under Operation Babylift, there were nine deaths; seven whose ages were known were 20 weeks of age or younger. Considering that 51% of the orphans were under two years of age and that many of the orphans were in poor physical condition, the medical services provided during Operation Babylift were very effective. . . .

### **Special Problems: Adoption Lawsuit**

On April 29, 1975, a class action suit was filed in the Federal District Court in San Francisco on behalf of Vietnamese children brought to the United States for adoption. The suit seeks to enjoin adoption proceedings until it has been ascertained either that the parents or appropriate relatives in Vietnam have consented to their adoption or that these parents or relatives cannot be found.

The Complaint alleged that several of the Vietnamese orphans brought to the United States under Operation Babylift stated they are not orphans and that they wish to return to Vietnam.

The action has been brought by Muoi McConnell, a former Vietnamese nurse, who allegedly interviewed Vietnamese children at the Presidio in San Francisco. The suit is supported by an ad hoc group called The Committee to Protect the Rights of Vietnamese Children. Spokesmen for the Committee are Thomas R. Miller, an attorney, and his wife, Tran Tuong Nhu, who is the head of an organization known as the International Children's Fund. . . .

INS and the adoption agencies should be able to establish clear orphan status for most of the children brought to the United States under their auspices. Where records have been destroyed, such as those lost in the crash of the C-5A, the process of verifying the true orphan status of certain of the children may be time-consuming. There may, of course, be other children who were not transported in haste to the United States with inadequate documentation to vouch for parental consent to their adoption or to demonstrate that they are without parents or relatives. The search initiated by the INS will seek to clarify all these cases. . . .

#### **Special Problems: Public Reactions**

Not everyone was in favor of the babylift. There were allegations at the time, often based on faulty information, that the U.S. Government was engaged in a wholesale effort to remove Vietnamese children from their culture, to save them from communist ideological influence, to satisfy the desires of Americans wishing to adopt children, and to gain sympathy in the Congress for last-ditch appropriations for military and humanitarian aid to the tottering Government of Vietnam.

None of these allegations approaches the truth. The fact is that the departure of these children from South Vietnam was the continuation of an intercountry adoption program that had been going on for some years. The movement of the children was accelerated due to the growing crisis in Vietnam. But, with negligible exceptions, the children met the criteria for intercountry adoption and virtually all of them were in some stage of processing when the decision was taken to speed up the movement. . . .

#### **Attachment A: ADOPTIONS—VIETNAM**

|                 | CY 1970-71 | CY 1972 | CY 1973 | CY 1974 |
|-----------------|------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total Adoptions | 200        | 485     | 682     | 1,362*  |
| Adopted in U.S. | 89         | 119     | 375     | 845**   |

\* Includes 1,062 adoptions completed by seven MSW-Authorized Agencies listed below; and estimated 300 completed through other than agency channels.

\*\* Includes 150 adoptions completed through other than agency channels.

#### **ORPHANS (estimated)**

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Total full or half orphans   | 1,200,000 |
| Children of fallen servicemen receiving benefits from the Ministry of War Veterans | 805,000   |
| Vietnamese children in registered orphanages                                       | 17,055    |
| Mixed children in registered orphanages*   | 945       |
| Children in non-registered orphanages or "homeless"                                | 5,000     |
| Other children living with mothers or relatives                                    | 372,000   |

\* There are an estimated 10,000-15,000 children with foreign fathers (mixed children); with the exception of 945 in orphanages, (312 of whom are black-Vietnamese) all are living with their mothers or relatives.

#### **U.S. Voluntary Agencies Authorized by the GVN/MSW to Process Intercountry Adoptions**

Friends for All Children (FFAC)

Holt International Children's Services (Holt)

Traveler's Aid-International Social Services of America (TAISSA)

Catholic Relief Services (CRS)

World Vision Relief Organization (WVRO)

Friends of Children of Vietnam (FCVN)

Pearl S. Buck Foundation (PBF)

**ADOPTIONS—VIETNAM, CALENDAR YEAR 1971-1974**

|                            |      |      |        |     |      |      |     |                      |       |
|----------------------------|------|------|--------|-----|------|------|-----|----------------------|-------|
| CY 1970-1971               |      |      |        |     |      |      |     |                      | 200*  |
| CY 1972                    |      |      |        |     |      |      |     |                      | 485*  |
| CY 1973                    | FFAC | Holt | TAISSA | CRS | WVRO | FCVN | PBF | Independent Channels | Total |
| Adopted in the U.S.        | 298  | 30   | 29     | 0   | 18   | -    | -   | UNK                  | 375   |
| Adopted in Other Countries | 285  | 0    | 14     | 0   | 8    | -    | -   | UNK                  | 307   |
| Total Adoptions            | 583  | 30   | 43     | 0   | 26   | -    | -   | UNK                  | 682   |
|                            |      |      |        |     |      |      |     |                      |       |
| CY 1974                    |      |      |        |     |      |      |     |                      |       |
| Adopted in U.S.            | 323  | 182  | 65     | 58  | 7    | 54   | 6   | 150                  | 845   |
| Adopted in Other Countries | 337  | 2    | 26     | 2   | 0    | 0    | 0   | 150                  | 517   |
| Total Adoptions            | 660  | 184  | 91     | 60  | 7    | 54   | 6   | 300                  | 1,362 |

\*No breakdown by agency available

Source: Agency for International Development, Operation Babylift Report (Emergency Movement of Vietnamese and Cambodian Orphans for Intercountry Adoption, April - June 1975), Washington, DC, pp. 1-2, 5, 6, 9-10, 11-12, 13-14. Special thanks for Bree Brown for sharing this document with me.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
 Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
 Department of History, University of Oregon  
 Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
 (541) 346-3118  
 E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
 © Ellen Herman



## Agency Philosophy and Policy Regarding the "Telling" of Adoption, 1966

*This excerpt illustrates that agencies were keenly aware of their responsibilities to help adoptive parents tell, and tell correctly, in spite of the shame that surrounded **illegitimacy**. Agency staff also understood that **psychopathology studies** made this task all the more difficult by implying that bungled or tardy telling would ruin children. One example of such a study was **Marshall D. Schechter, "Observations on Adopted Children," 1960**, which is mentioned, indirectly, in these meeting minutes from Louise Wise Services in New York.*

Dr. Bernard discussed agency philosophy and policy regarding the "telling of adoption." She indicated that one of the important things about telling of adoption is that it really should be part and parcel of the entire complex experience and the whole adoption process for parents and child even though, understandably, it is often singled out as a pivotal issue. For without question, it does tend to serve as a focal point around which many of the parents' anxieties and fears, attitudes and difficulties find expression. It is also a point to which subsequent problems and frictions in an adopted child's life are readily ascribed and from which a desire to find out more about his natural parents may arise. This may frighten the parents with regard to the success of the adoption.

Dr. Bernard proceeded to discuss some of the current articles on this subject. She reassured the Board that LWS is keeping up with developments in theory and knowledge in the field and with the pertinent professional literature. . . . Several papers by a few psychiatrists and analysts appeared a few years ago in which adopted children were considered more prone to emotional disturbance than other children. Thus, adoption was viewed, in a sense, as causing emotional disorders in children. At least two of these authors made the further suggestion that the maladjustment of these adopted children was due to being told about their adoption at an early age. Dr. Bernard regarded it as unfortunate that these opinions received wide public circulation through being picked up by writers for popular magazines. Although those of us in the adoption field should maintain a scientific attitude and thus accept whatever new facts may appear on the basis of sound investigation, it is important that

premature or unsubstantiated comments adverse to adoption be carefully reviewed and evaluated lest publicizing them as authoritative threaten the public's confidence. . . .

We have also come to realize that adopted children may have special difficulty in the psychological process of establishing their sense of identity. Emotional problems in adopted children are caused by a variety of reasons, just as they are for all children; but such problems for the adopted children are more apt to be expressed through symptoms involving their sense of identity. The telling about adoption may make this task of growing a sense of identity more difficult since it may be hard for a child to assimilate the concepts of two sets of parents and, thus, harder to build a firm sense of self. It would be a mistake, however, thinks Dr. Bernard, to try and protect the young child from being told about his adoption, partly because of the greater psychological burdens this places on the child-parent relationship. In our experience, when the adopted child is emotionally maladjusted, it is due not to the "telling" per se, but to underlying problems of the sort that may obtain for any child, including, of course, disturbing family relationships.

There are a number of ways by which we are learning more about the psychological implications of the telling process for both parents and children which, in turn, serves as a guide for improvements in practice. Thus, at LWS, post-adoptive contact with parents—both individually and in groups—helps the agency to expand its understanding while also providing further help to the parents. It has become apparent that the original casework discussions with prospective adoptive parents at the time of placement are not retained nor available when the time to tell about adoption actually arises. Group meetings when the child is near the age to be told have [been] found to be extremely useful for the parents and instructive for the caseworkers. Our increased realization of what telling has really meant in different situations, and how it becomes enmeshed with the determinants of emotional health, has also been enhanced by helping individual parents and children who return to the agency when the children are young, when they are adolescents, and occasionally when they are adults. . . .

By way of a case illustration, Dr. Bernard reported on a recent consultation she had with a young man whose parents had adopted him as an infant through LWS. The parents initiated the consultation because their son was now expressing some desire to know more about his biological parents. His parents told Dr. Bernard that although they had never lied to their son about anything else, they had told him that his natural parents had both died—which was not the case—and they now felt anxiety on this score. . . .

At the interview it was apparent that despite what he had been told, he was aware that he was probably the illegitimate child of an unmarried mother. He had grown up not believing his adoptive parents that his biological parents had died. By all the usual criteria, this young man was a very well adjusted person, doing well at graduate school, and, according to

a reliable and knowledgeable informant, the family relationships within this adoptive family had always been excellent. Nevertheless, at the time of the consultation, there were some psychological problems for both the parents and the young man—though not of overwhelming magnitude—which might have been obviated in the first place had the adoptive parents not disposed of his natural parents originally by killing them off. This is a very attractive solution to many adoptive parents since it avoids the painful question of illegitimacy (the parents who get killed off are always married) and it disposes of the worry about whether the children will want to seek out their natural parents and return to them. However, despite these advantages, in the short run when the children are small and the telling looms large, it can become, as in this instance, a source of later discomfort, anxiety, guilt, mistrust, and a barrier between this young man and his adoptive parents.

Source: Minutes of the Child Adoption Committee, May 4, 1966, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 155, Folder 4, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## ***ALMA et al v. Lefkowitz et al, 1977***

*The narratives excerpted below were just a few of the numerous adoptee affidavits filed in the case of ALMA et al v. Lefkowitz et al, a 1977 class action suit that challenged the constitutionality of the New York adoption records law. ALMA, the Adoptees' Liberty Movement Association, was a reform organization founded by Florence Fisher in 1971. Although ALMA pursued a bold legal strategy that emphasized the rights of adoptees to equal protection before the law, most of the **adoption narratives** emphasized themes of long-term emotional damage rooted in the trauma of **telling**, the stigma of **illegitimacy**, or **psychopathology** traceable to the fact that sealed records denied adoptees fundamental knowledge about their backgrounds and identities. The lawsuit did not succeed.*

---

Now comes ROBERTA BLACKER VAN LAVEN, nee GLORIA JOYCE GALLUB. . . .

1. According to my altered certificate of birth, I was born on May 9, 1934, on Staten Island, at the Staten Island Hospital (which has since been closed). On November 13, 1940, the Honorable Leone D. Howell, Surrogate's Court, Nassau County, at Mineola, New York, signed an order of adoption whereby I was adopted by George Blacker and Helen (Sherman) Blacker. The order of adoption shows that my name at birth was Gloria Joyce Gallub. My adoption was handled by the Louise Wise Agency (formerly the Free Synagogue Adoption Service). I entered my adoptive home at the age of five, after a period in two foster homes. I recollect appearing in court at the hearing of my adoption proceeding.

2. Although I cannot remember being specifically told never to mention my adoptive status, I quickly became aware that this was a forbidden subject, never to be mentioned. I believe that my personality was damaged by the trauma of adoption at the age of five, for I was made to deny my prior existence by secrecy and evasion. In addition, I believe it had a profound effect on my ability to mother and nurture my own daughter, now nineteen. I have lived most of my life with a feeling of being an outsider. I am detached, cold, unemotional. I believe my intellectual and professional attainments have been limited by a persistently faulty memory, since I

learned at the age of five that to be loved and accepted I must learn to forget the past.

3. My actual search for the past did not finally begin until I was nearly thirty. . . .

5. Having finally unburdened this heinous secret to a psychiatrist, I was then able to reveal it at last to my husband of ten years. He was shocked beyond belief—not at the fact of adoption, but at the fact of my secrecy. Surely, our marriage suffered damage at this time. But later, with his encouragement, we set about to find my past. . . .

6. We went to Louise Wise in 1966, and spoke to Barbara Miller. There we were met with hardened attitudes and evasions from social workers with pretensions to wisdom and omnipotence; they in their professionalism denied us information which they had. . . .

\* \* \*

Now comes JOYCE AARON, a/k/a JOYCE ANN FUNK. . . .

1. According to information given to me by a clerk at the Louise Wise Agency, I was born on December 14, 1935, in the Bronx. About six months after my birth, I was adopted by Aaron Joel Funk and Bobbie (Greenwald) Funk, who were living at the time in the Bronx. My adoptive father died in 1966; my adoptive mother is still living. My father was a lawyer and he had my adoption papers. Since his death I have thus far not been able to locate them.

2. I was first informed that I was adopted at the age of four. At that and later times, when I asked what happened to my actual parents, I was given conflicting stories, which led me to suppose that my adoptive parents were attempting to conceal from me that I was illegitimate. I was very much affected by this information, and by my adoptive parents' obvious anxiety about my inquiries, and I began to fantasize about my natural mother, to the extent that when I would observe a woman on the street with similar facial features, I would surmise that she must be my mother.

3. I became severely emotionally disturbed as a result of lack of knowledge of my origins and true identity, compounded by the attitude of my adoptive parents, and, at the age of fifteen, I began psychiatric treatment. I am now forty-one, and of the twenty-six years since I started psychoanalysis, I have spent about fifteen in analysis. My weekly schedule of hourly appointments with the analyst has varied between two and five times per week. During the periods I have been in analysis, I have spent many thousands of dollars on this treatment. It has helped me to some extent, but, in the end, my analysts have told me that it cannot fill the void, the emptiness, created by my lack of knowledge of my origins and personal identity. . . .

8. What I have suffered from all my life is the lack of knowledge of my origins and identity. I believe that the record should be unsealed and

opened to me. I am not afraid of what I may find in investigating my origins. Nothing that I might find could be worse than the unknown. . . .

\* \* \*

Now comes ELEANOR B. BARRON. . . .

1. According to my original birth certificate, I was born on January 29, 1923, at the Lying-In Hospital in Manhattan. My natural parents were Stanley Weiser and Evelyn Simon. I obtained my original birth certificate in May 1971 as a result of my search. According to information I obtained from the Louise Wise Agency, I was adopted within a year of my birth by Andrew V. Bekay and Blanche (Offer) Bekay, who were living at that time in Brooklyn.

2. My adoptive parents never told me that I had been adopted. At about the age of seven, I found in a drawer an envelope with the words written on it: "Eleanor's Adoption Papers." Inside I found papers, one of which indicated that my original name had been Geraldine Simon. . . . When I made this discovery, I was alone in the house. When my adoptive mother returned, I asked her what these papers meant. She became hysterical and said, "Never tell your father! If you do, I will commit suicide and you will have that on your conscience!" I was never able to discuss my adoption with my adoptive mother. Each time I tried, she would threaten me again. I did not discuss my adoptive status with my adoptive father until my mother was dying, about ten years ago. When I mentioned this to him, he told me, "That must be why I could never find your adoption papers. Your mother must have thrown them out. I always thought you knew." Nevertheless, he proceeded to tell me that all their relatives and friends had been sworn to secrecy (i.e., not to tell me). It was then that I began to understand why all these relatives and friends had always seemed uncomfortable with me: evidently, they were afraid they might slip up and tell me.

3. From the time I discovered those papers onward, life was never the same. The relationship between my adoptive parents and myself was always very strained. . . .

5. Since my mother had impressed me that the consequences of my revealing my adoptive status to family or friends would be so terrible, I concluded that adoption must be a terrible disgrace, and this has colored my thinking about myself ever since. . . .

Source: *ALMA et al v. Lefkowitz et al*, affidavits, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 164, Folder 1, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Excerpt from Catherine S. Amatruda and Joseph V. Baldwin, "Current Adoption Practices," 1951

In the course of these investigations, the clinic was called upon to assist in the evaluation of the child. At first the idea of indiscriminate placement of children in adoption seemed primitive. As, however, most babies are pretty normal and most people pretty decent, it became apparent that many of these placements seemed perfectly good. And then an extremely bad placement would turn up and point out that adoption is a serious matter, profoundly affecting the lives of at least three people, and that it does not seem right that it be entrusted to the law of averages. To test this point of view a series of both agency and independent adoptions was reviewed. . . .

### THE INDEPENDENT ADOPTION

If agency placements are so much better, then why do independent placements occur? There are many and good reasons such as ignorance of the value of the agencies, and the naïve assumption that any person who wants to adopt a baby is fit to do so. . . .

Independent placements entail a far greater risk, both to the child and to the adopting parents. The advantages to the parent are that they can get babies this way, and they can get very young babies. The only advantage to the infant is that he is placed early and thus spared possible institutional placement for long periods, or the possible necessity of making adjustments to a series of foster homes. The advantages to the natural mother are that she is relieved of the responsibility of her child, quickly, cheaply, and easily. These are some of the reasons why independent placements are made, risk or no risk. . . .

### SUMMARY

1. The present study shows that the social agencies do better adoption placements than does the well-intentioned or expedient laity.
2. Agency adoption placements are well done, on the whole, but they do not place enough babies, they do not satisfy enough adopting parents, and they work too slowly. Independent placements will continue as long as the agencies operate as they do now, which will certainly be until they have

much more money and many more workers.

3. The probationary period should be, among other things, an escape clause. It should be implemented not only by the power to remove the child from the home, but by the courage to do so when necessary in the child's behalf, over the protests of the adopting parents if need be.

4. Our efforts must continue to educate the public, which will include potential adopting parents; lay persons who tend to become involved in arranging independent placements; the legislators who frame our laws; and the courts which render decisions on each adoption situation. Thus there will be a wider understanding of the great risks involved and of what constitutes good, safe, and decent practice.

5. The alternative to a bad adoption placement is not homelessness or the orphanage but a good placement.

Source: Catherine S. Amatruda and Joseph V. Baldwin, "Current Adoption Practices," *Journal of Pediatrics* 38, no. 2 (February 1951):208-212.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Carole J. Anderson, "Child Abuse & Adoption," 1991

In fact, what is child abuse? All states have definitions, but these definitions differ considerably. Some include not only physical and sexual abuse but also psychological abuse; others do not. Some include neglect, another term with a multitude of definitions. . . . Should abuse be measured by the damage to a child's body or by the damage to a child's psyche? . . .

### **Risk factors for abuse**

Although we don't know exactly how much abuse there is, only that most of it is unreported, there are things we know about abuse. We know that one risk factor is differentness. If mom, dad and two of their children are stocky blonds while one of the children is a slender redhead, the redhead is at greater risk of abuse. This is true of personality differences as well. A child who does not seem to fit in, who seems alien in looks or disposition, is more likely to be abused.

Another risk factor is separation. . . .

Lack of blood ties is another risk factor. . . .

### **The adoption connection**

I used to think none of this had anything to do with adoption. When I first heard from abused adoptees, I responded much the same as social workers have responded to searching, unhappy birthparents: I thought they were the rare exceptions. But over the years, I've had a lot of letters from adoptees who report they were abused. I've talked to a lot of adoptees who were abused. The sheer number of them made me take a closer look. . . .

Many adoptees seem, even as adults, to express the same kinds of feelings as abused children. This cannot all be coincidence. Granting that there may be substantial numbers of adoptees who are physically or sexually abused, and even larger numbers who are psychologically abused, it seems we see abused child attitudes in a majority of adoptees.

### **Adoption's inherent abuse of children and families**

Adoption itself inflicts psychological harm on adoptees. Adoption means the

near-impossibility of either adoptee or adoptive parent being able to take their relationship for granted. Because the parent-child relationship is established by law and not by nature, the relationship cannot be regarded as a simple fact of life as it is in natural families, by either adoptees or adoptive parents.

We often read of adoptive parents being the "psychological parents" of adoptees. Yet what does being a "psychological parent" mean? It means that the relationship is not natural, not clear cut. It means that in adoptive families, the parent-child relationship may be something that must be continually proved because it cannot be assumed. One way adoptive parents may seek to "prove" that they are "the" parents and are necessary to adoptees is to make themselves essential, which may mean being more controlling than the typical parent. One way adoptees may "prove" they are their adoptive parents' children is by being more childlike, more immature, more dependent than typical sons and daughters, even when they are chronologically adults. . . .

Some adoptees may be less harmed by the disruption of the natural bond with their birthmothers than others. Some adoptive parents are better at empathizing than are others. Some are able to love and accept the children they adopt for who they really are, while others will never stop trying to mold adoptees into the natural children they could not have. But still adoption itself, I think, harms children. . . . Inside every adoptee lurks an abandoned child, and that child hurts. . . .

Yes, I know that some non-adopted children are damaged by abuse, poverty or other ills. I know many single parents have one or more risk factors in their families. Yet most, maybe all, of the problems that face vulnerable natural parents can be eliminated by societal and familial support, while the problems that occur in adoption, particularly when the parents are infertile and the adoption is closed, are inherent in adoption and cannot be prevented or eliminated.

Source: Carole J. Anderson, "Child Abuse & Adoption" (Des Moines, IA: Concerned United Birthparents, 1991), 4-7, 11-13, 16.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Site designed by:



**Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Anonymous, "An Adopted Mother Speaks," 1922

*This excerpt illustrates two enduring themes in the modern adoption experience: awareness on the part of adopters that their potential for parenthood is being carefully scrutinized and judged, and suspicion that children available for adoption—as well as adoptive kinship itself—are both different and inferior.*

---

As one of a family of ten children I felt great sympathy for smaller family circles, and looked forward to being the mother of at least ten children of my own. After six years of married life, however, I gave up this hope and sought an institution that cared for other people's children, explaining my crying need for a family. I convinced the heads of this institution that my past was blameless and my future full of promise, that I had paid my debts, did not like alcoholic beverages, had no skeletons in my closets nor any undesirable boarders in my home, that my house was at all times clean and orderly, that I went to church regularly and had only influential friends. Then, and not until then, two stolid, black-eyed brothers of an alien race were bestowed upon me.

The new members of my family were apathetic, suspicious and silent. No amount of coaxing could beguile them into a conversation or a smile. Tears flowed copiously. At the end of a week I was ready to quit and go childless to the end of my days. It took them that long to decide that I did not eat little boys and that I really meant to be kind. Even now, after nearly three years, I do not like to remember that week during which they sat on chairs and looked at me. But patience and love have worked wonders. I am sure now that they have learned to care for their foster parents; and we care for them as much as, if not more than had they been given us by nature instead of red tape. . . .

As we have lived in our neighborhood for a long time, every one knows that the boys came to us from an institution. Nearly every time that they went out at first they were questioned about how we treated them, and whether they remembered their own mother and father. Even now, they are asked many such questions. Much unsought advice is thrust upon me by mothers of "little terrors," and a great deal of thought is devoted to me by persons who give no apparent thought to the raising of their own

children. Parents whose children are more often accidental than desired rave to me about the terrible force of heredity, and the uncertainty as to how orphans are going to "turn out." That children are without parents seems to be considered an indication that they are naturally bad and for-ordained to be vicious. Yet, for every adopted child cited as an instance of ingratitude and wasted effort, there are thousands from so-called "good families" who, following the line of least resistance, eventually adorn our public institutions.

It has been proven to me to be an almost impossible task to raise an adopted child in a normal manner. If they are dirty the neighbors call them neglected. If they are kept clean, I am depriving them of their natural rights as children. If they obey promptly, they are abused; if they do not obey, they are hopelessly spoiled for all time. Then there are those dear, well intentioned persons who focus their curious eyes upon the children, drop their voices to a funereal pitch and say (always within hearing of the boys): "Poor little motherless babies, isn't it a pity?"—and give them sundry coins. I wonder if those well meaning but surely thoughtless people realize that they are fostering in the rapidly forming minds of future voters the idea that the world owes them a living, or that they are making two more victims of "self-sympathy." Perhaps I am unduly sensitive about this; but I want my boys' lives to stand upon solid foundations that will not quiver under the strongest winds of adversity. . . .

Again, people go out of their way to tell me what a wonderful work we are doing in taking two children of whose antecedents we know little into our home. It is work, and it is sometimes trying; but day by day it pays large dividends.

Source: Anonymous, "An Adopted Mother Speaks," *Survey 47* (March 18, 1922):962-963.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman





## Anonymous, "How It Feels to Have Been an Adopted Child," 1920

*This personal story by an adult adoptee shares the sentimentality of many [adoption narratives](#) from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries while offering insight into one woman's encounter with the stigma and fear that surrounded adoption. The author offers a sharp critique of professional standards that, in the name of [child welfare](#) and [science](#), increasingly emphasized the importance of placing "normal" children in "normal" families headed by middle-class married couples. Anecdotal evidence of adoptions by [single women](#) abounds in both fictional and non-fictional narratives before 1940. This story is one example, and it concludes by mentioning adoptions by [single men](#). These were probably much rarer, and almost always involved the adoption of boys. For a more negative perspective on the experience of adoption by single women, see [Carol S. Prentice, An Adopted Child Looks at Adoption](#).*

One day last week, just after I had settled myself in one of the coaches of a suburban train at the Terminal, in Boston, two women came into the seat behind me. I could not see their faces; but their voices, low-pitched and refined, reached me distinctly. Apparently, they continued a conversation already begun.

"Will wants to adopt a child," one of them said. "But I tell him I never could stand the moment when that child would realize that I was not its own mother. I can't make myself believe that the feeling is the same as it is with your own flesh and blood." . . . "If I could only believe it would be the same as my own when it grew up and that the child would feel that it was my child—"

Then and there I ached to whirl around and say: "Madam, it would! I know! I was an adopted child myself. It doesn't make any difference."

But I am a New Englander, saturated with the reserve of the locality in which I was reared. Not even for the sake of some little child, who might find a home with this woman and her "Will," could I make myself turn about in the face of a coach full of people and tell my own story. But because I was such a coward, my conscience has bothered me until I decided to ask the editor of *The American Magazine* to let me tell that

story to his readers.

When I was eight months old, I was adopted by an unmarried woman who was then almost fifty. Since she was a young girl she had taught in ungraded country schools, term after term. But in spite of that wearing experience she craved a child of her own.

She had a few hundred dollars saved from the ridiculously small sum she received for teaching—twenty-five or thirty dollars a month, I think—and she had a little house in which to live, besides a few acres of farm land she shared with a brother whose wife was dead.

With the shadows of old age beginning to fall, she heard of a baby not a mile away who lacked parents' care and was causing the town's three "selectmen" a great deal of embarrassment before they could get it to a state institution. She went after it, took it home, legally adopted it, gave it her name, and for thirty years was a wonderful mother—the most wonderful mother in the world, I think.

I was that child.

She must have begun, when I was still a baby, to talk to me about my coming to live with her; for I cannot *remember* ever being told, or ever experiencing any shock of realization that I was not her child.

To all intents and purposes, I *was* her child. . . .

Whenever the subject of my parents was mentioned as I grew older and went away from home, I learned it was easiest to come right out with, "I was adopted"—and have it over with. It is only when you are *afraid* someone will find out about it that there is any embarrassment. Like any other form of fear, it vanishes when you do not flinch, but say, "Come on! Do your worst. You can't make me dodge." And when there is no mystery there is no curiosity on the part of others, and the whole thing clears itself up. . . .

If that blessed woman had hesitated to take me off the hands of the selectmen because she thought she did not have money enough to take care of a child, I would have missed the riches of her wholesome upbringing and her unstinted affection. These are the "advantages" which count most. More than all, there is the spirit of sharing what there is to be shared. . . .

As I think back it seems to me she was always on the job—loving me out of sheer stubbornness, never scolding, forever encouraging. I think of all this when I see some so-called "real" mothers, who seem to me most unmotherly, and when I hear of the insistence of child placement agencies that children be put into "normal" homes. If they had investigated my mother's application for a child, they would have found her too old, too poor. They would have said that a home without a husband and father under these circumstances was not at all desirable.

"We can't consider the needs of people who want children," a superintendent of such an organization told me with a college-woman "scientificness" which brought out goose pimples on my wrists. "We think only of the children's interests. When a woman is over forty, and particularly if she is unmarried, we very seldom consent."

Then and there, I thanked the Lord that those three town fathers weren't so fussy about *me!*

As far as missing a father goes, I did very often envy other children the dads who could make willow whistles and play jig tunes on harminicons. But not more than I should have done had I been living with my real (?) Mother and she had been a widow. A child is, of course, much more fortunate who can have both adopted parents; but I can bear witness to very happy childhood days with just a mother.

There are interesting cases of men who have adopted little boys. A city official thirty-five years old, whose wife and little son died, arranged to have his mother keep house for him, and adopted a boy of four, now a husky chap on a high-school football team. Another man, a bachelor, became the legal father of a very young baby boy, who is certianly the proverbial "pride and joy" of both the man himself and of the sister with whom he lives. . . .

The records do show that there are thousands of foster parents and thousands of adopted children who, like myself, declare that they have never known "any difference," and who have lived happily ever after.

Source: Anonymous, "How It Feels to Have Been an Adopted Child," *American Magazine*, August 1920, 72-73, 116.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

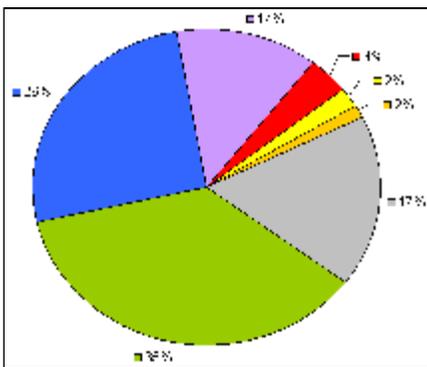
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Bernadine Barr, "Estimates of Numbers of Children in Institutions, Foster Family Care, and Adoptive Homes, 1910-1960"



By the early twentieth century, child welfare reformers had declared that families—not institutions—were the environments in which children should grow up. In 1909, for example, the first White House Conference on Children called the family “the highest and finest product of civilization.” As the table below shows, this famous declaration obscured the stamina of institutional care. In 1910, there were well over 1000 orphanages in the United States, their average size had grown considerably since the late nineteenth century, and they housed more than 100,000 children. Not until 1950 did the number of children living in foster families exceed the number of children living in institutions, and the number of adoptive placements did not surpass the number of institutional placements until 1960.

### Estimates of Numbers of Children in Institutions, Foster Family Care, and Adoptive Homes, 1910-1960

|      | Institutions | Foster Family Care | Adoptive Homes |
|------|--------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1910 | 101,403      | 61,000             |                |
| 1923 | 132,258      | 61,475             | 3354?          |
| 1933 | 140,352      | 102,577            | 5833?          |
| 1950 | 95,073       | 98,082             | 80,000*        |
| 1960 | 70,892       | 163,000**          | 107,000        |

\* estimate for 1951

\*\* estimate for 1961

Source: Bernadine Barr, "Spare Children, 1900-1945: Inmates of Orphanages as Subjects of Research in Medicine and in the Social Sciences in America" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1992), p. 32, figure 2.2.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Bastard Nation, "Open Records: Why It's an Issue," 1999



First Secrets and Lies Rally sponsored by [Bastard Nation](#), San Francisco, 1996

Adult adoptees in most of the advanced, industrialized nations of the world have unrestricted access to their original birth records as a matter of right. In contrast, adult adoptees in all but four states in the U.S. are forbidden access to their own original birth certificates. Archaic, Depression-Era laws created "amended" birth certificates, which replace the names of the adoptee's biological parents with those of the adoptive parents, and frequently falsify other birth information as well. The original records are permanently sealed in most states by laws largely passed after World War II, a legacy of the culture of shame which stigmatized infertility, out-of-wedlock birth, and adoption.

In Scotland, adoptee records have been open since 1930, and in England since 1975. Sweden, The Netherlands, Germany, South Korea, Mexico, Argentina, and Venezuela are only a few of the many nations which do not prevent adult adoptees from accessing their own birth records.

Why are they still sealed in most of the U.S.?

Well-funded lobbies representing certain adoption agencies and lawyers have a vested interest in keeping adoptee records closed. They are working in several states to pass a Uniform Adoption Act that would keep adoptees' birth records sealed for ninety-nine years and in some instances criminalize searching for one's biological relatives. These special interest groups would continue to deprive adult adoptees of their rights, presumably to prevent the disclosure of controversial past practices (baby-selling, coercion, fraud), which are now hidden by state-sanctioned secrecy.

While many adoptees search for their biological relatives to discover the answers to questions regarding medical history and family heritage, all adoptees should be able to exercise their right to obtain the original government documents of their births and adoptions whether they choose to search or not. At stake are the

civil and human rights of millions of American citizens. To continue to abrogate these rights is to perpetuate the stigmatization of illegitimacy and adoption, and the relegation of an entire class of citizens to second-class status.

For everyone else, it's "Vital Statistics"—for adoptees, it's "None of your business."

All Americans, adopted or not, have a right to access government records about their own lives.

Please join us in our fight to restore adoptee dignity and equality!

Source: The Basic Bastard, [www.bastards.org](http://www.bastards.org)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Bastard Nation, "Why It's Great to Be a Bastard"

*This list of reasons is an ongoing project of the [Bastard Nation](#) website. Visitors may send in additional suggestions.*

---

All entries contributed by Real Bastards.

1. Membership in Bastard Nation.
2. We have more names than most people.
3. We are good at lying and being lied to.
4. Two family trees
5. We get to go on this nifty epic search for our roots
6. We develop great research skills.
7. We learn to cut right through the bullshit.
8. We can moonlight as P.I.s
9. We have the ability to use the word f\*ck in very creative ways.
10. Some of our "life stories" would make great movies of the week.
11. When someone says, "Hey, you bastard!" we can just smile and say, "Yo."
12. Cheap health insurance by leaving "family medical problems" blank.
13. There's a type of sword named after us.
14. Whenever an a-parent does something idiotic, the knowledge that there is no genetic relationship.
15. Lust runs in our blood.
16. Some of us have 2 Birthdays.
17. We can always spend our extra money on a new search.
18. Every person we meet could be a relative.
19. If you're real nice Jackie might adopt you.
20. We can't get arrested for marrying our 1st cousins
21. Hell!!! We can't get arrested for marrying our sister or brother for that matter!!
22. I am a bastard. I am proud of being a bastard. I am not the product of some 3 minute routine baby-making session between two cookie-cutter suburban twits. I am the product of lust and self-gratifying passion. I like that. It makes me feel special.
23. We might be in for two inheritances.
24. IF we find our birth family we have the chance of having TWO great

families!!!

25. If we find our birth family we have a chance of having TWO crappy families!!!!

26. If we find our birth family we have the chance of having ONE great family and ONE crappy family!!!

27 You get to hear \*How does that make you feel?\* more often than a psychotherapy patient, but you don't have to pay \$90 an hour.

28. We get to hear chirpy little twits constantly tell us, "You weren't expected you were selected "

29 I won't be the first on my a-parent's list to donate a kidney if it's needed.

30. I save time at a new doctor's office because I leave the "family health history" blank.

31. You can blame everything and anything on the possibility of your space alien parentage.

32. You get to say proudly--I wasn't born...I was hatched!

33. You can claim that your mold wasn't only cracked or broken, that YOURS was so strange and bizarre that people came and smashed it all and hit the pieces!

34. You can eat any strange food you wish, and claim it as ethnic and healthful for your people.

35. You can be glad that you did not inherit the mental illness that runs in your adoptive family.

36. You truly have every reason to ponder your navel.

37. You can be surprised every time you look in the mirror and see a stranger!

38. Your adoptive mother could be a serial killer with a perfect alibi as she has a forged document saying where she was on the day you were born. Do you REALLY know where she was that day?

39. You get to be surprised when you are pregnant as you wait to see what kind of genetic mutations you may carry!

40. You can really connect to your minister telling the congregation that you were born in sin.

41. You have the chance to honestly believe you wrecked someone else's life.

42. You KNOW infertility isn't a genetic problem in your family.

43. You were ahead of your time as the ultimate in recyclables.

44. You can take solace in the fact that you were instrumental in helping some attorney make his Mercedes payments.

45. You eased the social conscience of a misguided social worker looking for a sense of personal importance by being a pathetic waif she placed.

46. You get to have your amom shoot The Look at you whenever you ask about your birthfamily.

47. You have your own personal Can Of Worms to open despite all warnings!

48. You can live incognito. After all, that's what your life is.

49. You can laugh at the pseudo bastards when they tell you how much you look like your aparents.

50. When everyone else is running away from the skeletons in their closets; you get to run towards them in your search.
51. You can answer "Probably" whenever someone asks "Do you have relatives in this area? You look so familiar!"
52. You get to meet new people through the placing of long distance phone calls to total strangers.
53. In boring meetings, you don't have to doodle—instead, you can practice forging you birthmother's signature.
54. You have no problem sleeping at night, knowing that you have done your part to keep AT&T's profits high.
55. You develop a close personal friendship with the postman.
56. You can claim all sorts of "affirmative action" and minority goodies, then let THEM do the research for you to disprove your claim.
57. You can read the delightful children's book "Are You My Mother" and cry.
58. You can read the delightful children's book "Horton hatches an Egg" and cry.
59. You can make fast cash by betting people that slavery still exists. You can prove that it does when your a-mother swears on a stack of Bibles that you "belong" to her, and gets angry when you say that you don't.
60. We can take bets on when our actual birth date was, and with any luck, we might actually be able to find out who wins.
61. When you can't answer any of the family medical history questions, you get to go through all kinds of cool tests at the hospital.
62. You can laugh at people who say "You look just like your mother."
63. You can blame your promiscuity on "genetic destiny."
64. You can warn those around you that you are probably a "bad seed" and might, therefore, snap at any time. . . .
65. You're the only one who roots for Edmund at a performance of King Lear.
66. You don't have to worry about living up to some potential; anything we achieve is perceived as up from our dark beginnings.
67. Your well practiced at pretending to be grateful!!
68. Someone in this country just might need one of your kidneys.
69. Medical history forms at the hospital are a cinch, advantageous when bleeding to death in the ER!!
70. Your children benefit!! No one can say they look like Great Aunt Edna!!
  
71. You can explain away any deviant personality flaws as genetic "features" rather than a poor upbringing by your aparents
72. You can try and get out of jury duty by pointing out that, even though you're over 21, the probate court still considers you a minor child and minors can't serve on juries.
73. The photographs of Anne Geddes take on a whole, new perspective (photos of babies nestled in peapods, babies' faces in the middle of cabbages, etc.)
74. You can earn a Geology degree in the process of trying to find out which rock you crawled out from under.

75. When your high school teacher makes your class write essays about their family origins, you can break out crying and be sent to the library to read porn while everyone else is stuck writing books the size of Alex Haley's!
76. You get to see all the nifty faces people make when trying to act casual after you have told them that you're adopted.
77. You always have a reason to be depressed.
78. When you die you'll be sent back to earth because you will always have unfinished business.
79. When caught with a dumb look on your face it can be explained away as simply pondering your roots, true identity, or other related topics.
80. If No. 72 doesn't work, you can confidently state you could easily be related to one of the principals in the trial.
81. You can learn to sign your amother's signature fluently for all those affidavits. You are 35 years old and she STILL insists (even though you know better) that she remembers the labor pains, and that folks keep getting you confused with ANOTHER baby they adopted and returned because it had a hole in its heart. Then \*YOU\* were conceived. (TRUE STORY!)
82. You can "not live up to your potential" and blame it on your afamily, but act like a smartass and blame it on your bfamily, or vice versa
83. You can read the delightful children's book "Stellaluna" and cry.
84. ?

Source: Bastard Nation, [www.bastards.org](http://www.bastards.org)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## E. L. Beckwith to Grace Abbott, June 21, 1931

*This letter was written to the [U.S. Children's Bureau](#). Bureau officials responded by enlisting a Boston investigator to gather whatever information existed about the man's adoption. Further details can be found in [Elizabeth A. Lee to Katharine F. Lenroot, August 6, 1931](#).*

---

My dear Miss Abbott:—

I can not remember just what year I was born but I am told two dates one is the 15th of June 1899 and the other is the 8th 1894 but I think I can remember far back enough to feel that it must have been 1894. A Mr. and Mrs. Fred L. Beckwith, of Boston, Mass. was all the Mother and Father I knew of untill I returned from France where I won the HONORS of an American soldier.

I have never been told anything only that they were my Father and Mother. He left us in about April 1902 when my baby sister was three or four months old. then she, Mother, was very mean to me. She beat me, made me steal and never allowed me to go to school. I have had only three months school in all my life. At the age of about 13 she swore that I was older and put me in a factory to work then I went into Cramps Ship Building Works in Philadelphia, Pa., where we then lived and worked until about 18 years of age. then would have to work all week and then come home on Saturday at noon and wash and then spend my Sunday at the Iron ironing the wash for the week, and clean up the house. I dare not go out not even to Church. I can truthfully say that my Mother never Kissed me or put her arms about my neck as I have seen other boys Mothers do. She has blacked my eyes and beat me until I did not know anything and then put me in a dark room. she passed out about ten years ago I burried her and now I still say that up to that time she never kissed me or loved me a time in my life.

Now, Miss Abbott, I am human and maybe to much that way for I am still at 36 longing for MY REAL MOTHER TO JUST ONE TIME PUT HER ARMS ABOUT MY NECK AND KISS ME. She is still living and Mr. Beckwith in Boston, the man that made me think he was my Father will not tell me who or where SHE IS. NOW I ASK YOU WHAT HAVE I DID AS A CHILD TO

BRING this on myself. I had nothing to do with my coming into the world but yet afor 36 long years I have lived all ALONE without a MOTHERS LOVE FOR HER SON, and GOD KNOWS I LOVE HER WHOEVER SHE AND WHATEVER SHE MAY CHANCE TO BE. SHE BROUGHT ME INTO THIS WORLD and I am an Ex-Salvation Army Officer and a male Nurse and I have been called out at nights to bring babies into the world and I think I know just a little bit of what a woman goes through to bring a son or daughter into the world.

Can you not see Miss Abbott, I am not trying to be unkind to you but GOD KNOWS MY HEART IN BEING EAT OUT WITH LONESOMENESS FOR A MOTHER LOVE. . . .

E. L. Beckwith, Capt.

Source: E. L. Beckwith to Grace Abbott, June 21, 1931, United States Children's Bureau Papers, Box 406, Folder 7332, National Archives II.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Viola W. Bernard, "Adoption as a Model for Community/Social Child Psychiatry," 1998



Viola Bernard's commitment to adoption grew out of her commitment to social psychiatry. Throughout her career, she was a vocal supporter of the civil rights movement and worked actively to promote the careers of African-American psychiatrists. In the photo above, she is seated with two unidentified African-American students from Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina. Below, she is standing with Margaret Lawrence and her family. Lawrence, also a psychiatrist, was involved in the Fellowship of Reconciliation, an early peace and civil rights organization that anticipated the mass protest movements of the 1950s and 1960s.



*In this piece, initially delivered as a 1983 lecture in the American Psychiatric Association's Distinguished Psychiatrists Series, [Viola Bernard](#) repeated a theme she had discussed often during her career. To work in the adoption field was to work in social psychiatry, practiced in such a way as to bridge the gap between individual needs, social institutions, and policies designed to influence the lives of entire populations. Her term for this ambitious understanding of mental health was "ecological."*

Adoption contains almost all the elements of social psychiatry as I conceive it. It is a socially devised, rather than biological, way of forming families. It involves courts, lawyers, and—at least with agency adoptions—the child-welfare field, along with consultants in medicine, clinical psychology, child development, genetics, and psychiatry, both adult and child.

The central social reality of adoption is its power to prevent misery and maldevelopment of children who lack families of their own. It provides services for the interlocking needs of the so-called adoption triangle—birth parents, adoptive parents, and adoptees. Adoption has enabled infertile couples to experience parenthood and family life; it has allowed birth parents who are unable or unwilling to function as parents to get on with their own lives, which for teenagers may mean schooling and employment as well as future parenthood under better circumstances. But the children's needs are regarded as primary. Major strides have been made in expanding the range of adoptable children to include older children and those with various kinds of problems and/or disabilities. Practices that discriminated against black and older minority children have undergone extensive reform, and government

subsidies now make adoption possible for many children by parents who could not otherwise afford it.

Adoption today also illustrates how the lack of an ecological perspective can turn reforms of the past into new sources of psychological harm. More than simply a case of the pendulum swinging too far, this problem is often a result of the failure to grasp the ramifications of a psychosocial policy, or indeed, to fully understand it in the first place.

A case in point is the issue of permanency of a home of their own for children. Many of us in child welfare and child psychiatry sought to improve foster-care practices and to change policies and laws that condemned children—some for most of their childhood years and without periodic review—to a succession of foster homes. Many of these children could and should have been freed for permanent adoption, since their own parents had vanished or couldn't care for them properly. Today, "permanency" is the child-welfare bureaucracy's watchword, and foster care the villain. So now, through the power of agency reimbursement policies, many children are being returned from foster care to unsuitable parents, in the name of permanency; others are being pushed into adoptions—often without suitable psychological preparation, and whether or not such placements are clinically indicated—because adoption offers *permanency*. Unquestionably, the permanency of adoption give it such potency for emotional health. But if the adoption is ill-advised on the basis of differential diagnosis, or a child's readiness, for instance, its very permanence can lock a child, with finality, into a pathogenic situation. What is missing is the essential individualizing that would recognize that good foster care can be the placement of choice for some children. . . .

I view such instances, and unhappily there are many, as *misapplications* of psychiatry and psychoanalysis to social problems. . . .

Source: Viola W. Bernard, "Some Applications of Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis to Social Issues," *Psychoanalytic Review* 85 (1) (February 1998): 160-161.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Viola W. Bernard, "Application of Psychoanalytic Concepts to Adoption Agency Practice," 1953



Viola W. Bernard in 1950

Psychiatrist *Viola Bernard*, born in 1907, was a charter member of the American *psychoanalytic* movement. A lifelong friend of *Justine Wise Polier*, Bernard shared the vision of therapeutic justice that was common among unusually well educated women early in the twentieth century. Bernard served for forty years as Chief Psychiatric Consultant to Louise Wise Services, an adoption and child welfare agency in New York.

Adoption, as an ingenious psychosocial invention can offer one of the finest and happiest adaptive solutions to the desperately frustrated needs of parentless children, childless parents, and those who cannot be parents to the children they have borne. Such are the human intricacies of this process of family formation on the basis of nurture rather than nature that sometimes participants fail rather than fulfill each other and themselves. Adoption agencies represent the community's stake in providing skilled professional services toward implementing and safeguarding this remarkable human experience. Ways and means of carrying out such services logically evolve in relation to the growth of understanding of the clients served. As psychoanalytic concepts have enlarged and deepened general understanding of human nature, they naturally are of special significance to a field so closely concerned with areas specifically related to major psychoanalytic contributions, such as child development, psychosexual conflicts, dynamics of family relationships and the role of unconscious motivation and emotions in behavior and symptom formation. . . .

Diagnostic, prophylactic and therapeutic responsibilities of the agency come into play during this period of temporary care between surrender and adoptive placement. Of the infants, some are newborns, straight from the hospital; others are a few weeks or a few months older, some of whom have experienced a traumatizing succession of being shifted about between different

places and people, or other forms of stress, before coming to the agency. The care they receive represents a vital contribution to their future psychological development, according to psychoanalytic assumptions and corroborating research. It simultaneously provides an opportunity for continuous clinical observation of each baby's behavior as the principal diagnostic method, to be supplemented by psychological and pediatric examinations and, in some selected instances, by psychiatric examination as well. Because of the importance to infant development of warm, relaxed human contact and adequate stimulation, temporary foster care seems far preferable to group care. Considerable attention should be given to selecting and working with the foster mothers, and it follows, from what has already been said, that the criteria of their selection should be heavily weighted in the direction of personal attributes that can fulfill "the rights of infants" by affectionate flexible mothering. Experience by the worker with the maturational sequences of infancy and her insight into the behavioral language of infancy helps her differentiate normal individual reactions from signals of disturbance calling for remedial action. Such action might take the form of helping the foster mother change some of her ways of handling the baby or even changing foster mothers. Fluctuations and aberrations in feeding behavior, for instance, are recognized as delicate barometers of the infant's condition. Anna Freud has recently added to the sizable psychoanalytic literature around this topic by a theoretical contribution in which she differentiates three main ways in which the function of eating is open to disturbance: organic feeding disturbances, nonorganic disturbances of the instinctive process itself, and neurotic feeding disturbances.

There is a promising trend in psychoanalytic studies of child development toward combining more data from direct observation of infants and children with the information gained from analytic therapy of adults by reconstructions of their childhood in the context of their full life history. Direct observations have obvious methodological advantages for studying the preverbal period of the first year of life and from such investigations by Ribble, Fries, Spitz, Anna Freud, and others, adoption agencies may hope to gain much needed data of specific relevance in meeting their responsibilities and growth-promoting opportunities around temporary preadoptive foster home care and permanent adoptive placement. Thus, Fries, investigating factors in psychic development in a group of children she studied from birth to adolescence, offers supporting evidence—elaborated in detail—for the interacting influential roles of constitution, habit training and parental emotional stability on the personality outcome of her original infant group. In his researches into "Psychogenic Diseases in Infancy," Spitz seeks to

classify certain damaging consequences to infants during their first year according to causally insufficient or emotionally unhealthy forms of mothering. Correspondences between the types of disturbances and types of mothering are differentiated as to course and outcome in relation to chronological phases of ego development within the first year of life. In the light of these and many other studies, adoption for parentless infants by "good" parents seems even more than ever the most logical preventive therapy for what can be most devastating psychogenic illnesses, i.e. maternal deprivation and "mal-mothering" of infancy. . . .

The social worker's task may be seen as helping the preadoptive child survive an undue succession of prematurely ruptured attachments to parental figures with minimal hardship and psychological damage while repairing, conserving and fostering his capacity for healthy attachment to new parents. Appropriate reassurance based on understanding the child's language, behavioral and symptomatic as well as verbal, entails repetition, consistency and honesty by the worker. Enlisting and permitting maximum participation by the child in the adoptive planning and placement is generally recognized as a most desirable reassurance against his anxiety-laden sense of helplessness as a passive pawn at the mercy of all-powerful unpredictable grownups. Sensitive timing of the various stages of adoption attuned to the particular child's inner pace is a vital ingredient of reassurance; destructive anxiety can mount when certain stops of the process are too prolonged, such as between a child's relating to prospective parents and his actual placement with them; by the same token, however, panic may stem from feeling rushed and stampeded so that a more graduated spacing and slowing down is the most effective reassurance. Another general principle along this line with preadoptive children consists of consolidating each step along the way of new environments and new relationships by converting a previous unknown into a positively experienced known which can then furnish continuity as the next unfamiliar element is introduced.

Psychodynamic insight and concepts of personality development underly [sic] these principles and procedures for direct work with children for adoption so that theoretical substantiation in general may be found abundantly in the literature. It may be of some interest to single out, however, one ingredient of personality recently discussed by Erikson because of its particular applicability to our topic. Erikson regards the inner institution of "ego identity" as crucial to healthy personality and defines it as "a sense of identity, continuity, and distinctiveness. . . . a sense of who one is, of knowing where one belongs, of knowing what one wants to do. . . a sense accrued throughout the stages of childhood that there is continuity and sameness and meaning to

one's life history." Ego identity, as something both conscious and unconscious, is normally established at the end of adolescence, according to Erikson, and sufferers from impaired or insufficient ego identity cannot "integrate all the various steps of their previous ego development, nor achieve a sense of belonging from their status in their society." By contrast, healthy ego identity entails "feeling that his past life has a meaning in terms of his future but also from the feeling that the future has a meaning in terms of his past." It is obvious that the typical life history of a child adopted later than infancy, with its lack of continuity between successive, unrelated experiences and relationships—natural parents, institutions, foster homes and adoptive homes—is especially inconducive to healthy establishment of ego identity in Erikson's sense. Such a series of changing worlds for the young child opposes his accrual of feeling identical with himself. Correspondingly, however, this specific impairment may be greatly minimized and corrected by the case worker's therapeutic opportunities as discussed above, particularly as to continuity, meaningful relatedness to past and future, and the restoration of trust. . . .

Perhaps some readers have become impatient by now with what may appear to them as needless exaggeration of the psychological complexity of adoption and the precautions advocated. This attitude may be bolstered by knowing of some apparently happy adoptions accomplished much more simply, either through independent adoption or social agencies with minimal case work. The personal qualifications for adoptive parents and for case workers may seem perfectionistic and the intensive psychological work with unmarried mothers and preadoptive children a lot of fancy nonsense. By way of reply, psychoanalysis provides a microscope whereby otherwise invisible psychic structures and processes come into view. A description of pond water in accordance with structures and movement observed in a drop under the microscope can sound unbelievable to one accustomed to water, but not to microscopes. Although hit-and-miss methods of adoptive placements sometimes do turn out well, reliance on knowledge rather than luck promises better control over the outcomes by adding to the successes and reducing the failures.

Source: Viola W. Bernard, "Application of Psychoanalytic Concepts to Adoption Agency Practice," *Psychoanalysis and Social Work* (1953), reprinted in *Readings in Adoption*, ed. I. Evelyn Smith (New York: Philosophical Library, 1963), 395, 399-400, 407-409, 431-432.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Viola W. Bernard, Can an Adopted Child Replace a Dead Child? 1961

Thank you for sending me the write-up of the conference of January 11, 1961 with Dr. Heiman and the others with respect to policy for requests from families seeking an adoptive child after the loss of their own child. . . .

I agree most heartily with the continued policy of prompt appointments for such couples. I also agree with continuing our policy of postponing any decision to place a child with such a couple until after they have had a period for mourning. However, I do want to add a comment to the reasoning underlying these procedures and policies. In addition to the reasons outlined in the minutes of the conference with Dr. Heiman, with which of course I am in agreement, I do want to emphasize that in my experience there is an even more frequent and "normal" psychological contraindication to placement prior to the mourning process. This reason has to do with the fact that the urge to adopt immediately after the loss of one's own child is of necessity a restitutive effort in which the adoptive child is inevitably experienced emotionally as a replacement of the lost child. In fact, this mechanism provides the intensity of the wish to adopt at such a time. From adoptive experience we know that this replacement effort of one child for another leads to inevitable unhappiness for both the adopted child and the adoptive parents and is therefore contraindicated. If the specific child who has been lost to these parents can be mourned and finally through the process of mourning relinquished, or to put it another way, if and when the parents through the mourning process can accept the fact of the reality of the loss of their child, then the restitutive nature of the adoption can work out psychologically constructively because what is being restituted then can be the experience of being parents and this can be a healthy restitution rather than having the specific child that is adopted perceived and experienced as if it were the dead child. . . .

Source: Memo from Viola W. Bernard to Mrs. Florence Brown, July 12, 1961, Viola W. Bernard Papers,

Box 157, Folder 8, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Viola W. Bernard, A Probable Case of Psychogenic Infertility, 1942



In this undated photograph, [Viola Bernard](#) is feeding a baby. Bernard devoted much of her career to promoting [child welfare](#), but she never raised children herself.

*Viola Bernard had an enduring interest in understanding the many causes of [infertility](#). From the 1940s through the 1960s, she conducted a series of studies at Columbia University, some small and others large, in hopes of illuminating the relevance of psychological factors and pinpointing their relationship to the physiological and biochemical factors at play in reproductive medicine. Bernard was always especially interested in infertility cases with no apparent "physical" cause because these suggested the possibility that infertility might be largely or exclusively "psychogenic." Such cases came to the attention of adoption agencies regularly, as this letter illustrates.*

Dear Mrs. Brenner,

I am returning the F chart, as agreed, before your interview today. This is indeed an interesting record and I am glad you made it possible for us to have the doctor's report about the sterility and the measures to overcome it. I think his report reinforces your impression that here is a case in which unconscious anxieties and conflicts may well have contributed to the ability to conceive. By the references both by client and physician to "unnatural methods," I presume they might mean artificial insemination, although, of course, I cannot be sure. This may be brought out in your interview.

Two years of course is not a very long time as sterility problems go, particularly where the degree of marital compatibility is playing a role, as seems likely here. Some times, therefore, even without psychotherapy, a couple may be able to work things out better in their mutual adjustment that in turn relieves the emotional interference with pregnancy. In any event, Mrs. F. might be reassured by having this pointed out to temper her impatience and frustration at not getting immediate guarantee of a

adoptive baby. I feel this is one of the cases where it would be undesirable to hurry a home study—in contrast to feeling that desirable in most cases—because the interval, if prolonged, may permit events to better determine their feeling about adoption. Thus I think here I would utilize the realistic limitations of time to project the picture of possibilities for her into the future.

The other two courses that are open to you, I suppose, are giving a final turndown now or suggesting psychiatric help. As I sense the case, which is always less vivid than your own firsthand impression, I would be hesitant in referring her to a psychiatrist, with all the threats involved. . . . I would also refrain, I think, from giving a complete refusal, but, instead, point out the short time of her marriage, as indicated above, with the time limitations of the agency and suggest, therefore, that she make her application now and then let you know in six months how matters stand.

Part of my thinking in this is tied up with our frequent observation of pregnancy not only after adoption but after the decision to adopt. If Mrs. F. is made to feel she has not decided to adopt because of our refusal, that factor—for whatever it is worth—would not be available to her in bringing about the natural pregnancy she thinks she wants. On the other hand, if she could relax a little, know that there need be nothing particularly wrong with her just because she has not had a baby in two years—and that in time she be considered for adoption and has done something about it by filling out the application,—it is possible that she will resolve this conflict—and we won't have to decide—either by getting pregnant or by becoming aware that she doesn't want to be. This does not mean, of course, that I advise our committing ourselves to promising a baby.

In your interview I think it might be wise to elicit more about the marital adjustment, the length of courtship, etc. . . . The material this elicits may make your course of action plainer and go counter to much of the above that I have written. . . .

Source: Viola W. Bernard to Ruth F. Brenner, November 24, 1942, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 160, Folder 3, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Viola W. Bernard, Review of a Manuscript About the Incidence of Psychiatric Problems in Adoptees, 1986

*The following excerpt is drawn from a peer review that [Viola Bernard](#) wrote for Hospital and Community Psychiatry, a professional journal. Even though she was a trained psychoanalyst and the [Freudian](#) tradition was an important source for [psychopathology studies](#) revealing adoption as a factor in emotional and developmental problems in children, Viola Bernard sharply criticized clinicians and researchers, such as [Marshall Schechter](#), who claimed to show that adoption led directly to increased psychiatric risks. One of the things that is notable about this excerpt is that it was written in 1986, when a virtual consensus in professional and public opinion supported the belief that adoption was a "risk factor" of one kind or another. Psychopathology studies had been vigorously contested during the 1960s. For example, H. David Kirk, author of [Shared Fate](#), protested the methodological flaws of psychopathology research. One of Bernard's most astute observations here is that modern adoption was a moving target rather than a static institution whose psychiatric implications remained constant. Practices with a direct bearing on children's mental health had changed dramatically during the postwar era and, in Bernard's view at least, had generally improved. These included the expansion of adoptability that [special needs adoptions](#) represented, changing thinking about "[telling](#)," and the growth of reform movements that criticized [confidentiality and sealed records](#) and promoted [search and reunion](#).*

### Comments for the attention of the authors:

The paper is described as a literature review of "the incidence" and elsewhere of the "reported incidence" of psychiatric problems among adoptees. But instead of overall incidence, it actually reports on the extent of adoptee over-representation in clinical settings, and their rate of service utilization, as compared with non-adoptees in the same caseload. Rate of inpatient and outpatient over-representation and service utilization cannot be equated with overall incidence of disorder among the total adoptee population. By now, there is general professional agreement that various diagnostic categories of adoptees are over-represented in such settings, as reported in most, though not all, of the articles you discuss. You note such variations, but mainly in terms of their numerical differences. Actually,

many other variables seem relevant to these differences, such as the quality and methodologies of the research, and the range of time periods when the studies were done with respect to the changes in adoption practices and in the adoptee population.

In a single sentence in the Abstract, you combine the finding from the literature of "increased risk of psychiatric problems in adoptees" with the generalization that this is "because of genetic transmission of disease." Thus, the first part of the sentence refers to incidence, the stated purpose of the review, while the second part makes the conceptual leap that the incidence revealed by the literature reviewed is caused by genetics. The references cited do not in toto support this causation. . . .

Your basic method of assessing "incidence" of adoptee psychiatric disorder is by comparing the numbers of adoptees and non-adoptees with similar symptoms in a given clinical setting, as well as with the rate of such symptoms in the general population. In fairness to you, this is a widely used approach in the literature about the rate of adoptee psychopathology. Nevertheless, not only do some of us not regard the over-representation at clinics as a reliable indicator of the true incidence, but we also challenge the appropriateness of the comparison groups. Non-adopted children comprise the bulk of the child population, so the "non-adopted" as a category is too undifferentiated. Among the non-adopted are groups who lack permanent or adequate parenting for diverse reasons, as do adoptees, and who require substitute care, including institutions, foster care, or catch-as-catch-can informal arrangements. As a more appropriate method, I think, some follow-up studies compare adjustment after adoption, foster care, and post-placement return to biological parents. . . . Thus, the apparent error in comparing rates of maladjusted adoptees in clinical settings with maladjusted non-adoptees in those settings, and psychiatric illness in the general population is that the first category seems too narrow, the second too broad, and the third statistically questionable. . . .

The reliability of conclusions from this paper seems diminished by the time span covered by the bibliography, in view of the rapid pace of changes in adoption practices over the past few decades, and still in process—changes that are significant to the extent and nature of adoptee problems. Thus, a major shift in social philosophy has expanded the range of adoptability to what used to be termed "hard-to-place" children. These include children who are older than formerly, of a wider range of ethnicity, and with mental, emotional, and physical handicaps. . . . These [also] include, for example, various adoptive practices: the impact on adjustment of telling and not telling adoptees about their adoption and how to tell them and when; problems of individuation and identity related to needs for direct contact with natural parents (i.e., searching and reunions); recognition of some degree of cerebral damage among some adopted children referable to inadequacies of prenatal and perinatal care; screening and helping adoptive-parent applicants in terms of their own adoption-related psychological problems; inclusion of a broader range of adoptive parents in terms of SES [socio-economic status] through such means as subsidized

adoptions, and converting prior foster parents into adoptive parents.

So in sum, I reluctantly conclude that this painstaking and interesting review not only does not advance knowledge beyond what is already accepted—the genetic risks of schizophrenia and affective illness, for example, or adoptee over-representation in clinical settings—but also, for the reasons mentioned, can provide a misleading picture of adoption.

Source: Review Form for *Hospital and Community Psychiatry*, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 59, Folder 6, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman

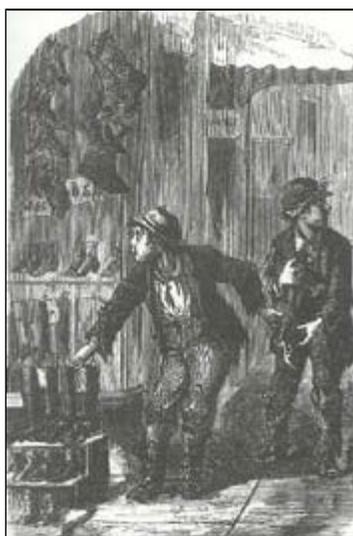


## Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years' Work Among Them*, 1872

Brace depicted "the fortunes of a street waif" in four stages, from homeless child to young thief, drunkard, and imprisoned criminal.



first stage



My great object in the present work is to prove to society. . . that the cheapest and most efficacious way of dealing with the "Dangerous Classes" of large cities, is not to punish them, but to prevent their growth; to throw the influences of education and discipline and religion about the abandoned and destitute youth of our large towns; to so change their material circumstances, and draw them under the influence of the moral and fortunate classes, that they shall grow up as useful producers and members of society, able and inclined to aid it in its progress.

In the view of this book, the class of a large city most dangerous to its property, its morals and its political life, are the ignorant, destitute, untrained, and abandoned youth: the outcast street-children grown up to be voters, to be the implements of demagogues, the "feeders" of the criminals, and the sources of domestic outbreaks and violations of law. . . .

The founders of the Children's Aid Society early saw that the best of all Asylums for the outcast child, is the *farmer's home*.

The United States have the enormous advantage over all other countries, in the treatment of difficult questions of pauperism and reform, that they possess a practically unlimited area of arable land. The demand for labor on this land is beyond any present supply. Moreover, the cultivators of the soil are in America our most solid and intelligent class. From the nature of their circumstances, their laborers, or "help," must be members of their families, and share in their social tone. It is, accordingly, of the utmost importance to them to train up children who shall aid in their work, and be associates of their own children. A servant who is nothing but a servant, would be, with them, disagreeable and inconvenient. They like to educate their own "help." With their overflowing supply of food also, each new mouth in the household brings no drain on their means. Children are a

second stage



third stage



fourth stage

blessing, and the mere feeding of a young boy or girl is not considered at all.

With this fortunate state of things, it was but a natural inference that the important movement now inaugurating for the benefit of the unfortunate children of New York should at once strike upon a plan of

#### EMIGRATION

Simple and most effective as this ingenious scheme now seems—which has accomplished more in relieving New York of youthful crime and misery than all other charities together—at the outset it seemed as difficult and perplexing as does the similar cure proposed now in Great Britain for a more terrible condition of the children of the poor.

Among other objections, it was feared that the farmers would not want the children for help; that, if they took them, the latter would be liable to ill-treatment, or, if well treated, would corrupt the virtuous children around them, and thus New York would be scattering seeds of vice and corruption all over the land.

Accidents might occur to the unhappy little ones thus sent, bringing odium on the benevolent persons who were dispatching them to the country. How were places to be found? How were the demand and supply for children's labor to be connected? How were the right employers to be selected? And, when the children were placed, how were their interests to be watched over, and acts of oppression or hard dealing prevented or punished? Were they to be indentured, or not? If this was the right scheme, why had it not been tried long ago in our cities or in England?

These and innumerable similar difficulties and objections were offered to this projected plan of relieving the city of its youthful pauperism and suffering. They all fell to the ground before the confident efforts to carry out a well-laid scheme; and practical experience has justified none of them. . . .

#### PROVIDING COUNTRY HOMES.

#### THE OPPOSITION TO THIS REMEDY—ITS EFFECTS

This most sound and practical of charities always met with an intense opposition here from a certain class, for bigoted reasons. The poor were early taught, even from the altar, that the whole scheme of emigration was one of "proselytizing," and that every child thus taken forth was made a "Protestant." Stories were spread, too, that these unfortunate children were re-named in the West, and that thus even brothers and sisters might meet and perhaps marry! Others scattered the pleasant information that the little ones "were sold as slaves," and that the agents enriched themselves from the transaction.

These were the obstacles and objections among the poor themselves. So powerful were these, that it would often happen that a poor woman, seeing her child becoming ruined on the streets, and soon plainly to come forth as a criminal, would prefer this to a good home in the West; and we would have the discouragement of beholding the lad a thief behind prison-bars, when a journey to the country would have saved him. Most distressing of all was, when a drunken mother or father followed a half-starved boy, already scarred and sore with their brutality, and snatched him from one of our parties of little emigrants, all joyful with their new prospects, only to beat him and leave him on the streets. . . .

Source: Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years' Work Among Them* (New York: Wynkoop & Hallenbeck, 1872), i-ii, 225-227, 234-235.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Ethel E. Branham, The Los Angeles County Bureau of Adoptions Reflects on Its Transracial Adoption Program, 1964



This photo was included in a brochure produced by the Children's Home Society of California in the mid-1970s. Like the Los Angeles Bureau of Adoptions, its efforts to provide adoption services to African-American children were chiefly devoted to locating black parents for black children.

*The Los Angeles Bureau of Adoptions, founded in 1949, actively recruited African-American and Mexican adoptive parents, believing that **matching** was as important for minority as for white children. This large public agency also began experimenting with **transracial adoptions** during the 1950s. In this excerpt, Ethel Branham described that program. She clarified that the most sensitive (but not most numerous) cases involved "Negro" children requested by white couples, reported that her agency gradually moved toward greater acceptance of these adoptions, and presented their demographic characteristics in some detail. Although the long-term outcomes of transracial adoptions were unknown at the time, Branham agreed with well-known psychoanalyst Judd Marmor that "non-ethnocentric" couples and families had distinct advantages when it came to transracial family-making. Its own **outcome study** showed that the black children it had placed with white parents were adjusting well, but the Los Angeles agency acknowledged that **transracial adoptions** were, at best, only a partial solution for African-American and mixed-race children. In 1966, the Bureau became the first agency in the country to openly recruit **single parents**. The effort was designed largely to find permanent adoptive homes for **African-American children**.*

---

The Los Angeles County Bureau of Adoptions' experience in transracial placements substantiates the conclusion reached by Dr. Marmor that "non-ethnocentric families" are the ones which have the added ingredient that makes a "good family" better. The white family that can accept and love a Negro child is more inner-directed and emotionally independent, and for this reason, is considered, by our agency, as one of our best families. . . .

The Bureau of Adoptions has had considerable experience in transracial placements—at least a decade—which may be surprising, when one considers that we have not yet reached our fifteenth birthday. . . .

Prior to April, 1952, when Walter A. Heath became the Director of the Bureau of Adoptions, we had made very few transracial placements. Eleven Mexican-American and six American Indian children has [sic] been placed with Anglo families. Since 1953, we have not counted these types of adoptions as transracial; however, technically, they could be so considered. Neither have we included Oriental-Caucasian child placed with an Oriental family, in spite of the fact that, generally speaking, Orientals were not tolerant of non-Oriental mixtures. We made our first such placement in 1956, the next in 1957, and it was two more years before the third placement could be effected. However, in this area also, the pattern is changing.

The Bureau's willingness to participate in this meeting comes from its experience in having made over 204 transracial placements. It should be remembered that this figure excludes the Mexican-American and American Indian children placed after 1953. The 204 placements does [sic] include: Twelve non-Caucasian but not Negro children placed with white families; 118 children—at least one-half Oriental, Malayan, Polynesian, or East Indian—who were also given new white parents; 17 other racially mixed children placed with couples who had married across racial lines, and who accepted children with an additional racial component; 4 non-Negro children placed with Negro families; 2 part-Negro children placed with couples who married across racial lines, but non-Negro; and 34 Negro children placed with 28 white families. These latter 34 placements we wish to consider today, in relation to Dr. Marmor's paper.

The Bureau realizes that this is not a large number of placements. However, it does represent a growing maturity on the Bureau's part. We have had other families which might have been used for some of the Negro children, but we have used them for other children who were also waiting for homes. The Bureau's attitude has changed. We no longer think that a white family who specifically ask for a part Negro child is neurotic and, for this reason, deny their request. Now we take a more selective position of attracting these non-ethnocentric couples. . . .

The 28 families who accepted Negro children have the characteristics Dr. Marmor has described as "encompassing non ethnocentricity". For the most part, their level of maturity has been high, as has been their capacity for frustration tolerance. However, this capacity for frustration, in several of the placements did not need to be tested in terms of the child's racial difference, because the Negro strain was not discernible.

A close look at these families reveals a high level of intelligence; 16 fathers are college graduates; five of these have Doctorate degrees, and three Masters' degrees. In addition, 9 have had

from one to three years of college training, while only 3 have not graduated from high school. One mother is a Master of Arts; 6 others are college graduates, and 11 more have some college training; only 2 have not completed high school.

The occupations, for the most part involve working with people rather than things. They are, for example, college professors, teachers, managers, supervisors, foremen, businessmen, entertainers and a writer. The women, at the time of placement and post placement, were unemployed.

Interestingly enough, to substantiate Dr. Marmor's theory regarding relatively non-authoritarian attitudes toward religion, eleven families were Jewish, and 8 were either Unitarian or non-denominational, 6 were Catholic, and the rest non-authoritarian Protestant.

There were 8 families which could not be considered as "room for one more". These families had resolved their feelings around infertility and, in addition, felt that adoption was acceptance of difference, even though an adopted child might be of their own ethnic origin. The room-for-one-more families included those with from 2 to 6 natural children. Out of 10 one-child families, there was just one natural child.

Four of the families, three of whom had natural children, were foster parents for the Negro children before adopting them. . . .

These 28 families certainly are not the ones Dr. Marmor describes as being of marginal eligibility; that is, falling within the group of families that agencies at one time would not accept. Those were the days when we had arbitrary policies around age, citizenship, number of children, etc., in order to screen families out, rather than in.

The workers' need to thoroughly face and resolve their own inter-racial ambivalence and unconscious prejudices was borne out by the fact that one adoption worker made 27.27% of these transracial placements; the next highest was 9.09%. The majority of the adoption workers have not developed the capacity or courage to operate in this controversial area, even though they may have developed skills in other types of transracial placements.

Since 1950, the Bureau has placed 1150 Negro children. Although this may sound like a very impressive number, we presently need to plan for 225 additional children, with no diminution expected in the future. . . .

At this point in the Bureau of Adoptions' history, we desperately need to evaluate the pros and cons of these transracial adoptions. . . .

The findings presented today are relevant to current and future concerns of those in the field of adoption. Every community, every agency, may not be ready to enter into this relatively untested dimension of transracial placements. Those who feel, the test of the pie is in the tasting, will need to wait many years before these adoptions can be thoroughly evaluated. Others who are keenly sensitive to the barometric changes toward "equality for all" in the broader social area, will muster up the courage to plan creatively for all children who need adoptive placement. . . .

Source: Ethel E. Branham, "Transracial Adoptions: When a Good Family Is Not Good Enough," pp. 1-4 (paper presented at the National Conference of Social Work, May 1964), Viola Bernard Papers, Box 162, Folder 7, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Ethel Branham, "One Parent Adoptions," 1970



When the Los Angeles County Bureau of Adoptions began to arrange **single parent adoptions**, only one of the first forty placements was with a single father.

When the County of Los Angeles Department of Adoptions (then called the Bureau of Adoptions) was established in June 1949, it was charged with the special responsibility of finding adoptive homes for children who are difficult to place—children of minority racial groups or of mixed racial parentage and children with severe medical problems. The agency services were also offered to all mothers or expectant mothers who were considering relinquishing a child for adoption. . . .

The Department has supplanted its spotty and spasmodic recruitment efforts with an aggressive, full-time publicity program. It has also reconsidered a longtime policy of automatically rejecting lone adults as potential adoptive parents. Late in 1965, it began placing selected children for whom no other homes could be found with persons who had no marital partner in their home.

This practice became possible because that year the California State Department of Social Welfare revised its adoption regulations to allow acceptance of single persons as adoptive parents. The new policy clearly reiterated the established principle of adoption practice that *a two-parent family is the best of all possible choices for an adoptable child*, but it recognized the fact that two-parent families could not be found for all children needing the security of a permanent home.

In late 1965 the Los Angeles Department of Adoptions had registered with it more than 300 children available for adoption for whom adoptive couples were not readily available. This group included about 275 healthy Negro and part-Negro children of various ages, 60 Mexican-American babies, 18 children of mixed racial background other than part-Negro, and several Caucasian, Negro, and Mexican-American children who had severe medical problems. When intensive efforts to find two-parent adoptive homes for these children failed, the Department decided to look

into the possibility of finding them one-parent families.

The Department made its first one-parent placement in December 1965. . . . During the 2 years 1966 and 1967, the Department placed 40 children for adoption in homes with only one parent—approximately one-half of 1 percent of all the children placed by the Department for adoption during that period. They were placed with single women, divorcees, widows, and even a single man.

To learn what kind of parents these children acquired, the agency in 1969 reviewed the records of 36 of these 40 placements. . . .

### **Male companionship**

The need for children, especially boys, to have a father figure to serve as a role model for sexual identification has been a major reason adoption agencies have avoided placing children in one-parent homes. . . .

The records show that the workers have paid special heed to the availability of male companionship for both the adoptive mother and the adopted child. Most of the 35 lone women with whom children were placed had close male relatives interested in the adopted child—fathers, brothers, sons, nephews, and, in a few instances, even former husbands. Thus the children had grandfathers, uncles, brothers, cousins, and even adult male friends who could give them the kind of intimate contacts needed for male identification. . . .

Two thirds of the women had been married. This prior experience plus a yearning for the opposite sex, evident in all the mothers, suggests that these single parents could compensate effectively for not having a man in the home. Most of them dated regularly. Many had interests and hobbies involving group activities that included both sexes. Men, both in and outside their families, seemed interested and willing to become father surrogates. . . .

### **Income and employment**

Placing children for adoption with women who are employed full time is another break with traditional adoption practice. But today the working mother is commonplace. The agency has therefore not regarded such employment as a sufficient reason for keeping a warm, emotionally stable woman from becoming a parent of a child desperately in need of a home of his own. It does, of course, look into the adoptive applicant's plan for providing child care while she is at work. . . .

### **Evaluation planned**

The Los Angeles County Department of Adoptions has shown that

many persons without marital partners do have a great deal to offer children and that they will do so when given an opportunity. The review of these 36 case records strongly suggests that the children involved have found true "familiness." It does not tell us, of course, anything about how the children are responding to the experience. Only time can tell—time for the children to grow up and for the agency to make a careful evaluation of their adjustment at periodic intervals.

The Department is now planning such a longitudinal study. . . .

The one-parent home is just one resource for helping to close the gap between available hard-to-place children and adoptive families. Communities committed to the welfare of their children will explore every feasible plan for providing children with adequate permanent care. . . .

Source: Ethel Branham, "One Parent Adoptions," *Children* 17 (3) (May-June 1970): 103-104, 105, 106, 107.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Charles E. Brown, "Agency Seeks Homes for Negro Kids, Single Persons May Adopt," 1966



Walter A. Heath, Director of the Los Angeles County Bureau of Adoptions, talking to a potential [single adoptive parent](#).

*This excerpt illustrates the direct links between the origins of [single parent adoptions](#), [African-American adoptions](#), and [transracial adoptions](#).*

---

Adoption officials in Los Angeles County, for the first time, are seeking single persons—specifically Negroes—who wish to adopt a child.

Since the program was approved last year, three one-parent adoptions—two Negroes and one Caucasian—have been approved.

According to Walter A. Heath, director of adoptions for the county, no other agency in the country has undertaken such a program. However, there have been "unique" instances where single persons—usually relatives—have been permitted to adopt, he said.

The "single parent" program is intended to provide a home for "hard-to-place children." Negro children are hardest to place. Heath said there are 275 Negro children "growing up in foster homes" while virtually no white children are available for adoption.

"We want to find permanent, secure homes for all our children," Heath said. He added that the agency prefers placing children where there are two parents "but one parent is better than none."

The Child Welfare League of America, which sets national adoption standards does "not now contemplate adoptions by unmarried persons," but the subject is under study, it was reported. League approval could cause the idea to spread to other areas of the country, thereby sharply reducing the number of unadopted Negro children.

"The most important qualifications to adopt," Heath said, "are love of children, a happy home, reasonably good health, a good outlook and the ability to love a child not born into the family."

The important thing for the children, as Heath sees it, is that they have a family of their own. He feels "it's devastating" to watch youngsters grow up moving in a succession of foster homes and institutions. "We don't want that to happen to our kids," he said.

Under Heath's direction, the Los Angeles agency has placed more Negro children than any in U.S. history. After he joined the agency in 1952, 52 Negroes were adopted; last year 199 were given homes. In 1965, too, 14 "part-Negro" children were adopted by white families.

The county, said Heath, has no racial policy. "But," he added, "we try to give parents the kind of children they want."

"Most families want children who are like them." Heath said, to his knowledge, two children classified as white have been adopted by Negroes.

Although he is attempting to place older children in "single parent" homes, Heath stated that some infants will go to them.

There are 25 applicants awaiting the agency's approval to become parents. Most of the anxious, would-be parents are single, Heath said.

Source: Charles E. Brown, "Agency Seeks Homes for Negro Kids, Single Persons May Adopt," 1966, newspaper clipping, probably the New York Times, Viola Bernard Papers, Box 64, Folder 7, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman





## Pearl Buck, "The Children Waiting: The Shocking Scandal of Adoption," 1955



Buck with a Welcome House child, late 1960s

*Because of Buck's popularity, her article criticizing agency social workers, sectarian institutions, and the reigning **matching** paradigm attracted a great deal of attention, including a **letter of protest** from Joseph Reid, the Executive Director of the **Child Welfare League of America**.*

---

Two babies came [to me] from adoption agencies, where they were considered unadoptable because it was difficult to find adoptive parents to "match" them. I was sure that there must be good families, matching or not, who could love these babies and indeed there were. . . .

Yet I continue acutely and constantly aware of the thousands of children waiting. . . . These are the citizens of my new world, the children without parents and the parents without children, pressing eagerly toward each other, and yet unable to reach each other. A barrier stands between, a high wall, and in the middle of the wall is a narrow gate, kept locked until a social agency unlocks it a little way and lets one child through at a time. . . .

Nobody knows truthfully how many children are in our orphanages. There are many kinds of orphanages but the largest number belong to religious groups. It was once necessary, I do not doubt, for religious orders to care for orphans, but certainly that day is past. Parents are waiting to adopt them. True, it would be very difficult to close these orphanages, not because of the children but because of vested interests. . . .

The rights of natural parents over children must be defined. Children are not property, but they are considered so under our laws. . . . There is no magic in blood relationship when parents alienate their children by neglect or desertion. Yet under our laws and our customs blood still takes precedence, blood instead of the reality of love. . . . The human qualities of love and understanding and acceptance alone should decide the fate of a child rather than race and religion.

Where all else is equal, of course similarity in race and religion is good but human destiny should not be based on these two elements. . . . I venture to say, were the dead hands of neglectful relatives removed, were the divisive and possessive jealousies of religious groups replaced by the spirit of true religion. . . .that nearly all children, at least up to the age of 12, would be easily adoptable. No, when I think of teen-age boys and girls I see children still hungry for home and parents and I withdraw the age limitation.

And how. . . .could we ever get so many children adopted when our social agencies cannot cope with what we have? I submit a controversial answer. It could be done if the red tape of adoption procedures were eliminated and only essentials kept. There are, I am sure, sincere and unselfish social workers and religious persons in the field of child welfare and adoption who honestly believe that they are doing the best that can be done, unaware that they themselves are the hindrances because they are faithful to red tape and encrusted in tradition. . . .

There is a surplus of children but the parents who are waiting are prevented from adopting them. . . . Let no small arguments be raised here. It is idle to retort, for example, that adoptive parents usually want a perfect child, that most children are not perfect, and so on. They can be helped to want a handicapped children, a child of mixed origin, or any child at all. . . . We can tear down the walls that keep them prisoners of red tape, prejudice and religious division. . . . We can refuse to accept the excuse that there are not enough children to satisfy adoptive parents.

Source: Pearl S. Buck, "The Children Waiting: The Shocking Scandal of Adoption," *Woman's Home Companion*, September 1955, 33, 129-132.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

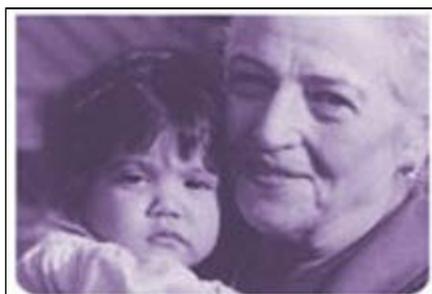
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman





## Pearl Buck, "I Am the Better Woman for Having My Two Black Children," 1972



Pearl Buck with a Welcome House child

*This personal reflection by [Pearl Buck](#) about her own experience with [transracial](#) and [transnational adoptions](#) expresses her lifelong commitment to intercultural understanding and belief that it was possible for love and common humanity to overcome racial and national prejudice. The story is especially interesting, however, because it was published at a time of enormous controversy over the adoption of black children by white parents. For a view quite different than Buck's, see the statement opposing such adoptions by the [National Association of Black Social Workers](#).*

My husband and I thought our family of five adopted children was complete when she first came to us. Her birth mother was a girl in a small town in Germany. Her father was an American soldier who was killed. He was black. The German mother said his black child was despised in her town and had no future there. She begged his university president in Washington to find the father's family.

I was a trustee of the university. We tried to find the family, but they had disappeared without trace. What then should we do with the child? From experience we knew that the little black children from Germany had difficulty adjusting to black mothers.

The president looked at me. "Would you. . ."

"Of course I will," I said. "We'd love to have another child."

I lived in a white community. But I knew it would make no difference to me or to my husband that this child was black, and since it made no difference to us, it should make no difference to our white children. If it did, I wanted to know it and see to it that attitudes were changed. If there were wrong attitudes in the school or community, I would see to that, too. If the basic love was in the home, the child would be fortified enough to be a survivor. . . .

She arrived at our house on Thanksgiving Day—five years old, bone-thin, weighing only 35 pounds, speaking only German. She had been airsick, she was unwashed, she was terrified, but she did not cry. Later, years later, she told me her German mother had simply put her on the plane without telling her where she was going. She had promised to return in a minute, but had never come back.

That plucky little thing, so alone, those enormous haunted eyes! Tears come to my eyes now when I think of her that day. I took her in my arms and held her. Her heart was beating so hard that it shook her small, emaciated frame. . . .

She was our child. When my husband died, she was my child. I am glad he lived long enough to share in her adoption. The ceremony was a double one. I asked the judge to ask her, too, to adopt us. She was then old enough to understand. It was a beautiful and sacred little ceremony, just the four of us in his private chambers. It sealed our love.

The years passed. She went to public school, developed a strong personality, fearless, independent, sometimes difficult. She had to be rid of all fear before she gave up lying as a protection. The result today is a strong, outspoken, fearless woman with a mind of her own. And yet love, our love, has helped her to try to understand other people. She understands both black people and white. She is in the deepest, truest sense a bridge between two peoples, to both of whom she belongs by birth. . . .

In China, I was the wrong color, for my skin was white instead of brown, my eyes were blue instead of black, and my hair was light instead of dark. I taught my children to feel sorry for people who made rude or nasty remarks about such differences. . . .

Adopting a black child into my white family has taught me much I could not otherwise have known. Although I have many black friends and read many books by black writers, I rejoice that I have had the deep experience of being mother to a black child. I have seen her grow to womanhood in my house and go from it to her own home, a happy bride and wife. It has been a rich experience and it continues to be. It has brought me into the whole world. . . .

"Mommy, please find me a little sister." It was a natural request at a time when the older children were growing up

and off to college.

Being always in touch with the children of American servicemen and Asian women in Asia—those piteous lonely children whom no country claims—I found in a Japanese orphanage a little seven-year-old girl and brought her home with me. She, too, was of a black father. She, too, I adopted. At first she spoke only Japanese, but her lively mind soon discovered English.

How my two brown children enlivened our household! . . .

Let me say here that the attitude of adoptive parents is most important. If the parents are doubtful, if they are not strong enough, secure enough in themselves to accept children of a race different from their own, they should not adopt such children. My black children knew and know that color means nothing to me. Whatever they might meet outside they could cope with because at home there was only love and acceptance. . . .

In sum, should white people adopt homeless black children? My answer is yes, if they feel the same love for a black child as for a white one. . . .

I would not have missed the interesting experience of adopting children of races different than my own. They have taught me much. They have stretched my mind and heart. They have brought me, through love, into kinship with peoples different from my own conservative, proud, white ancestry. I am the better woman, the wiser human being, for having my two black children. And I hope and believe they are the better, too, and the more understanding of me and my people because of their white adoptive parents.

At least I know that there is no hate in them. No, there is no hate in them at all.

Source: Pearl Buck, "I Am the Better Woman for Having My Two Black Children," *Today's Health*, January 1972, 21-22, 64.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Edmond J. Butler, "Standards of Child Placing and Supervision," 1919

### DEFINITION OF TERMS

Placing-Out—The term "placing-out" has acquired, during the last fifteen or twenty years, a distinctive meaning which should be generally known, especially to charity workers, in order that the confusion which has resulted from its improper use may be avoided. It does not mean boarding-out, indenturing, baby-farming, the securing of employment or the mere transferring of the custody of a child from one person to another or to an institution without regard to the object of each transfer. It means placing a placeable child in a free family home for the purpose of making it a member of the family with whom it is placed. . . .

### THE CHILD

As a general proposition, any normal healthy child is a placeable child, but aside from this subjective qualification there are many conditions which would render placing-out undesirable.

The age of placeable children may be briefly stated as follows: Boys to and including the age of fourteen; girls to and including the age of ten. The placing of girls over ten years of age, particularly when there are other children in the family, does not give promise of good results. The most flagrant exploitation of child labor and neglect of scholastic training occurs in the cases of girls between the ages of ten and fifteen. The experience of placing-out agencies will show that the most successful results occur in the cases of children placed at or below the age of five years. No child should be placed who is suffering from any physical or mental defect. All such children should receive the attention necessary to bring them up to normal standards before placement. . . .

### THE FOSTER PARENTS

In view of the fact that the vast majority of the families of our country consist of persons having a limited amount of wealth, an ordinary education, and little or no distinction of a social character, it would be unwise, if not futile, to set up standards for foster parents of so high a character as to limit our possibilities for success. . . .

We should aim to secure for foster parents, persons who desire a child for the child's sake. They should have an income, with a reasonable prospect of its continuance, sufficient to ensure proper care and support of the child. They should not be advanced in years, as otherwise the child might lack the continuous care necessary to enable it to reach manhood under their training and supervision. They should be persons of good physical and mental health, industrious and thrifty, should possess at least average education and intelligence, and should enjoy the respect and endorsement of their pastors and neighbors as law-abiding and respectable citizens of their communities. They should be of the same religion as that of the child to be placed with them, and should be vouched for by their pastors as persons who are practical in the performance of their religious duties and as persons who will provide religious training for the child assigned to them. . . .

#### SUPERVISION

Within a month after a child has been placed it should be visited by an agent of the placing-out society with a view to learning whether the home fits the child and whether the child fits the home and is a welcome member of it. Thereafter the child should be regularly visited by the agent, not less than twice each year and as much oftener as the necessities of the case demand. No person or society should engage in doing placing-out work unless prepared to follow this initial feature by providing adequate supervision continued for the period necessary to ensure good results. To place out without such supervision is a crime and should be treated accordingly. . . .

Source: Edmond J. Butler, "Standards of Child Placing and Supervision," in *Standards of Child Welfare: A Report of the Children's Bureau Conferences*, U.S. Children's Bureau Conference Series No. 1, Bureau Publication No. 60 (Washington D.C: Government Printing Office, 1919), 353-357.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman





## Miss Elizabeth Campbell to Bessie Irvin, April 4, 1956



Children of mixed American and Korean parentage during the Korean War, 1950s.

April 4, 1956

Dear Miss Irvin,

I have been interested in the work of World Vision, Inc. for several years, and when they began bringing the little GI-Korean orphans to the United States (Harry Holt in charge of this phase) because they are not well treated by the other Korean children, even to the point of being murdered, I wondered if I might be allowed to take two small girls for adoption.

Mr. Holt wrote that an act of Congress is necessary as I am a single woman so Mr. Teague was written to and he sent forms and bulletins, also wrote that only in a few rare cases have single women been allowed to adopt children. However, the instructions were to write you for guidance, if I understand them correctly. Your advice will be appreciated.

The forms call for giving the names of the orphans, which of course I don't know. If there are couples enough to take all the children Mr. Holt plans to bring (all GI-Korean) that's fine, but if there were not available homes for all I would have liked two little girls as near school age as possible.

I am an elementary (2nd grade) teacher and am retiring shortly at the age of 60 with a pension of approximately \$232 a month, I own my own home, and have further income from two pieces of property sold. I also have an insurance policy which would be put away for an education fund.

My health is good, no high blood pressure or anything like that. I belong to the Presbyterian church, also am one of a large family with nieces & grandnieces—also have brothers, & nephews—so there would be many contacts. The

youngest brother & his wife have agreed "to take over" in the event that anything should happen to me before the children are old enough to be on their own. This brother has two small daughters of his own.

The process of adoption looks very complicated—seven forms were sent—but when you are heard from I will proceed to prepare them.

Sincerely yours,

(Miss) Elizabeth Campbell

Source: Elizabeth Campbell to Bessie Irvin, April 4, 1956, International Social Service, American Branch Papers, Box 10, "Children-Independent Adoption Schemes, Holt, Harry, vol. I 1955-57," Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman

[Timeline](#)[People & Organizations](#)[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)[Topics in Adoption History](#)[Further Reading](#)[Document Archives](#)[Site Index](#)

## The Case of Alice R., 1927

The failure of Alice R.'s family to recognize her mental defect and to agree to her placement in an institution for the feeble-minded was responsible for her remaining in the community following the birth of her first child. Three other children were born to her, all four being of illegitimate birth. When she was illegitimately pregnant for the fifth time she was arrested for adultery and sent to the reformatory, and was later transferred to an institution for the feeble-minded.

In spite of Alice's history her four children were offered for adoption through a newspaper advertisement and were given by the overseer of the poor to a woman who lived in the neighborhood. Within a few months the two older children, a girl of 6 and a boy of 8 years, were removed from this home. The girl was placed in an institution and the boy was taken by relatives, but within less than two years he was sent to an institution for problem boys. The two younger children, boys of 2 years and 10 months, were adopted by Mrs. A. After they had been in the A. home for about two years Mrs. A. decided that she wanted to get rid of them, and a private agency that had been interested in the family from the time of the mother's arrest was instrumental in having them committed to the board of children's guardians. Mr. and Mrs. A. were both of limited intelligence and unstable, and had a mania for taking children. The board of children's guardians had placed the children in a number of family homes prior to the time of the study. Only a few months after their commitment Mrs. A. found where they were and took them home with her. The board allowed her to keep them under supervision, but at the end of three months they were placed in another foster home. Mr. and Mrs. A. tried repeatedly to get the board of children's guardians to release the children from supervision, but their request was not granted.

Source: U.S. Children's Bureau, *Child Welfare in New Jersey, Part 4. Local Provision for Dependent and Delinquent Children in Relation to the State's Program*, Bureau Publication No. 180 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1927), 68.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## The Case of Michael B, 1965

*This case summary from Louise Wise Services was written when the subject, Michael, was a young adult. It illustrates the conviction that interest in [search and reunion](#) was a sign of trouble in adoptees and their adoptive parents, mothers above all, whereas lack of such interest indicated positive adjustment. These beliefs were common among psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, [social workers](#) and other helping professionals, especially during the period from 1940-1970. They were the starting point for many [psychopathology studies](#) and the basis for [home studies](#) that emphasized psychological interpretation. They also served to shore up policies of [confidentiality and sealed records](#).*

There was a unique source of data in this case record—the detailed description by a professional observer of a home visit when Michael was 4. His interaction with his mother and his sister is well described. At the same age Michael was tested by a psychologist, some of whose data are also in this record. . . .

Michael was a very bright (IQ 129), handsome, well built, athletic boy. His adoptive parents' record as applicants to Louise Wise Services unfortunately consisted mostly of correspondence, so there is no data about them prior to adopting Michael. It is clear, however, that they provided well economically, and made an impression upon the agency staff at least to the extent of another placement.

I infer that Mrs. B was able to cope with Michael well prior to Joan's advent. Her obsessive traits did show up before then—bowel training at 5 months, bladder training at 13 months every hour on the hour, bottle weaning by 8 months—but she was apparently able to control Michael, and thus herself, and not to show overt disturbance until his sister arrived.

Mrs. B was an over-indulgent mother. This lack of realistic setting of limits resulted in Michael's having an excessive strong reaction to having Joan come into the family. Already very active and assertive, traits praised by Mrs. B and little disciplined by her, he was bossy to Joan, overly possessive about his toys. From his hitting Joan, it is clear that he resented her openly. Mrs. B. was observed as being distressed by this but unable to

control it. After much hesitation, she did try to do so by punishing M., but he had a tantrum which further defeated her. . . .

Michael showed definite signs of emotional disequilibrium—nailbiting, bed wetting and tantrums, hyperactivity, all probably clustering about a battle for control between his mother and himself. This he appears to have handled by incorporating some obsessive traits into his own personality—emphasis on achievement, work, appearance.

What was not fought out was the lack of warmth for Michael on his mother's part. In my opinion, it is this factor which is responsible for most of his current disturbance. He seems to have become overtly disturbed only in late adolescence, when the need for a relationship with a woman became strong. His pattern of searching out a new girl every year and dropping her is evidence both of the strength of this drive in Michael and of his inability to establish a sustained relationship. While he is openly concerned about being abandoned by his natural mother, I suspect this is a displacement from his adoptive mother. I can only speculate that he fails with young women because of his repressed anger at them and mistrust of them, stemming from his relationship with Mrs. B.

How does his being adopted affect his behavior? He has been preoccupied since 5 with the past and with the true identity of his parents. Whatever else it did, Mrs. B's reading him, *The Chosen Child*, repeatedly at age 3, did not diminish this curiosity. It is fascinating that Joan does not share his involvement with being adopted. Is this not evidence enough to show that it was not the B's technique or manner of handling telling of adoption that, per se, was the main dynamic in Michael's pathologic involvement with it? It suggests that Joan was well integrated into her adoptive parents' life, whereas Michael was not, for reasons cited earlier.

Michael wants to know all about his mother, but not to meet her. Is this a defense against incest desires?

Mrs. Miller's handling of her meeting with Michael was excellent. I was particularly impressed by her skill in imparting to him the agency's knowledge of his past, and her allowing him to take a piece of paper as a tangible, concrete "result" of his long search. Her skillful interpretation of his emotional disturbance, leading him away from his blind search for his mother to the more realistic approach of psychotherapy, was a tour de force.

Source: Dr. Arthur Peck, Summary of B Case, July 16, 1965, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 162, Folder 5, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## The Case of Miss M, 1944-1945



This 1913 photograph shows the Virginia K. Johnson Home, also known as A House of Refuge for Unmarried Mothers, in Dallas, Texas. Many adolescents and young women found themselves "confined" during their unplanned pregnancies in maternity homes like this one. By 1960, approximately 200 licensed maternity homes operated in 44 states, the majority under the auspices of the Florence Crittenton Association of America, Catholic Charities, and the Salvation Army.

*These case notes follow the struggle of one birth mother trying to decide whether or not to place her baby for adoption in the face of shame and stigma. They illustrate the spread of **Freudian** concepts (unconscious motivations, repression, etc.) and therapeutic approaches to nonmarital pregnancy in the **social work** profession during World War II, when geographic mobility and new employment opportunities were creating new sexual possibilities and problems for many women. This **narrative** also offers evidence that many adoption professionals had changed their minds about the risks of separating babies from their **birth parents**. Instead of seriously considering M's various ideas about keeping her baby, the social worker in this case believed that family preservation was unrealistic. From "a reality standpoint," adoption was the only viable option.*

---

10-23-44

Miss M in my office. She is not a very attractive girl, has light brown hair, gray eyes, medium build. As she sat on the edge of her chair, she looked more like a scared little girl than a young woman of 26. I tried to put her at ease but she continued to be very scared and couldn't seem to relax in her chair. I told her that we had not known anything about her before she came and therefore, didn't know just how we could help her. We knew that she wanted shelter but that was all. She was surprised, she thought Dr. B must have told us some things. I assured her that he hadn't and then she became more frightened than ever. Where should she start? I wondered if she wouldn't like to start by telling me something about herself. She talked fairly fluently after that, although somewhat jerkily. Her voice trembled at times and her hands shook. When I wondered if the trip down here was pleasant, she said that she had never been to New York before and that was why the mother insisted the neighbor

come with her. Since the neighbor knew nothing about Miss M's pregnancy, this made it difficult. She told the neighbor that she was coming here to work. She didn't think the neighbor suspected anything even though there was [a] girl obviously pregnant sitting in the waiting room. Miss M quickly said that she noticed her, however, but then she was conscious of such things. I wondered how she had kept her small town from knowing about this but she assured me that nobody but her mother knew. She didn't tell her mother even until she was getting ready to leave. She had told everybody that she was being transferred to a new job with the OPA but her mother told her that she had guessed what the real reason for her coming here was. When she spoke of her mother, her lips trembled and tears came to her eyes. She said that she and her mother had been like sisters and she could have told her mother, only she was afraid it would hurt her. Her father must never know because he is a "victorian." She expressed some scorn at this point. I tried to get a little more feeling from her what home had been like. She had grown up and lived up to two years ago in a small country village outside of R, New York. Her father is a painter and decorator and runs a small farm on the side. She has just one brother, W. . . . I noticed that every time she mentioned her mother, she started to cry.

Miss M could talk more easily and readily about the father of her baby. He is a man almost twice her age, who is on the Rationing Board in the office where she was working. She didn't think anyone in the small town of R knew of their relationship, at least she hoped they didn't. She thought they had been very discreet. Of course, they walked to work every day and usually walked home to her boarding house together but after dark, they met in out of the way places. He is a Catholic, married unhappily. His wife "holds the purse-strings." She knows that nothing further can come of this relationship but she knows, too, that she can never go back there again and work with him or "it will start all over again." She is crazy about him, she said. She should not be but she is. . . .

She gave me the picture of a girl who had grown up in a small town, been kept very close to home by a father who did not approve of dances, and kindred activities. Even when she went down to R to work two years ago, her father insisted that she come home every week-end. She gave me no picture of having any special interest in life or any special things that she enjoyed. She just stayed around home helped her mother with the housework, was very shy

and afraid to mingle with other young people, especially boys. At one point, she spoke of herself as being her father's favorite which surprised me after the bitterness she had expressed toward her father and I wondered whether this was the way she had wished it had been. She apparently has been craving affection from him that she didn't receive. . . .

11-1-44

. . . . We discussed her plans for her baby more fully. She had discussed them a little bit in her first interview, saying then that Dr. B had told her she should "put it out for adoption," but she had been thinking of possible ways she could keep it. She had asked me, however, to put it on the L agency waiting list in case she made up her mind to place it so I knew she was pretty ambivalent about the whole thing. I found that she had not made up her mind yet by any means. She wants the baby and she doesn't want it. She cannot talk about it without her voice trembling. She has thought of all kinds of unrealistic schemes of placing it in the village nearby her home, of taking a job here in New York and having it with her and mother has even suggested that they might place it with a cousin of theirs. I tried to discuss with her not only her feelings about this baby and her needs in the situation but the baby's needs. Her attention, however, was centered only on her needs and it is almost impossible to keep her on any discussion of the baby's needs. She did say she (as she left my office this time) that she knew she must make up her mind soon but my feeling is that this girl is going to find it very difficult to come to any decision herself.

#### Summary

11-2 to 11-16-44

During this period M in my office about every other day. Said she couldn't eat, couldn't sleep all she could do was sit and think. Her voice trembled and her hands shook as she talked. Each time she brought up new plans for keeping the baby. To each plan she proposed I pointed out as clearly as I could the different factors involved from a reality standpoint. She herself began to reject plans she at first proposed such as boarding the baby in a nearby town. In our first interview she had been very sure she could do this without any one knowing, now, she was able to admit that this wouldn't be possible in a small rural community. The baby might even look like its father and that would start all kinds of talk she thought. She had another plan of boarding the baby in Connecticut but she discarded this since she knew people from the town of Connecticut who

came to her town in the summer time. Her plan of keeping the baby and living in New York she admitted couldn't work out because father would never accept the baby and that would cut her off from her own home. She couldn't stand that. In all of these plans her own need for security was paramount; any suggestions of rejection by her own family or ostracism by her community was a threat to her future security.

11-17-44

M asked me if she could see me about something important. When she came in instead of proposing new plans she said directly, "I have now decided; I am placing the baby for adoption." There was less indecision in her voice than formerly and I felt that she was relieved by her decision. I accepted it matter of factly without further discussion, then asked if she would like me to talk with the L agency worker now about an appointment to discuss adoption procedure with her. She said any time and left the room without any further discussion. . . .

11-30 to 12-20-44

. . . . Doubtless underneath she has considerable ambivalence about her decision to give up the baby but I felt she was too neurotic a girl to ever completely make up her mind, but the definite release her decision has given her seems indicative of its rightness to her. . . .

1-3-45

M went to the clinic and was kept there, as she was definitely in labor. Her baby, a boy, was born about 3:00 P.M. that afternoon. The hospital social worker said that M was one of the most stoical girls in labor that she had seen.

Later:

Notified the L agency and they will definitely take the baby when it is ready for discharge as it weighed at birth 6 lbs. 14 oz. and is described as a "bouncing boy."

1-4-45

Mrs. H, hospital social worker, telephoned that M was much disturbed. Some one had brought around a paper asking M's consent for circumcision which had upset her greatly. . . .

Later:

. . . . My feeling is that the circumcision request stirred up in M all her unconscious feeling about this whole thing and was a great threat to her. I took her letters from her mother, some spring flowers and stayed with her almost

half an hour. She was like a little girl wanting her mother to calm her fears. When I left I talked with the head nurse whom I think was feeling a little guilty about having upset M. . . . I explained to her that M was a very neurotic girl, who had a good many fears about this whole thing that she was not conscious of. . . .

1-8-45

. . . . Telephoned L agency worker, Miss B. They will take the baby directly from the hospital on 1/12. Told her that M is again exhibiting some indecisiveness and thinking of unrealistic schemes whereby she may keep her baby.

1-12-45

Baby taken to L agency foster home by their worker.

1-13-45

M taken from the hospital to W House. . . .

1-19-45

. . . . During her last week at W House she was as happy as I ever saw her. She seemed almost reluctant to leave the girls. She looked well, always insisted she felt well and was only staying because the doctor advised her. All of the unconscious anxiety and guilt she must be feeling was completely repressed again. In her interviews with me and with the L agency worker she talked very little. She did say her mother might help her with possible plans for keeping the baby but I felt this was said without real conviction. It was more as if she felt she ought to say it.

M was a very unhappy girl inside herself. Whether she is able to hide all her feelings and become more repressed as time goes on or whether she goes to pieces depends I think upon how she is received back in her family and her community. If she continues to feel that no one knows but her mother and the doctor she may function adequately in a limited way as she did before, but if she finds that her father or the community knows I wouldn't be surprised to see her become very depressed and perhaps in the end take her own life. As one talked with M it seemed very clear that her trouble lay in her familial relationships—a stern, unloving father, a mother who was more of a sister than a mother, a younger brother who appeared to be, prior to going into the service, a more normal outgoing person than M. Unconsciously I feel that M was working out a love relationship with a man her father's age who represented her father to her but of all this she was totally unaware.

Case Closed.

Source: Dorothy Hutchinson Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, Dorothy Hutchinson Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Henry Dwight Chapin, "Family vs. Institution," 1926



These drawings of the New York Infant Asylum in 1873 were supposed to illustrate the excellent care given to babies and the benevolence of the women who volunteered in the institution. But they also portrayed the institutional conditions—"handling children in mass"—that advocates of family [foster care](#) wanted to eradicate.



*In this excerpt, a well known pediatrician made the case against orphanages and for family [foster care](#). Henry Dwight Chapin began with statistical findings about infant mortality, but also suggested that institutional child care was damaging even for those children lucky enough to survive it. At risk, according to Chapin, was the long-term mental and emotional development of children in orphanages or asylums. Especially interesting is his emphasis on infants' need for affection, which anticipated later research on attachment and loss, such as [Harry Harlow's monkey love experiments](#).*

According to my experience, the earlier the age the greater the undesirability of handling children in mass. While it is often difficult to get exact figures, there is a heavy mortality and morbidity in most institutions caring for babies. It is of comparatively recent date that any really intelligent investigation of this problem has been attempted.

### Mortality in Institutions

The information given in the reports of infants' institutions is usually meager and unsatisfactory. In 1914 the then American Association for Study and Prevention of Infant Mortality attempted a study of this question. In their review the New York State Department of Charities is quoted as presenting the statistics from 1909 to 1913 of eleven institutions in the State in which the death rate for babies under two years, during this period, based on the total number of children cared for, varied in the different institutions from 183 to 576 per 1,000, with an average mortality rate for the eleven of 422.5 per 1,000. During these same years the death rate for children under two years, based on the estimated population for the state at that age, was 87.4 per 1,000 or about one-fifth of that in institutions. . . .

Very little accurate study has been made as to what effect the institution has upon the mental development of children. Three years ago the Bureau of Jewish Social Research undertook a careful and exhaustive study of this subject. It was made in connection with the children of the Hebrew Home for Infants, the Hebrew Orphan Asylum, and the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society, the first an institution for infants, the two latter for older children. In a study of mental development as determined by school grade among 311 children that had been done at one time or another under the care of the Hebrew Home for Infants it was found that about 20 per cent were retarded three terms or more in school. Against this, it was found that among the children of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum and the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society who had not previously been under the care of the Hebrew Home for Infants only about 12 per cent were retarded three terms or more. . . .

While the numbers concerned in this investigation are limited, they certainly show a distinct trend. There has never been as careful and exhaustive a study, as this of the Bureau of Jewish Social Research. As far as its findings go, they show that a longer residence in an asylum for infants may have an effect on the later mental life. . . .

It may also be noted that the very young infant craves and responds to affection, which seems to have a stimulating effect, particularly when there is drooping and lack of vitality. That close human observer Jane Addams, with sympathetic vision, puts it thus,

We are told that the will to live is aroused in each baby by his mother's irresistible desire to play with him, the physiological value of joy that a child is born, and that the high death rate in institutions is increased by the discontented babies whom no one persuades into living.

Such persuasion to life runs all through nature. This is one of the reasons why the young thrive best under individual care and attention. We have here a biological law: all animals respond to affection. . . .

Most workers in this field. . . have found that carefully regulated boarding out is the best method of handling abandoned babies. In 1902 the writer started the Speedwell Society, the method of which consists in

boarding out babies in carefully supervised units. . . .

There are few studies that statistically show the comparative results of institutional care and boarding out, especially with babies of the atrophic type. One of the most illuminating comparisons is found in a report of studies made ten years ago by the Sage Foundation and Dr. Josephine Baker of the New York Department of Health. A number of babies were taken from the marasmus [malnutrition] ward of the New York Foundling Hospital. This ward receives only the chronic cases of extreme atrophy that in spite of the best care have always ended in death. In boarding out a number of these babies, an extra bonus was given to selected women and a doctor and a nurse furnished for every ten babies. As a result there was an eventual mortality of 46 per cent. Thus nearly half of the babies were saved in the home who in spite of the greatest care were bound to die in the institution. This is the method employed by the Speedwell Society. . . .

The magnitude and importance of the problems raised by abandoned children have not been sufficiently realized. In New York state alone over 30,000 dependent children are being housed and trained in institutions. Are these little lives being warped by unnatural surroundings? . . .

Children are brought into the world singly and not in droves and their physical, mental and moral health should be conserved in the family unit. . . . The institution as a stop gap represents a failure along the normal lines that development should take place in child life. This truth must be spread abroad in the hope that wealthy and well-meaning people will lose the common obsession of endowing asylums.

Is the family or the institution best suited to conserve the child as a valuable asset? To ask such a question is to answer it in favor of the family. In the past much unselfish work has been done in institutions and there is no reason for trying summarily to close them all. But their future work should lie in the direction of clearing houses or centers where the dependent child may be studied and classified as to the direction of future effort. In the future let the family and home be stressed while institutions take a secondary and retiring place.

Source: Henry Dwight Chapin, "Family vs. Institution," *Survey* 55 (January 15, 1926): 485-488.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Child Welfare League of America, "Adoptions: A Statement of the Problem," 1937

The well-known decline in the birth-rate and the demand on the part of childless families for children to adopt makes a consideration of procedure of ADOPTION a timely subject.

The newspapers and magazines are almost daily giving evidence of this vital interest and also of the serious questions that are involved. Doctors, lawyers, and social workers have important parts to play. The standards of procedure of these groups differ much, and within the groups themselves there are as yet no accepted standards.

The variations among these groups of persons lead to a somewhat similar variation in the judgments of the courts which finally grant the decree of adoption.

All of this work has much sentiment connected with it at every point. Yet, unless the placement of the child and the decision of the court are based upon the knowledge of the fundamental facts regarding the child's physical and mental condition and the suitability of the foster parents to rear the child, tragedy and disappointment may be brought into the lives of child and foster parents.

To discover how the procedure throughout this land may be more uniformly based upon sane, kindly, and approved methods, so that child and foster parents may both benefit the Child Welfare League of America has by vote of the Board of Directors accepted the task of (1) exploring the present procedure in the nation, (2) discovering weaknesses, if such exist, (3) gathering the lessons which experience has taught, and (4) presenting the minimum safeguards for child and foster parents alike.

To do this well we think that the League must take the following steps:

1. TO ACQUAINT OURSELVES WITH THE ADOPTION LAWS OF THE STATES  
We need to gather, study and evaluate the laws dealing with the subject of adoptions. They are different in essentials as well as details in every state. Uniformity is probably not desirable, but it is desirable to learn what safeguards are present and what are lacking in these laws.

## 2. TO LEARN PRESENT WEAKNESSES AND ABUSES

In a goodly number of states shocking practices are being revealed. Infants and young children are given away without consideration of their best interests, and in some instances are even given for cash.

## 3. TO DETERMINE THE FUNCTION OF THE PRIVATE CHILD-PLACING AGENCY IN THE FIELD OF ADOPTIONS

It is well known that adoptions in the main are not going through children's agencies in most states. With notable exceptions, they are likely to be arranged by organizations and individuals who disregard when they can the wishes of parents, the standards of safe procedure, and the best interest of the child, and are more likely to feel greater responsibility toward finding children for families than providing suitably for the children.

On the other hand, the better equipped agencies have failed to realize that the public has had but little opportunity to learn to pitfalls in adoption, and that intelligent public opinion has not been formed. Some of the agencies have even abandoned adoptions as a part of their program in disgust because of the general low standards in vogue.

The agencies will therefore need to reconsider their procedure for the purpose of discovering whether they have moved too far ahead of public opinion, and whether without sacrificing essential safeguards, their technique can be so modified that doctor, lawyer, judge, and the adopting public will find it advantageous to use them in this field as well as for other child welfare services.

## 4. TO DETERMINE FUNCTIONS OF MATERNITY HOMES AND ADOPTION NURSERIES

Children born in maternity homes are usually born out of wedlock, and the proportion of those whom the mother does not wish to keep with her is necessarily large. The maternity home, therefore, finds it necessary to make some provision for many babies that are born there, and failing other suitable outlets, enters into the placement of the infants for adoption, usually without staff trained for the purpose, and without the ordinary safeguards.

Maternity homes and such outlets as adoption nurseries supported by the community as social service enterprises should, therefore, be under obligation to observe well recognized safeguards for placement and for adoption.

## 5. TO DETERMINE THE FUNCTION OF A STATE TO SAFEGUARD ADOPTIONS

Even when individual social agencies have become aware of the importance of applying all reasonable safeguards in the procedure of adoptions, there still remains the need for such standardization of procedures among the various agencies as can be undertaken only by the state itself. It is probably a well established principle that adoptions are not wholly safeguarded unless the state has passed upon the adequacy of the procedure of the agency whose report goes up to the judge. A certain

amount of actual police work is often necessary to eliminate agencies that are grossly careless in their procedure. This also falls to the work of the state.

#### 6. TO INVESTIGATE INTERSTATE PLACEMENT AND TRAFFIC IN BABIES

There are at the present time large and well-known commercial maternity homes and adoption nurseries charitably supported. These advertise extensively and attract foster parents from other states who are seeking infants for adoption. These organizations usually know little about the parentage and have no desire to inquire into the suitability of the child for adoption, nor do they know anything about the suitability of the home. Although the plans of these maternity homes and nurseries are somewhat interfered with by legal requirements in certain states, on the whole the traffic in babies that is made possible by them and by the lack of safeguards in the states from which these people come, is appalling!

#### 7. TO LIST MINIMUM ESSENTIALS IN ADOPTION

In order that the procedure for adoptions may come into the programs of reputable child welfare agencies in larger measure some compromise may be necessary. This may mean elimination of certain procedures of the social worker and retaining only the minimum essentials necessary to the safeguarding of adoptions.

For example, consideration would need to be given to the responsibilities and rights of the father and other relatives of the child. Likewise the question arises whether the delay, which adopting parents resent, is an essential safeguard. These and other questions require careful study.

There is also need to write certain safeguards into the laws of the states. The following are suggested as important and one, or all, are now found in the statutes of some of the states:

A—That placement of children in foster family homes for adoption be made possible only by the state and its administrative units, or by private agencies licensed by the state.

B—That there be required supervision by the state of the child-placing and home-finding in the case of every petition coming up for adoption, for the purpose of providing the judge with reliable data on the basis of which the court may reach a wise decision.

C—That a period of time, preferably a year, be required for the child to have been in the home with the intention of adoption, with at least four visits during the year from a representative agency.

#### 8. TO TELL THE STORY TO THE PUBLIC

Without special efforts at education the public will not learn the pitfalls which adoption presents both to the child and the adopting home. At present, sensational newspaper articles seem to be the order of the day. For example, recent stories in the public press about a young mother giving away her baby for a dollar and of the young married couple who discovered they were brother and sister, separated in babyhood. In both

cases Adoption played a part. If the subject can be further explored and the facts given to the public and especially to the doctors, lawyers, ministers, and certain social agencies who play important parts in the procedure of adoption, we believe that they will see the wisdom of proceeding more cautiously than is now the case.

Source: Child Welfare League of America, "Adoptions: A Statement of the Problem," 1937, Child Welfare League of America Papers, Box 15, Folder 5, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Child Welfare League of America, "Adoption Terminology," 1980s

### ADOPTION TERMINOLOGY

Words and phrases to watch for positive and negative connotations:

| POSITIVE  | NEGATIVE  |
|---|---|
| Adoption Triad<br><br>Adoption plan was made for. . .<br><br>The baby joined the family<br><br>The older child moved in with his/her family   | Adoption Triangle<br><br>Adopted out<br><br>Put up for adoption<br><br>Given up |
| Adopted person  | Adopted child (when speaking of an adult)                                       |
| Parent by marriage  | Stepparent  |
| (To opt for, to take on, to choose) Parenting   | Keeping   |
| Birthparent (father, mother, giver)<br><br>Biological (parent, child, ancestry)<br><br>Genetic (parent, ancestry, shared genetic ancestry)<br><br>First parent<br><br>Woman (lady) who gave birth | Real parent<br><br>Natural parent<br><br>Unmarried mother<br><br>Sire           |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| My child  | Adopted (as a prefix to "child" or "parent" can become a label when constantly used). |
| Born outside of marriage  | Illegitimate child<br>Bastard   |
| Born to a single person<br>-divorced<br>-single<br>-never married           | Unwanted child  |
| Termination of parental rights; unable to continue parenting (older child)  | Gave up   |
| Made an adoption plan, legally released                                     | Gave away   |
| An adoption was arranged for - or planned                                   | He/She was placed   |
| Permission to sign a release of information or a non-release of information | Disclosure<br>Non-disclosure  |
|   | Their own children<br>Their real children   |
| The waiting child   | Adoptable child<br>Hard to place child  |
| Update (case file)  |   |
| (making, resuming)<br>Contact<br>-Meet<br>-Locate                           | Reunion   |
| A child from abroad   | A foreign child<br><br>(Korean) orphan (child was likely not orphaned)                |
| Preadoptive counseling  | Homestudy   |

Adoption available for  
children

Children available for adoption

A BASIC INTENTION SHOULD BE TO AVOID FOREVER LABELING  
PEOPLE, e.g.:

adopted child vs. child

Korean child vs. child

own child vs. child

foreign child vs. child

Source: "Adoption Terminology," Child Welfare League of America Papers, Box 66, Folder: "Post Legal Adoption Services," Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact  
Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Child Welfare League of America, "Definition of Child Welfare," 1957

*The following is part of the definition of child welfare articulated by the Child Welfare League of America in the mid-1950s. It was part of an ambitious effort to define standards that would, according to League President Marshall Field, finally "take the 'folklore' out of child care and would substitute in its place the most scientific knowledge currently available" in "psychology, psychiatry, sociology, anthropology, genetics, pediatrics, child development and medicine." The standards project produced Standards for Adoption Service in 1958. This lengthy handbook detailed the protections that **birth parents**, children, and adopters should be offered and described exactly what should happen before, during, and after children were placed. It was revised in 1968, 1973, 1978, and 1988. The newest revision is Child Welfare League of America, Standards of Excellence for Adoption Services, 2000.*

### **Nature and Needs of the Child**

The distinctive aspects of social work practice in the field of child welfare are derived from the nature of the child, particularly his characteristics of dependency and development; and from the special concern and responsibility for children which all social groups have. . . .

Furthermore, because it is universally recognized that the years of childhood are of particular significance for his future development, whatever happens to the child during the developmental process is of concern as it may promote, interfere with or adversely affect the kind of development which is considered desirable. Moreover, the community or state has a real stake in this, in his becoming the kind of person whom it needs or wants, who will perpetuate its traditions, values and ideals. . . .

The family has, through the parents particularly, assured the child of the close and continuing individual relationships, attention, concern, special interest and love which we now recognize to be the most important stimulants of healthy development. **We can therefore say that the primary and unique need of the child is for parental care.** . . .

### **Social Problem**

It is because of the **primary social problem** of deprivation of parental care that child welfare services have a responsibility and a purpose that

differentiate them from other kinds of treatment or social services; and require specialized knowledge, understanding and skills. . . . In its most extreme form the problem may need for its solution temporary or permanent substitute parental care as provided by foster care and adoption services. . . .

### **Social Responsibility**

Various kinds of provisions for dealing with the problems that result when the child's need for parental care is unmet have been made by social groups, out of their special concern for children. In doing so, the social group in effect takes over or shares part of the parental function, namely, the responsibility for seeing to it that the needs of the child are met. The assumption of this responsibility, in proportion to the degree which parents cannot or are not expected to carry it, is a distinguishing characteristic of those social services which provide help for children whose need for parental care is not being adequately met. . . .

For the most part, child welfare services are provided by authorized social agencies to which has been delegated by law responsibility for some aspect of parental care.

Source: Child Welfare League of America, "Definition of Child Welfare," 1957, Child Welfare League of America Papers, Box 12, Folder 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Child Welfare League of America Memo, "Description of Children Who Were Referred For Adoptive Placement and Considered Difficult to Place," 1955



**African-American children**, no matter how young or healthy, were invariably considered to have "special needs" simply because child welfare professionals found them difficult to place—all the more so in the case of siblings.

### No. 1: Joe – 3 years old.

Joe is a Mexican and Indian boy who is very attractive and alert appearing, but tests indicate an I.Q. of about 80. Joe is dark in coloring and has a mop of unruly straight, thick, black hair, which his foster mother finds very difficult to manage. At the present time Joe is in a White foster home in a rural area and spends most of his time tagging the foster father around as he takes care of the farm. Joe was removed from his home when he was an infant of about six months, and although he has other brothers and sisters he has always been separated from them and so does not know them. He has not seen his father nor his mother since he was removed, but until a year ago, he was not legally free and therefore could not be referred for adoptive placement. However, when he was freed he was referred immediately, but as yet no home has been found for him. So far as he knows he belongs in his present foster home. Joe is a very outgoing boy with sparkling black eyes and an engaging grin, most of the time. He has a hot temper however, and a stubborn streak shows itself when he does not get his way. There are older children of the foster parents in the home and Joe is their pride and joy.

### No. 2: Mike – Mexican and Indian – 7 years old.

Mike is Joe's half-brother, having the same mother but another father. Mike is a rather withdrawn, anxious boy who has been in a foster home since he was about 4-1/2 years old. At this time he has been in his present home for about 8 months, but had three foster home placements before that. Mike does exceedingly well in school, is in the second grade and on a psychological test his I.Q. was 120. About a year ago Mike was made legally free and was immediately referred for adoptive placement, but as yet no home has been found for him. He is a tall wiry boy with very

black hair and very dark eyes. His eyes are quite expressive and the foster mother says that he is very difficult to discipline because if you look at his eyes you "just melt." Mike does not have to be disciplined very often, in fact not often enough perhaps. He is quite interested in reading and in music and most particularly in fishing. His coordination has always been excellent and his foster parents think he could be a good athlete, but he does not seem to be interested in athletics at this point. The teacher, of course, is very fond of Mike because he does well in school and causes no trouble. Mike has begun to ask why his parents do not come to see him anymore and is aware that he has a different status in his foster family than the own children of the foster parents. Mike remembers life with his mother and with a rapid succession of fathers. For awhile after he was placed, his mother visited every few months, but within the past 2 years he has not seen her. He has never known his father and has had some difficulty in understanding why in a foster home the fathers come home every night, they don't come home drunk and the same father comes home consistently. At this point Mike is rather unsure about trusting adults and is seeking a permanent and secure relationship. However, the worker is hesitant to talk very much with him about adoption since finding an adoptive home for Mike will be a long process. His chief disadvantages are his color and his age.

No. 3: Regina – Negro and Indian – 6 years old

Regina has a very dark brown skin and looks quite Indian with straight thick coarse black hair and black eyes that can change from being very somber to being very sparkling in a very short time. Regina is of average intelligence and in starting school has seemed to make an adequate adjustment. She has been in the same foster home for the past four years and is the ideal of her foster father. The foster parents are in the 70's and so it is obvious that Regina cannot stay there much longer even though they would very much like to keep her. She lives in a very small town, but there are several Indian children in the school. Regina has been legally free for 2 years, but for a time she was not placed because she tested too low according to the worker. It seems that when Regina was about 3 years old she came in for a psychological examination and sat glumly through the whole process, participating very little. She made almost no response to the tester and sat the whole time "looking holes through her." When Regina was about 4-1/2 or 5 the case was transferred to another worker who, after observing Regina, was positive she was not dull. She began to see more of Regina to get acquainted with her and finally after awhile brought her in for another psychological test. At that point Regina seemed like a different child, responding very well and testing well within the average

range. Two sets of adoptive parents have seen Regina, but she has been too dark for them. Regina has a faculty for controlling things by remaining silent and just sitting staring at whoever is attempting to talk with her. At one point she had to be moved from her present foster home for a brief period because the foster mother became ill and went to the hospital. Throughout the whole 2 weeks Regina was in a strange place, and talked very little, played very little and just seemed to be suspended in space until she could return to her foster home. It was most frustrating to the foster family and they became quite upset by her. Of course, the more upset they got the more silent she was. As soon as she returned to her first foster home she became her old self again and proved that she could be responsive, alert and full of fun.

No. 4: Marie – Eskimo and Indian – 4 years old.

Marie has been legally free since birth, but for some time was held without referring to an adoption agency because she had a cleft lip and cleft palate, which needed repair. At this point the repair has been completed and she needs speech training at this point. There may be some orthodontics at a later time, but just now her greatest need is for a permanent home and one where she can get speech training. Marie is a short, squarely built, round faced little girl who looks rather Oriental in appearance is except for her brown skin. Her mother was an unmarried mother from Alaska who came to the States after she got pregnant. She relinquished the child at birth and was not heard from after that. She was not too sure about the father, but was sure of only the one thing that he was an Indian from the West Coast someplace. The worker is convinced that Marie could be a much more attractive child than she is if she were dressed differently and if the foster mother would take better care of her hair. However, at this point she usually looks like a little waif with dresses much too long for her and her hair cut in a very square dutch bob. The repair of her cleft lip has been done so well that one hardly notices the scar. Marie seems to function on an average level for a 4 year old except for her speech, but since she is in a foster home where she does not get stimulation, the worker is not convinced that Marie is functioning up to capacity.

No. 5: Felix – Indian and White – 11 years old.

Felix is a handsome bright boy who looks like the pictures of Indian braves one sees on postcards. He has a beautiful body, is very good in sports, and does well at school. He is quite an outgoing gregarious boy and is very much the leader in the small school that he attends. Felix looks more White than Indian, except for his very thick coarse black hair, and since he is in a community where there are a great many Indians he has not

appeared to think much about his mixed racial background. Felix has had rather a checkered background and was one of several children, but since he was the youngest he has been pretty much completely separated from the rest of his family for the past several years. He sees his older brothers once in awhile since they live in that vicinity, but there seems to be no strong relationship between them. Felix was in foster care off and on from the time he was about a year old. He would spend some time in foster homes where he was placed because of neglect by his mother and father and then would return to his parents when the agency thought they were rehabilitated enough to take care of their family. Actually, most of the care Felix received was from his brothers who were from 3 to 7 years older than he. His father was White and was a logger who had to give up his occupation of logging and was never able to find a job that lasted very long and that would support the family. Most of the time while the father was gone in the woods the mother would entertain various and sundry men in her home. When the father came back the situation would improve, but it would last only as long as he was there. Finally, after being unsuccessful at attempting to find employment other than logging he returned to his former occupation against the advice of a doctor, and after a few weeks was killed in the woods when a tree fell on him. At this point the mother seemed to give up completely, came into the Welfare Department and asked them to place all of the children. . . .

Source: Zelma Felton to Joseph Reid, December 5, 1955, Child Welfare League of America Papers, Box 1, Folder: "Speeches - Joseph Reid, 1952, 1955," Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Child Welfare League of America, "Minimum Safeguards in Adoption," 1938



This illustration of a pitiful "bargain-counter baby" accompanied a March 1937 article in *Pictorial Review* calling for more strenuous adoption standards. Reformers agreed that increased state regulation was the only way to combat commercial and black market adoptions.

*Approved by Vote of the Board of Directors of the Child Welfare League of America, November 5, 1938*

---

- I. The safeguards that the child should be given are:
  1. That he be not unnecessarily deprived of his kinship ties.
  2. That the family asking for him have a good home and good family life to offer and that the prospective parents be well adjusted to each other.
  3. That he is wanted for the purpose of completing an otherwise incomplete family group, in which he will be given support, education, loving care, and the feeling of security to which any child is entitled.
- II. The safeguards that the adopting family should expect are:
  1. That the identity of the adopting parents should be kept from the natural parents.
  2. That the child have the intelligence and the physical and mental background to meet the reasonable expectations of the adopting parents.
  3. That the adoption proceedings be completed without unnecessary publicity.
- III. The safeguards that the state should require for its own and the child's protection are:
  1. That the adopting parents should realize that in taking the child for adoption they assume as serious and permanent an obligation as do parents rearing their own children, including the right to inherit.
  2. That there be a trial period of residence of reasonable length for the best interests of the family and the child whether there be a legal requirement for it or not.

3. That the adoption procedure be sufficiently flexible to avoid encouragement of illegitimacy on the one hand and trafficking in babies on the other.

4. That the birth records of an adopted child be so revised as to shield him from unnecessary embarrassment in case of illegitimacy.

These safeguards are best provided to the natural parents and also to those asking adoption if they turn to a well established children's organization which has a reputation in this field for good advice and good results.

Source: Child Welfare League of America, "Minimum Safeguards in Adoption," 1938, Child Welfare League of America Papers, Box 15, Folder 5, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Child Welfare League of America, "Proposal for Analysis of the Sealed Adoption Record Issue," 1973

Guidelines for dealing with issues raised by the sealed adoption record controversy are needed by the field of adoption and do not now exist. . .

In 1917, the first state adoption law providing safeguards to protect the adoptive process and the adopted child was passed in Minnesota. This law provided for, among other things, the protection of court records from public inspection and the revision of birth certificates. Gradually, other states began to follow suit until today all states have adoption laws that safeguard the adoption and the child, and nearly all states number among the safeguards the sealing of adoption records.

The emphasis on protection of the adoption and of the interests of the child and the guidelines for implementing these principles were derived largely from the adoption agencies that emerged during the 1920s, '30s, and '40s. These agencies, in turn, were greatly aided and influenced by the United States Children's Bureau and the Child Welfare League of America. In 1938, the Child Welfare League issued a set of minimum safeguards for adoptions. These included the provisions that the birth record be revised to shield an adopted child from unnecessary embarrassment in the case of illegitimacy and that the identity of the adopting parents be kept from the natural parents.

The field of adoptions was growing and practice was evolving so rapidly that in 1948, 1951, and 1954, the Child Welfare League conducted nationwide surveys and workshops on adoption practices. In 1959, the first CWLA Standards for Adoption Service, developed by an interdisciplinary committee, was published by CWLA. The anonymity of all parties, the confidentiality of agency records and of the adoption proceedings, and the sealing of court adoption records and original birth certificates were all supported in that document and reaffirmed in 1968, the date of the most recent revision of the adoption standards.

These principles are based on the assumption that intervention of the natural parents after the child's adoption is not conducive to the child's well-being or to development of the new parent-child relationship. They

assume also that the natural parents, having relinquished parental rights and responsibilities, should be free to pursue their own lives without fear of intrusion by the relinquished child or the adoptive parents. . .

Adoption agencies have long stressed the importance of telling children they were adopted, of not trying to preserve a family secret that would slip out in some sudden, harmful way. The Standards encourage the agency to furnish the adoptive parents information needed to understand the child and to deal with the child's curiosity about his natural parents. It was not anticipated that learning of one's adoptive status would lead to a desire to meet one's natural parents. It was assumed that a loving adoptive home would answer a child's need for identity and security and that involvement with the natural family might jeopardize that identity and security. Furthermore, in past years the typical adoptee was an infant born out of wedlock to a young woman, who, in the context of societal disapproval, did not want this fact known. Again, it was not anticipated that the mother might wish to have contact with the relinquished child at a later point.

But times have changed. The basic assumptions underlying the guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality are undergoing challenge from both legal and psychological perspectives. . .

Many adoptees and others claim that, regardless of their reasons and regardless of the outcome, they have a right to know the full details of their past, including the identity of their natural parents.

There is a groundswell of support for this position. The media have embraced it. New legislation has been or is being proposed in many states. Court cases including class action suits seeking to strike down laws that seal the records or birth certificates are in process. In our society greater emphasis than in the past is being placed on the right of all people to know the contents of various records kept about them and on the civil rights of previously overlooked groups. All of these factors make the time ripe for a reexamination of earlier established policies and practices. . .

Source: Child Welfare League of America, "Proposal for Analysis of the Sealed Adoption Record Issue," 1973, pp. 1-5, Child Welfare League of America Papers, Box 8, Folder: "Institutional Care and Adoption," Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Site designed by:



**Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Child Welfare League of America, Rating Sheet for Prospective Parents, 1962

*This rating sheet was developed by the [Child Welfare League of America](#) as part of a publicity effort aimed at medical professionals. Child welfare leaders, especially in [social work](#), had long tried to explain to their counterparts in medicine, law, and midwifery why they had no business making placements on their own: because adoption was a highly specialized procedure. The persistence of independent adoptions suggests that they were less than entirely successful, although [adoption statistics](#) indicate that the proportion of non-agency placements dropped to an all-time low around 1970. The criteria listed here also illustrate the therapeutic orientation of [home studies](#) during the postwar era. The emphasis was on evaluating applicants' emotional qualifications, but standards like "acceptance of sex roles" indicated that judgments of psychological health and illness were intimately related to normative (and rapidly changing) social prescriptions rather than fixed or objective truths established by science.*

### Some Criteria in Evaluating Couples Who Wish to Adopt a Child\*

| <u>Total personality</u>  | <u>Feelings about children</u>  |
|---------------------------|---|
| Family relationships      | Basic love for children   |
| Work adjustment           | Ability to deal with developmental problems                                 |
| Relationship with friends | Sensitivity to, and understanding and tolerance of, children's difficulties |
| Activities in community   | Capacity to accept child as he is or may develop                            |

### Feeling about

**Emotional Maturity**

**childlessness and  
readiness to adopt**

Capacity to give and receive love

Absence of guilt regarding infertility

Acceptance of sex roles

Mutual decision to adopt

Ability to assume responsibility for care, guidance, and protection of another person

Ability to tell child he is adopted

Reasonable emotional stability

Attitudes toward natural parents

Flexibility

**Motivation**

Self-respect

Desire to have more nearly complete life

Ability to cope with problems, disappointments, and frustration

Desire to accept parental responsibility

**Quality of marital relationship**

Desire to contribute to development of another human being

Successful continuance of marriage not dependent on children

Desire to love and be loved

Respect for each other

Capacity to accept a child born to other parents

\* Agencies select adoptive parents by evaluating applicants with respect to characteristics which seem desirable in persons capable of developing into parents who will meet an adoptive child's needs. Adoption agencies may have policies with regard to the age and religion of the adoptive parents; they may require that a prospective adoptive couple be married a certain period and may give preference to childless couples. Among the reasons for rejecting an adoption application may be the couple's advanced physical or mental illness, overemphasis on prestige, or wish to replace a lost child.

Source: "Rating Sheet for Prospective Parents" in "Special Report: Adoption," Child Welfare League of America Papers, Box 16, Folder 1, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Child Welfare League of America Special Bulletin, "A Study of Board Rates," January 1942

*This excerpt is drawn from a [Child Welfare League of America](#) study of 115 public and private agencies. During World War II, [child welfare](#) professionals all over the country were forced to respond to the shortage of foster families caused by the rising cost of living and the expansion of employment opportunities for women. Should payments to foster parents be increased? If so, what exactly was being paid for? The comments below suggest some of the financial, philosophical, and emotional problems that emerged when family-based labors of love resembled market-based wage labor. Like [baby farming](#) and indentures, which turned children into subjects of commerce and exploitation, paid [foster care](#) exposed the dilemmas of compensating some women for work that both adoptive and [birth mothers](#) were expected to perform for free. As this document makes clear, a bright line was still drawn in 1942 between reimbursing foster parents for child-rearing expenses—a legitimate practice—and paying for their love and nurture—an ethical violation. By 1959, when the Child Welfare League of America issued its first set of [Standards for Foster Family Care Service](#), payment was defined as a "realistic and valid" way to value the services that foster parents provided as well as a crucial tool for recruiting and retaining foster families.*

The board money paid to foster families has been a source of conflict to agencies throughout the development of this program. "Mothering" is definitely something which one would like to think should not be paid for. Agencies have been known to reject any applicants who showed an interest in the board rate. There are several reasons, however, for questioning this point of view. Families into which children are placed are, generally speaking, of such financial circumstances as do not permit them to assume the responsibility for the cost of bringing up an additional child. The early history of farming out and of indenturing children naturally brought an awareness that children could be exploited unless there were adequate supervision, that is, unless the agency took some responsibility for what was happening to the child. This immediately limits the amount of "mothering" that is left to the foster parent. That is to say, we are not asking prospective foster parents to become even complete foster mothers. We are asking them to share with an agency a responsibility for

the care of a child who needs a home more or less temporarily. Foster parents, too, have had conflicts about accepting board money. It may be because of the meaning to all of us of "mothering" that agencies are confused and unable to cope with this problem. One agency expressed this confusion in this way,

"We do not encourage taking of children for money and therefore are not considering raising the board rate."

Obviously, if foster families are to be paid at all for the care of children, decision as to the amount, and whether that is to be increased or not, should be based upon a consideration of what it is we are intending to pay for. . . .

Board rates for the school age child throughout the country in 1941 ranged from \$9.00 per month in one southern rural area, to \$26.00 per month in cities in the Middle Atlantic States. For infants and adolescents the board rate was shown to be higher. For special physical or emotional difficulties, the board rate too is higher. . . .

Since all the agencies indicated variations for one reason or another, a very real question to consider is, what does the board rate intend to cover. . . . In general. . . agencies stated that the board rate covers food and shelter, and in some instances incidental expenses like toothpaste, school supplies and haircuts. Some 90 agencies stated that in addition there is an allowance in kind or money for clothing, medical and dental care. . . . It was almost unanimously stated that no agency attempts to pay for the "services" of the foster mother. . . .

It should be remembered that families in the income groups from which most foster families come, have for years been suffering from financial difficulties. Must as they might have strong motivations for becoming foster parents under more usual circumstances, it is to be expected that such families will take the opportunity to earn some money. . . .

Moreover there may be an increased demand for foster family care. Some mothers wishing to go to work for both personal and patriotic reasons see the solution to the problem of the care of their children in foster family placement, probably because day care facilities are slow in being developed. . . .

Suffice it to say that to solve the "abnormal" situation created by the defense boom is a serious challenge to the whole field. . . .

What are foster parents paid for?. . . . [B]oard rates should be high enough to attract families of average income who would be interested in taking a child into their home and "mothering" it and yet who would be interested in some kind of financial return besides. However, it should not be so high as to attract applications from families who would not be interested in caring for children except for their need of the money to be earned. . . .

A major consideration in the amount paid is how much it affects the foster parent's feelings that the child is hers. . . . That is, the more a foster parent can feel the child is hers the less she will need to be paid. This is well illustrated in pre-adoption placements. For example, during the trial period of placement with prospective adoptive parents so that the latter and the agency can both decide whether these parents should permanently adopt the child, the agency pays board though those foster parents might prefer not to have it. The agency feels that the prospective adoptive parent must be ready and willing to accept this board money as a token of the fact that the child is not yet hers. Similarly, in the foster family care program, the board money paid covers the cost of the care and shelter of the child and is in part a token of the fact that the foster parents are sharing the responsibility with the agency.

Source: Child Welfare League of America Special Bulletin, "A Study of Board Rates," compiled by Henrietta L. Gordon, January 1942, 3-4, 5, 7-8, 11-12, 13-14, Child Welfare League of America Papers, microfilm reel 3, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Child Welfare League of America, *Standards for Adoption Service*, 1958



During the 1940s and 1950s, popular magazine coverage invariably included warnings about the risks of private, unsafeguarded placements. The photo above was accompanied by the following caption: "It took time and red tape to adopt her son through an authorized agency, but this mother knew he was healthy. People who "buy" black-market babies risk getting sick—often fatally ill—children."

*By 1958, certain adoption standards, taken for granted earlier in the century, were beginning to generate considerable controversy. This selection illustrates how the **matching** paradigm had shifted and, in particular, how contested religious matching had become. Unable to resolve deep conflicts about this issue within the child welfare community, the Child Welfare League of America chose to publish two statements: one endorsed by the Catholic Church, the other by most nonsectarian, Jewish, and Protestant agencies.*

### Factors in Selection of Family

Consideration should be given to the following:

#### 4.5 Age

The parents selected for a child should be within the age range usual for natural parents of a child of that age.

#### 4.6 Race

Racial background in itself should not determine the selection of the home for a child.

It should not be assumed that difficulties will necessarily arise if adoptive parents and children are of different racial origin. At the present time, however, children placed in adoptive families with similar racial characteristics, such as color, can become more easily integrated into the average family group and community.

#### 4.7 Interracial Background

Children of interracial background should be placed where they are likely to adjust best. A child who appears to be predominantly white will ordinarily adjust best in a white family, and should therefore be placed with a family that can accept him, knowing his background.

In such situations it is desirable to have the participation of the appropriate consultants, including a geneticist or anthropologist, in arriving at a decision on how the child should be placed. (3.7)

In selecting a family it is necessary to consider not only the attitude of the adoptive parents, but also that of the larger community within which the child will be living. If a suitable placement is not possible within a given community, the child should be placed elsewhere. (6.10, 7.9)

#### **4.8 National, cultural and social background**

Nationality should not be a factor in the selection of an adoptive home, except in the case of an older child who has lived with his natural family where acquired characteristics related to nationality may be of importance to the child.

National and cultural characteristics are not inherited but must be learned. The adopted child acquires the cultural and social attributes of his adoptive parents. (3.7)

#### **4.9 Religion**

*The following statement is in accord with the beliefs underlying practice in a high proportion of nonsectarian agencies, and of those represented by the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds and by the Department of Social Welfare, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.*

In view of the differences among religious and denominational bodies, it is difficult to suggest practices in adoption which would completely satisfy the religious tenets of each group. It is recognized that agencies under religious auspices may choose to establish rules for adoption practice which satisfy their beliefs. However, inasmuch as equality under the law is a democratic principle applying to all religions, the beliefs of no one religious group can be rightly imposed upon all adoption agencies, voluntary or tax-supported.

Opportunity for religious and spiritual development of the child is essential in an adoptive home. A child should ordinarily be placed in a home where the religion of adoptive parents is the same as that of the child, unless the parents have specified that the child should or may be placed with a family of another religion. Every effort (including interagency and interstate referrals) should be made to place the child within his own faith, or that designated by his parents. If however such matching means that placement

might never be feasible or involves a substantial delay in placement or placement in a less suitable home, a child's need for a permanent family of his own requires that consideration should then be given to placing the child in a home of a different religion. For children whose religion is not known, and whose parents are not accessible, the most suitable home available should be selected.

Placement of children should not be restricted, in general, to homes with formal church affiliations. It is recognized that a church-related agency may need to require formal church affiliation of adoptive parents for the children for whom it has undertaken to find homes.

Parents have the right to determine the religion in which they wish their child to be reared. Because of this, it is presumed that the religion of the child will be that of the parents, and in the case of unmarried parents, that of the mother, unless the parents specify otherwise or have given the agency permission to place the child in a family that the agency considers best for him, although it may be of another religion. The wishes and consent of the parents or mother should be obtained in writing. (2.6)

*The point of view of the Roman Catholic agencies differs in certain respects from that given above and agreed upon by the other denominational groups, and is expressed in this statement prepared by the National Conference of Catholic Charities.*

The consensus in Roman Catholic circles is that among the several important factors that play a part in successful adoption, the weightiest, although not the sole element, is the religious status of the couple who wish to adopt a child. For Roman Catholics, the religious status of the adoptive applicants is determined by the family's acceptance of and adherence to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, and by the manner and degree to which the family puts such teachings into practice.

The consensus in Roman Catholic circles is that Roman Catholic children who are to be adopted should be placed only in Roman Catholic families. If a child is born out of wedlock, he should be placed in a family of the same religion as his mother. Any person or agency accepting custody or guardianship of a child who is a member, or whose parent or parents are members of the Roman Catholic Church, should place that child for foster care only in a family or setting having the same religious affiliation as the child or his parents.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact  
Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Child Welfare League of America, *Standards for Foster Family Care Service*, 1959

Although "fostering" had long referred to various forms of family-based child care, the meaning of the term narrowed by 1959, when the *Child Welfare League of America* issued these authoritative standards. During the past half-century, *foster care* has designated a form of paid family care, offered temporarily or on an extended basis, to poor children who cannot remain with their *birth parents* because of neglect or abuse. This definition of foster care contrasts sharply with adoption, a status presumed to involve legal and emotional permanence as well as financial autonomy. Note also the emphasis on "casework," "treatment," and "personality development" in this excerpt. These concerns suggest not only that therapeutic perspectives shaped all *child welfare* services, but an acute awareness of the hazards associated with the conditions that made *foster care* necessary in the first place.

### Definition of Foster Family Care

Foster family care is the child welfare service which provides substitute family care for a planned period for a child when his own family cannot care for him for a temporary or extended period, and when adoption is neither desirable nor possible.

#### 1.1 Components of foster family care

The distinctive component of foster family care is the development and use of the foster family home to provide substitute life experiences, together with casework and other treatment services for both the child and his parents.

Experiences inherent in family living, which are regarded as essential in achieving maturity and the ability to initiate and sustain a family of one's own, including the following:

- emotional relationships of the child with other members of the family, relatives and friends
- socialization of child in learning modes of behavior and expectations of his cultural group
- observation of roles of father and mother, and husband and wife, which

provide models for a home and family

- sharing of responsibility for housekeeping chores, for purchases, and for management and physical maintenance of a home
- living in a home in a community, making use of community resources and being part of community groups

Casework with child and parents, beginning with the intake study and continuing throughout the period of placement, is essential for formulation, evaluation and appropriate modification of the plan for the child. Lack of adequate casework and failure to define and review goals periodically may result in an outcome detrimental to the child.

Provisions must be made for meeting the normal developmental needs of children under care, and for treatment of their emotional problems, including help to their parents with problems associated with impaired parental functioning. . . .

### **1.3 Objectives and purpose**

The ultimate objectives of foster family care should be the promotion of healthy personality development of the child, and amelioration of problems which are personally or socially destructive.

Foster family care is one of society's ways of assuring the well-being of children who would otherwise lack adequate parental care. Society assumes certain responsibilities for rearing and nurture of children which own parents are unable to carry, and discharges these responsibilities through the services of social agencies and other social institutions.

Foster family care should provide, for the child whose own parents cannot do so, experiences and conditions which promote normal motivation (*care*), which prevent further injury to the child (*protection*), and which correct specific problems that interfere with healthy personality development (*treatment*).

Foster family care should be designed in such a way as

- to maintain and enhance parental functioning to the fullest extent
- to provide the type of care and services best suited to each child's needs
- to minimize and counteract hazards to the child's emotional health inherent in separation from his own family and the conditions leading to it
- to make possible continuity of relationship by preventing replacements
- to facilitate the child's becoming part of the foster family, school, peer group and larger community
- to protect the child from harmful experiences

- to bring about his ultimate return to his natural family whenever desirable and feasible. . . .

## **Types of Foster Family Care**

### **. . . . 1.10 Free homes**

Foster family homes which provide care without financial reimbursement from the agency, the child or his family, should not be recruited or used at the outset of a child's placement.

Free homes should be used only in exceptional instances for children who have no continuing relationship with their own parents but cannot be placed for adoption, and when free care is the natural outgrowth of an established relationship between the child and foster parents. The relationship of the foster parents with the agency must be such that the arrangement will permit the agency to carry out its full continuing responsibility for the child's welfare, and will not adversely affect the child's care. . . .

## **Agency Responsibility to the Child**

### **3.1 Casework planning**

Services should be given on the basis of an individualized plan for each child, so that he may receive the care and treatment which meet his particular needs and promote his healthy personality development.

### **3.2 Care and treatment**

The agency should make sure that the child receives the basic units of care necessary for normal maturation: a normal foster home, medical and dental care, and opportunities for education, recreation and religious experiences. Casework and other treatment services for overcoming problems affecting personality development should be available as an essential part of foster family care service.

The relation of personality problems in childhood to mental illness, criminality and dependence in adolescence and adulthood, and the increasing number of emotionally disturbed children among those requiring placement, make it imperative to offer treatment services to every child who needs them.

For children who require treatment for persistent emotional disturbance and deviations in personality development which foster family care and casework help alone cannot remedy, the agency may choose to provide such treatment by qualified caseworkers on its own staff, through community resources such as child guidance clinics, or by child

psychiatrists in private practice. The choice should be determined in part by the availability of resources within and outside the agency, and in part by the resource which the child can use best.

Source: Child Welfare League of America, *Standards for Foster Family Care Service* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1959), 5-7, 9-10, 24.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



|                          |  |  |  |                                 |                                   |                            |
|--------------------------|--|--|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <a href="#">Timeline</a> | <a href="#">People &amp; Organizations</a> | <a href="#">Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science</a> | <a href="#">Topics in Adoption History</a> | <a href="#">Further Reading</a> | <a href="#">Document Archives</a> | <a href="#">Site Index</a> |
|--------------------------|--|--|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|

## Children's Home Society of Florida, Home Investigation Report Form, 1910s

No child should be placed in a home which has not first been visited by a trained worker. The fact that an applicant stands high in the community, and that there is no question as to his motives in taking a child, does not relieve an institution or society from the responsibility of seeing the home. How the best intentioned people may subject children to serious dangers through sheer ignorance of the ways of the world, and how a preliminary visit to the home may remove risks, is illustrated by an instance which recently came to the writer's notice.

A young colored girl had been placed as a nurse maid with an eminently respectable family. The preliminary investigation had been omitted because of the unquestioned character and standing of the man and his wife, who were prosperous, conscientious and sympathetic college-bred people. When the visitor called at the home some months later, she found that the girl had been given a room in a part of the house entirely separated from that occupied by the family, and that the only other person who slept in this wing was a young white man who worked on the place. The possible danger of such an arrangement had not occurred to the family, who immediately remedied the situation when it was pointed out to them.

Most of the regular child-placing agencies have a printed form upon which the visitors report the results of their investigations of foster forms. Form 22 is used by the Florida Children's Home Society. It is similar in most respects to those in general use among child-placing societies. . . .

Many organizations, as a matter of courtesy, write to applicants whose homes have been investigated, telling them whether or not a child is available to them. Form letters are often used for this purpose.

\* \* \*

### Children's Home Society of Florida

Report on Home personally investigated ..... Date .....

Home of ..... Residence ..... Phone .....

**THE FAMILY**

1. How does it stand as to honesty, morality, and trustworthiness?
2. How does it grade in education? ..... In Intelligence? .....
3. Are they kind hearted and sympathetic?
4. Do they seem generous and liberal in spirit?
5. Does any member of the family use intoxicants?
6. Did you learn of any bad personal faults or habits?
7. Are they frugal and industrious?
8. What is their income? ..... Its source? .....
9. Habits of church going ..... Are they active in church work?  
.....
10. Did you interview husband? ..... Temperament .....
11. Did you interview wife? ..... Temperament .....
12. Husband's purpose in taking child?
13. Wife's purpose in taking child?
14. Are there children in the Home? ..... How many? .....  
Ages? .....

**THE HOME**

1. Describe their property ..... Approximate value .....
2. Is the home cleanly? ..... Neat? ..... Convenient?  
.....
3. Have they books? ..... Papers? ..... Musical instruments?  
..... Pictures? .....
4. What of the furnishings? ..... Cultured? .....
5. What of the neighborhood?
6. Will they give the child reasonable school, church and social privileges?
7. Describe the children in Home ..... Lodging place? .....
8. If a Society ward is now in the home, give name
9. Date of placement

10. General remarks

11. What is your recommendation?

Signed

Source: Georgia G. Ralph, *Elements of Record Keeping for Child-Helping Organizations* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1915), 77, 84, 85.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## “Children's Story Needs an Ending . . . Adoption Could Make It So!” 1956



Adoptive parents and a staff member of the Spence-Chapin Adoption Agency in New York, one of the first in the country to set out to find black homes for black children.

*This is a sample of publicity material used by the Baltimore City Department of Public Welfare in the mid-1950s to encourage African-American couples to adopt African-American children.*

Take a minute or so to listen to this story—a children’s story that needs an ending.

It began in the Adoption Department of this agency when an applicant for adoption for Charles Allan M. was made before he was born. That was two years ago.

Charles Allen at age eight days was placed directly from the hospital in an agency foster home. For the first six months of his life he was studied closely to see how well he could use adoption. His social worker took him for monthly clinic check-ups. He got his shots; he had his psychological tests. And even on the first day he performed way above average. At seven months, Charles Allan was a bouncing, chubby baby trying to take his first steps. Legally he had been released for adoption and would have been ready to go; except that there wasn’t anybody to adopt him.

He is only one of the 42 Negro babies in the agency’s pre-adoptive foster care program faced with the same fate. None of these children has a family. What they need is a permanent home, a mother and father for keeps. All that the future holds for them now is life in a foster home or homes, not really belonging to anybody. This story could go on and on—3 year old Allison who has had as many homes as birthdays; a bundle of 18-month old energy named “lou” full of get up and go; dainty, 6-month old Pat, wide-eyed and adorable. Infants, crawlers, toddlers, self-sufficient 5 year olds. Each has that one big need and so much to give.

Could you stop by the Adoption Department on the third

floor? Talk to the workers. Get a first-hand account of the real plight of these forgotten babies. Could you spread the word among your friends and church groups or club meetings? Talk it up and don't let requirements for adoptive parents loom so overpowering. Children have been placed with college professors, clerks and laborers. Let the interested party know all that's necessary to begin is a phone call to the Adoption Department here (Extension 346).

The only ending for this story is the timeless one, "and they lived happily ever after". That means adoption for these babies—the right to the secure sound feel of "my mother" and "my father". Children have a way of crawling up under your heart. They can't be shut out. Would you help?

Source: "Children's Story Needs an Ending . . . Adoption Could Make It So!," 1956, Child Welfare League of America Papers, Box 17, Folder 10, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Florence Clothier, "The Psychology of the Adopted Child," 1943



Florence Clothier

*Florence Clothier, a graduate of Johns Hopkins Medical School, worked as a psychiatrist at the New England Home for Little Wanderers from 1932 to 1957. She was an active member of the Boston Psychoanalytic Society, where she knew Helene Deutsch and Erik Erikson, among other notable **Freudians**. In addition to her work on adoption, she was an active advocate of birth control. Clothier directed the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts from 1939 to 1956. In this excerpt, she anticipated themes of attachment and loss that became commonplace in later years.*

The child who does not grow up with his own biological parents, who does not even know them or anyone of his own blood, is an individual who has lost the thread of family continuity. A deep identification with our forebears, as experienced originally in the mother-child relationship, gives us our most fundamental security. The child's repeated discoveries that the mother from whom he has been biologically separated will continue to warm him, nourish him, and protect him pours into the very structure of his personality a stability and a reassurance that he is safe, even in this new, alien world.

Every adopted child, at some point in his development, has been deprived of this primitive relationship with his mother. This trauma and the severing of the individual from his racial antecedents lie at the core of what is peculiar to the psychology of the adopted child. The adopted child presents all the complications in social and emotional development seen in the own child. But the ego of the adopted child, in addition to all the normal demands made upon it, is called upon to compensate for the wound left by the loss of the biological mother. Later on this appears as an unknown void, separating the adopted child from his fellows whose blood ties bind them to the past as well as to the future.

Environment, or experience, influences the personality in very different ways, depending upon the age and maturity the

individual. Those experiences and emotional relationships which exist in earliest childhood have effects that are incorporated into the very structure of the personality. Experiences and relationships after the Oedipal development may mold or modify the presenting or external personality but their effects are as a general rule not incorporated or built into the personality. It may be said the external environment functions in two capacities. In the earliest years, it combines with constitutional factors to determine personality. Later on, through the influence of education, environment and experience modify personality manifestation, even to the extent of creating the person we think we know. Though analogies are unsatisfactory, we might say that, in the construction of the personality, constitution provides the basic metal, infantile emotional relationships and experiences add alloys and temper the metal, and childhood education and environment provide the superstructure, facade, and the paint.

The implications of this for the psychology of the adopted child are of the utmost significance. The child who is placed with adoptive parents at or soon after birth misses the mutual and deeply satisfying mother-child relationship, the roots of which lie in that deep area of the personality where the physiological and the psychological are merged. Both for the child and for the natural mother, that period is part of the biological sequence, and it is to be doubted whether the relationship of the child to its post-partem mother, in subtler effects, can be replaced by even the best of substitute mothers. But those subtle effects lie so deeply buried in the personality that, in the light of our present knowledge, we cannot evaluate them. . . .

Although the adopted infant obviously cannot experience fully with his substitute mother the satisfactions of the nursing period, he will experience with her his first and supremely important socializing relationship. The process of receiving food or sucking is for the infant at first an intensely personal experience, but through it the child establishes his earliest meaningful rapport with another individual. If his first social relationship is satisfying and free from tension, his later social relationships will be easier for him. If his feeding experiences in infancy consist of one battle after another, he is apt to go battling through life, tense, suspicious, and anxious over social relationships.

The child who, before being placed for adoption, has lived in an institution or a foster home has been profoundly influenced by his feeding experiences. Babies cared for in institutions are usually fed by a number of different nurses or attendants who are more interested in getting correct amounts of formula into their charges at specified times than they are in the infants themselves. Some institution babies are even left alone in their cribs to suck from a bottle propped on a pillow. These children

lose their earliest and most important opportunity to establish an object relationship through which they can progress from the stage of primitive narcissism to that of socialized human beings. . . .

The following case is one that shows very clearly the traumatic effect of an ill-advised adoption on a boy whose social and emotional development was tied up with a previous foster-home placement.

Dan is a nine-and-a-half-year-old boy, who was adopted at the age of three years. He was referred to a children's study home because of running away, bunking out, and a devastatingly negative, hostile reaction to his adoptive mother. Dan ran away only when his adoptive mother was at home. He never ran very far, but rather than come home, he would endure untold hardships and discomforts. On one occasion, in the dead of winter, he stayed out for several nights, and when the police found him, his legs were both badly frozen. . . .

Dan's immediate life situation in no way explained his behavior. The home was a good one and offered all the satisfactions that a boy would need. The adoptive father was an exceptionally fine person, and the adoptive mother, although tense and neurotic, was kindly and well-intentioned.. The adoptive brother [another child of Dan's age, but adopted in infancy] was making an adequate adjustment and was devoted to Dan. For the key to Dan's behavior, we have to go back to the story of his adoption and his life prior to that fateful event.

When we review Dan's history, we gain some understanding of the problem he presented. He was an illegitimate baby who, at the age of three weeks, was placed by his mother to board. He remained in this foster home for three years, until his adoption took place. In the foster home, he was the baby of the family. There were two children very much older than "Sonny," as Dan was called. The foster mother had lost several other children in infancy, and she accepted Sonny completely as her own baby. He was the adored baby of the entire family, even of the neighborhood. For three years he lived in that home and held the center of the stage. The foster mother was a warm, motherly, affectionate person, and it is said that when they parted with Sonny, both the foster mother and the father felt the loss as if it had been the death of their own child.

While living in the foster home, Sonny was visited periodically by his own mother, whom he spoke of as "Mummie Kay." She, too, was "a good mother" to him and brought him frequent gifts. During these three years, Sonny was apparently an outgoing, happy child, developing normally.

When arrangements for the adoption were made, the foster parents were loath to lose their baby, but felt that in the adoptive home he would have far greater educational opportunities than they could hope to give him. They did not wish to upset him by telling him that he was to leave home, so he was told one day that after his nap he was to go for a drive with a friend of "Mummie Kay's." Sonny complained that he did not want to go, but would prefer to stay at home with "Mummie" (his foster mother). However, after his nap, when the big automobile drew up at the house, Sonny climbed in full of enthusiasm for a ride in the car with the nice new lady. He was driven away and has had no contact since with either of his foster parents or with "Mummie Kay." One can imagine what a horribly traumatic situation this must have been for a three-year-old child whose entire world revolved around his love objects.

When Dan arrived in his new home, he showed a typical childish absence of a mourning reaction. It is likely that Dan's sorrow at the security he had lost was so great that his immature ego could not face it and his sorrow was, therefore, entirely suppressed or denied. Dan repressed all memories of his first foster home. In his unexplained outbursts of crying, he is now giving evidence of a deferred mourning reaction. He cries, but he does not know why or for what he cries. It may also be that in his symptom of running away and hiding, he is repeating, in a distorted form, the traumatic situation to which he was subjected at the age of three. He comes back from his expeditions in such a condition that he has to be put to bed and lovingly cared for and nursed. . . .

Source: Florence Clothier, "The Psychology of the Adopted Child," *Mental Hygiene* 27 (April 1943):222-226.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman

.



## Florence Clothier to Mary Ruth Colby on "Permanent Love Objects," January 14, 1941

*Florence Clothier was a psychoanalyst at the New England Home for Little Wanderers. Her exchange with [U.S. Children's Bureau](#) official Mary Colby suggests that Freudian developmental theory was one factor in the reconsideration of early (sometimes called "direct") adoptions: the placements of newborns and young infants. Another was the spread of [adoption science](#) in many different research fields and the general turn toward nurture in the human sciences after 1940. At the beginning of the century, child-placers considered early adoptions extremely risky and advised against them, in spite of the fact that many adopters expressed strong preferences for babies. By midcentury, adoptions of children under one year of age had increased significantly. The resistance that Clothier noted to this trend, and her concession that early placement might not make sense when social workers had only "meagre" information to go on, indicate the stamina of [eugenic](#) worries about the children available for adoption.*

---

Dear Miss Colby:

Thank you so much for your letter with its helpful criticisms of my adoption manuscript. I am hopeful that "MENTAL HYGIENE" will use the whole set. . . .

You questioned my insistence that, if possible, adoption placements should be made in early infancy. On psychological grounds I feel very strongly on this point. However, I do realize that there are many cases where the information is so meagre that, even at the risk of introducing traumatic experiences, adoption has to be delayed. I shall go over my manuscript and try to make it clear that, where information is meagre, delay in legal adoption is advisable. That need not always or necessarily mean that careful early placement on a trial basis is contra-indicated. From a psychological point of view I am convinced of the importance for the child (and the adoptive mother) that the conflicts and struggles of the infantile and Oedipal development be lived through with the permanent love objects. This psychological fact should, of course never be admitted as an excuse for careless or inadequate work and investigation. On the contrary, it challenges the skill and energy of the social worker and makes

tremendous demands on the efficiency of the social agency. I realize that many agencies throughout the country are not equipped and staffed to accept the challenge of painstakingly careful early placements. However, that does not alter the fact that the child's infantile relationships and experiences are important and that insofar as environment can modify the structure of the personality infantile relationships and experiences are doing so. As often happens, we have here a conflict between what, in the light of our present day knowledge, seems psychologically true and what seems sociologically advisable, safe or expedient. Similes are unsatisfactory, but this occurs to me. A surgeon, addressing a professional group, does not hesitate to recommend what seems to him the best operative procedure, even though many clinics may not be staffed or equipped to carry out that procedure. He outlines his procedure and trusts that medical centers and societies will see to it that it is not exploited or misused by inexperienced, careless or ignorant persons.

I realize that problems in the field of psychology and sociology are complex and not easy to control. For this reason, I suspect, social workers as a defense develop patterns of rigidity about which they are uncritical. There is need for social workers, as a professional group, to evaluate accepted social work procedure in the light of new experimental work coming from all sorts of sources, including genetics, the various schools of psychology, medicine, sociology and economics.

As a psychiatrist, interested in social problems, I can conscientiously express only what, in the present state of my knowledge, I believe to be true. I grant that what I may think of as a fact may be regarded by others as a theory. Certainly further difficult study and observation of the effects of infantile relationships and experiences is essential and I hope that social workers will follow these studies alertly and critically. . . .

Source: Florence Clothier to Miss Mary Ruth Colby, January 14, 1941, U.S. Children's Bureau Papers, Box 169, Folder 7-3-3-4, National Archives II.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:

**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact  
Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon



Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Excerpt from Margaret Cobb, "The Mentality of Dependent Children," 1922

The family histories of the first dozen of our cases, taken alphabetically, are reproduced herewith:—

1. Father a drunkard and abusive to family. Mother died. May, 1915, T.B. She had 12 children, 10 of whom died in infancy. The other living child is 15 years of age. Works in a factory. Diagnosis made in Boston by New England Home for Little Wanderers is as follows: Chronological age 11, mental age, Binet 8.8, Yerkes, 7.8, Coef. I.Q., 61. (I.Q. of patient, 82 Stanford revision) Prognosis—very poor.

2. Father died of T.B. Mother at present is patient in Wallingford T. B. Sanitarium. Both parents come from stock superior to that of average immigrant. Paternal grandfather is a druggist and known to be a man of intelligence and some education. (I.Q. of patient, 90).

3. Mother and father were heavy drinkers. Family fell below average social status before father's death in 1914. Siblings: 1. Female, 20 years, St. Vincent's Training School for Nurses. 2. Female, 16 years. Has illegitimate child. 3. Female, 15 years. 4. Pt., male, 14 years. 5. Male, 12 years. (I.Q. of patient, 81).

4. Mother is dead. Father was a drunkard and abusive to his children who lived in constant fear of him. (I.Q. of patient, 90).

5. Parents have separated for the 6th time. Their life together has always been unhappy. Father is jealous of mother who is 13 years younger than he. Mother in turn accuses him of mistreating her. (I.Q. of patient, 93).

6. Father a heavy drinker. Mother reported immoral. Family lived in constant state of destitution. One brother; considered feeble-minded by teachers. Recently released from Meriden Industrial School. Sister was considered very backward by teachers when in school. (I.Q. of patient, 83).

7. Father was a drunkard and 22 years older than his wife who is an extremely nervous, frail woman, considered by all who know her to be mentally deficient. Upon autopsy, it was found that one-fourth of father's

brain was destroyed. Brother, 16 years, emotionally unstable, possibly psychopathic. I.Q. of patient 59. Sister, 11 years, I.Q., 53. Brother, 11 years, I.Q., 95, emotionally unstable.

8. Mother is dead. She and one sister were syphilitic. Father deserted children after mother's death. He was considered a smart man and a capable worker but refused to keep any job steadily. (I.Q. of patient 96).

9. Both parents were immoral. Father who was probably subnormal was involved in a "White Slave" affair with his son and was reported as an undesirable alien. Mother is said to be syphilitic, is emotionally unstable, and thoroughly unreliable. (I.Q., 93).

10. Mother, a woman of the vampire type, was immoral with a number of men. The father a laborer, physically and mentally her inferior, was frequently jailed by her for drunkenness and abuse. In 1916 she eloped with another man, taking the youngest child with her. (I.Q. of patient, 58).

11. Father comes from a family in which nervous troubles are common and has been a patient in Middletown since 1914. He has dementia praecox, and also T.B. Mother had two illegitimate children before she met him, and lived with him for some years before marriage. She is now living with another man. (I.Q. of patient, 94).

12. Mother died from tuberculosis after a long illness. Family self-respecting. (I.Q. of patient, 95).

Source: Margaret Evertson Cobb, "The Mentality of Dependent Children," *Journal of Delinquency* 7 (May 1922): 139-140.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Concerned United Birthparents, "Separated by Adoption? What Is CUB?"



"Who cares about keeping *this* family together?" was the poignant question posed by [Concerned United Birthparents](#) from its inception in 1976.

CUB (Concerned United Birthparents, Inc.) is a non profit organization that began its official existence in October 1976, by Lee Campbell. A small group gathered to provide mutual support for birthparents, men and women who had surrendered children to adoption. CUB membership and purpose have greatly expanded since those early days. CUB continues to evolve each year.

CUB members now include birthparents, adoptees, adoptive parents, other adoption affected people and professionals. CUB's purposes are providing mutual support for coping with the ongoing challenges of adoption, working for adoption reform in law and social policy, preventing unnecessary family separations, assisting adoption separated relatives in searching for family members, and educating the public about adoption issues and realities.

### MUTUAL SUPPORT

People sometimes mistakenly assume the surrender of a child ends a traumatic time for birthparents and is soon forgotten. Robin Winkler, in his study of birthmothers, reports that even forty years later birthparents regard the surrender of a child to adoption as the most stressful experience of their lives. He found that for half of birthparents the pain of the surrender remains as intense or intensifies over time. The loss of a child to adoption affect many areas of life, particularly marriage, subsequent children and difficulty trusting other people.

Adoptive parents frequently lack the information they need in order to assist their children with developing healthy self identity and obtaining needed medical services. In increasing numbers, adoptive parents have joined CUB in efforts to understand the issues confronting their children. They begin to recognize that adoption is a blended family situation in which they are the nurturing parents, and their children have birthparents. They

believe that sealing their children's original birth certificates implies adoption is inadequate and must be disguised as birth. They resent this lack of respect for the authenticity of adoptive parenting. They are learning they have the right to know the other parents who love their child.

Growing up in an adoptive home is different than growing up in a family of parents and children who are genetically related. Adoptees share their love and lives with adoptive parents. They do not share their genes and birthparent histories. Adoptees' bodies, talents, health and genes come from their birthparents. Adoptees need to know their origins and birthfamilies. This need to know does not indicate a lack of love for adoptive parents, but shows the adoptees are secure enough in their adoptive parents' love to pursue their need to know their backgrounds.

Mutual support through monthly meetings, our CUB Communicator, correspondence and phone calls helps members cope with the challenge of dealing with adoption difficulties and feelings.

#### ADOPTION REFORM

Many CUB members work to promote legislative and social policy changes to require fully informing families, including single parent families, of all alternatives and services available to them and to assist them in keeping their families together. There are some parents whose situation, even with support, does not permit them to raise their children. When adoption is truly necessary, we encourage changes that would make adoption a humane and caring alternative, not a punishment. Closed adoption harms all parties by imposing secrecy on people who do not want it. We encourage openness, honesty and cooperation in adoption.

Birthparents often surrender because of a temporary lack of resources, not a lack of love. Parents unable to raise their children should have a voice in who will raise them. Denying loving parents knowledge of their children, even when their children are adults, is a cruel and unnecessary punishment that causes suffering for birthparents and their families. Birthparents' love for their children does not end at the time of their surrender.

Many agencies arrange open adoptions. It benefits adoptees and adoptive parents to be able to answer medical questions doctors ask with the assurance that up to date answers are available. Adoptive parents can reassure their children that their birthparents are loving people. Many adoptive parents feel that knowing the birthparents as people gives them freedom from unwarranted fears about the birthparents. Knowing their child's

history allows them to help their children grow into whole people whose backgrounds are accepted facts, not frightening fantasies.

By denying adoptees knowledge of their origins and birth families, our society treats adults as eternal children. Like other citizens, every adoptee has a distinct genetic background and history. Yet unlike other citizens, adoptees in many states are never considered old enough to have a right to know their backgrounds. If adoption is to serve the needs of all parties, it must be changed to address people's needs at the time of surrender and placement, and throughout their lives. This means social and legal recognition of the facts that adoptees grow up, and that living with truth is healthier than living with fears and fantasies.

#### PREVENTION

Many CUB members live with the pain of being separated from family members and living in incomplete families. The circumstances leading to the surrender of a child are often temporary and can be overcome with caring support. A temporary lack of finances or support should not be a reason for a loving parent and child to be separated. To prevent unnecessary separations, members have welcomed young mothers and their children into their homes. By providing temporary support, we have been able to help vulnerable young families overcome temporary difficulties so they could be strong, healthy, positive families. CUB members eagerly share their own situations and feelings with young parents-to-be and their families. CUB has provided a booklet concerning the choices available to people experiencing an unplanned pregnancy because of our concern that parents be informed of alternatives and choices.

#### SEARCH

CUB is not a search organization. We may suggest reliable searchers. We let members know of other search groups in their area. Perhaps our most important service to searchers is to provide emotional support during search. We help searchers be sensitive to others' needs as they plan for contact and reunion. Members who are not close to a branch receive support and information through our newsletters, emails and phone calls with CUB leaders and members.

#### EDUCATION

CUB has a strong interest in educating not only adoption affected individuals but also society in general. Many of our members and leaders volunteer their time to speak to community groups about issues relating to family separation and adoption.

Source: Concerned United Birthparents, "Separated by Adoption? What is CUB?" (Des Moines: Concerned United Birthparents), undated.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 6-22-2005  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



- [Timeline](#)
- [People & Organizations](#)
- [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)
- [Topics in Adoption History](#)
- [Further Reading](#)
- [Document Archives](#)
- [Site Index](#)

## Confidential Medical Report on Fertility Status of Prospective Adoptive Couple, early 1940s

### CONFIDENTIAL MEDICAL REPORT

On Fertility Status of Prospective Adoptive Couple  
(Only fill out what is applicable)

HUSBAND..... Age.....

WIFE..... Age.....

1. How long have you treated (husband)..... (wife).....

Date of initial examination..... Most recent examination.....

2. How long trying to have a baby, when first seen?..... For how long after marriage were contraceptives used?.....

How long had patient been treated for (sterility) (other reproductive disorder) by previous physicians?.....

3. Probable cause of child bearing difficulty.....

4. HUSBAND

Degree of patient's cooperation with recommended diagnostic and treatment procedures.....

Was artificial insemination ever recommended or attempted?.....

If so, results, including husband's and wife's reaction.....

Method: (Husband) (Donor) By what diagnostic procedures (cf. interview, semen specimen, etc.).....

Findings?.....

Treatment for same?.....

5. WIFE

Examination findings and results of any special diagnostic procedures, such as Rubin's test and endometrial biopsy.....

Type of treatment and its results.....

Evidence, if any, of endocrine imbalance other than the sterility.....

6. Outcome of previous pregnancies, if any.....
7. Degree of sexual compatability:  
Any evidence in either husband or wife of markedly negative or fearful attitude towards the sexual relation; of any potency disturbances, frigidity, dyspareunia or vaginismus?
- .....
- .....
8. Prospect of this couple having their own baby. (Please check)
- |                         |                         |                       |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Impossible.....         | Extremely doubtful..... | Fair possibility..... |
| Inadvisable (why?)..... | Doubtful.....           | Good possibility..... |
9. Additional Remarks:
- .....

Source: Confidential Medical Report on Fertility Status of Prospective Adoptive Couple, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 157, Folder 1, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Reverend S.S. Cummings, New England Home for Little Wanderers' Orphan Train

Following is a description of an *orphan train* sponsored by the New England Home for Little Wanderers. The excerpt, which quotes missionary agent Reverend S.S. Cummings, illustrates that this method of child placement was not limited to the New York Children's Aid Society or its famous leader, *Charles Loring Brace*.

There is system and order about it as there should be about every good work. These homes are not engaged beforehand as some have supposed. It is surprising to some that we will start off with a company of thirty or forty children, not knowing where we shall find a home for them. The process is simple. We look over the map of the country, and line of railroads, and decide on some town to make our first point, and then write to the pastors of the churches that we will be there at a given time, generally arriving on Saturday, and ask them to make arrangements for our holding services in their churches on the Sabbath. . . .

The children at the church in the presence of the people and an appropriate talk of our duty to provide for, and take care of, orphan children, brings our work and the object of our visit before the public preparatory for the work of adoption on Monday. We invite the people to meet us on Monday and see the children and make a selection if desirable. Meantime, we form a brief acquaintance with the pastor and a few good reliable citizens, that are always ready to give any information desirable as to the fitness of families to become responsible for the charge of the children.

The terms or conditions of taking the children and the references required soon decide the question of applicants. We seldom fail of doing a good day's work in the line of adoption, after thus spending a Sabbath with the people.

Source: "A Brief History of the Children's Aid Association of Boston and the New England Home for Little Wanderers," in Edith M.H. Baylor and Elio D. Monachesi, *The Rehabilitation of Children: The Theory and Practice of Child Placement* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), 524.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## [Neva R. Deardorff, The Children's Commission of Pennsylvania Studies Adoption, 1925](#)

*The Children's Commission of Pennsylvania conducted one of the largest and most significant early field studies when it investigated 1022 Pennsylvania adoptions granted between 1919 and 1924, supplemented by an additional 1200 cases examined by the [U.S. Children's Bureau](#) in various Pennsylvania counties. As the excerpt suggests, adoption was vulnerable to a host of problems, from the economic exploitation of young people to their sexual abuse. The Commission's report to the state legislature recommended that the state's adoption law be strengthened and more strictly enforced. Pennsylvania lawmakers stopped short of requiring judges to consider professional investigations in all cases, but the revised adoption law attempted to give agencies and interested parties occasional opportunities to protest the most objectionable placements. Like most bodies that gathered empirical data on adoptions during the early decades of the century, the Children's Commission of Pennsylvania found that more and better information was desperately needed in adoptions. Consistent record-keeping, thorough investigations, and other regulatory protocols needed to be put into place long before the family's day in court if [child welfare](#) was to be meaningfully protected.*

---

No more striking example could be found of the wide discrepancy between life as set forth in the stereotyped phrases found in legal documents and life as shown in good social case records than is presented by adoption petitions in Pennsylvania and doubtless in many other places in the United States. . . .

Between twelve and fifteen hundred adoptions take place each year in Pennsylvania. Children may be legally adopted in either of two ways in this state. In 1855, following the example of Massachusetts, which enacted the first adoption legislation in 1851, Pennsylvania provided that adoption could be decreed by the common pleas courts of the counties. In 1872 an amendment to this law was passed which legalized a process of adoption referred to as the "common law form of adopting a child by deed." This dual system makes it possible that an adoption refused by the judicial authorities should be consummated by deed. While the Commission has

found no actual instance of this kind, it has found traces of adoptions effected by deed because the parties recognized that they were of such doubtful character that they hesitated to submit them to the scrutiny of the courts, casual as that often is.

The second outstanding defect of the Pennsylvania system is that it provides for no social investigation of the child and his natural family or of the adopting family. An adoption can be consummated by a judge who has not seen any of the parties and who has no information other than that contained in the high sounding phrases of the petition. . . . The Commission has unearthed interesting cases of perjury as to the identity of the parents of a child and whether or not they are dead. The minor's own consent it assumed. . . .

Families in which venereal and other serious transmissible diseases are present at the time of the adoption of unrelated and very young children, families who are receiving assistance from the charitable resources of the community, beggars, fortune tellers, families with prison and criminal court records have all been found among those who appear in the petitions. . . .

The Children's Commission does not wish to convey the impression that all or even a large number of the adopted children went into homes of the kind described in the two cases cited on these pages. Instances reminiscent of the adoptions in story books stand out, however, in somewhat bold relief against a mass of adoptions in which at best the child secures a tolerably good abiding place and at worst sinks apparently to the deepest depths of misery and degradation. Adoption gives the adopters control of the services and earnings of the child during minority and a claim for non-support thereafter; it becomes a very practical matter when an aged couple of no financial resources adopt an adolescent or a young child. . . .

#### **Persons of Respectability**

A married couple whose street address is omitted in the petition to adopt, took a twenty-two months old boy three days after they filed their petition in 1921 in the Philadelphia County Court. They are described as persons of respectability by the two affiants, whose street addresses are also omitted. The petition contains no information concerning their character or their home.

The records of the social agencies, however, had a great deal of enlightening information. The family consisted of a husband then forty years old, his wife, forty-seven, and one daughter fourteen years old. Nine years previously the family had taken an illegitimate child and at about the same time had appealed to the Salvation Army for help on the ground of sickness. The Salvation Army asked one of the relief societies to go in but the family was found not to need material relief.

Not long afterward an anonymous complaint was made to the Society to Protect Children from Cruelty that the foster child was not receiving proper food.

In April of 1917 the man, who at one time had worked as a street car conductor, was arrested on the charge of disorderly conduct and indecent exposure. He was committed for thirty days to the House of Correction.

In August 1919 the Society to Protect Children from Cruelty again received a complaint which alleged abuse by the father of the twelve year old daughter. During the early morning hours, neighbors had heard the girl begging the father not to touch her and not to turn down the light. Stories were rife in the neighborhood of indecent practices of the man toward his daughter.

The visitor for the Society to Protect Children from Cruelty found that the woman kept a very dirty and untidy house. She was known as a drinking woman who told fortunes. Husband and wife were known to quarrel and fight continuously. The Society filed a petition alleging neglect and improper guardianship and recommended that the children be removed and placed in foster homes with a court order on the father for their support.

The court left the children with the woman and put a support order on the father, who also was ordered to behave himself toward the children. The case was put on probation with the court and the Society to Protect Children from Cruelty withdrew.

In January 1921 the boy taken in 1912 died suddenly of broncho-pneumonia. His death certificate is signed by the coroner.

In October 1921 the family took the boy, whose adoption is described above.

At Christmas 1923, this family appealed to a relief society for a basket of food and for clothing for this little boy. When in January 1924, they were asked to send the little boy to the Sunday School maintained by the relief society, they again dropped out of sight.

Source: Neva R. Deardorff, "The Welfare of the Said Child..." *Survey Midmonthly* 53 (January 15, 1925): 457-458.

Site designed by:



**Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Department of Defense Position Regarding Children Born Out of Wedlock, 1971



The adults in this 1990s photo lived with their Vietnamese mother and African American father when they were small. They were unable to leave Vietnam in 1975 because their father had a wife and children in the United States.

### DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE POSITION REGARDING CHILDREN BORN OUT OF WEDLOCK IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES WHERE U.S. ARMED FORCES ARE ASSIGNED

The command in Vietnam is not complacent about the morals of the servicemen and associated activities. In this regard, responsible military commanders strive to curb the problem at its sources by making it clear that irresponsible and immoral behavior on the part of servicemen is never condoned, including the conditions which tend to induce or encourage immoral behavior and in particular, where it contributes to the problem of children born out of wedlock.

Separation from family and placement in an alien environment, coupled with the difference in mores which frequently prevail, are recognized as conditions which require unusual efforts. Accordingly, special command emphasis is given to character guidance and other programs to provide servicemen an opportunity to channel their off-duty activities into wholesome pursuits. In addition, direct control measures are employed as warranted. These include such measures as the enforcement of curfews, off-limits restrictions, bed checks, and disciplinary actions. Areas and establishments can be and are placed off-limits by our commanders concerned when such is necessary to protect the interests and welfare of our servicemen.

Personal conduct of servicemen in Vietnam can be governed by forcible measures only on a transitory basis. In general, service personnel are neither more nor less moral than when they enter the service; unfortunately, some persist in engaging in immoral conduct despite counseling and advice to the contrary. . . .

We recognize that emotion and compassion often lead to a distorted view of the magnitude of the problem of illegitimate children by some persons. Accordingly, the number of such children fathered by American servicemen overseas is frequently



The Buddhist nun who ran the Vietnamese orphanage in which these children grew up reported that eight of the forty-six orphans who lived there in 1975 were Amerasian. This was a much higher percentage than the two percent estimated by the U.S. Department of Defense.

exaggerated. Official reports from authorities in Vietnam state that the problem there is not of substantial magnitude. A recent survey of 120 orphanages with a total orphanage population of 18,000 children indicates a range of 350-400 children or about 2.08 percent were of possible U.S. parentage. Another survey of a representative number of institutions for children in Vietnam shows that children with possible U.S. parentage account for approximately 2.6 percent of the total. A United Press report indicated that less than one-half of one percent of the children in Vietnamese orphanages are thought to be Vietnamese-American.

Similarly, in 1952, when estimates of children of mixed parentage born out of wedlock in Japan during the United States occupation placed the number at 200,000, the American Consul General enlisted the cooperation of the Japanese Ministry of Welfare in evaluating the true extent of the problem. The Ministry's subsequent report placed the official figure at 5,013, of whom 1,000 were born to parents who were legally married subsequent to the birth of their child. (Eveland, Virginia D., "Welfare Program for Children of Mixed Parentage," Foreign Affairs Association of Japan, Tokyo, 1956). Again in 1963, allegations were made that there were about 100 orphan children in an orphanage on Okinawa of whom the majority were illegitimate children of American service personnel. However, an official investigation established that, of the 85 children assigned to the orphanages by the Ryukyuan Government, only six were of mixed parentage.

The other side of the story often goes untold. We take pride in the fact that the American serviceman, through his generosity in all foreign lands, has adopted many of these alien children.

Source: DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE POSITION REGARDING CHILDREN BORN OUT OF WEDLOCK IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES WHERE U.S. ARMED FORCES ARE ASSIGNED, June 28, 1971, International Social Service, American Branch Papers, Box 38, Folder: "Conference on the Special Needs of Children in Vietnam," Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact**

**Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Helene Deutsch, "Adoptive Mothers," 1945



Helene Deutsch, an emigré psychoanalyst known for her theories of feminine psychology



Helene Deutsch in 1967

When a woman's longing to be a mother is not gratified by children of her own, and when she seeks a substitute by the most natural method, namely, adoption, the question arises as to why she has no children of her own. In the course of our discussion we have met various types of women who long for children but are unable to gratify this longing directly, owing to unresolved psychic conflicts. We have seen the midwife who out of fear of the biological functions was obliged to content herself with presiding over the delivery of other women's children, and Unamuno's Aunt Tula, who despised sexuality to such an extent that she could gratify her ardent motherliness only by exploiting the sexual service of other women. We have seen the androgynous woman who withdraws from female reproductive tasks and yet wants to create and shape a human being after her own image, and the woman whose eroticism has remained fixed in homosexuality and whose yearning for a child derives from the profound source of her own mother relationship. Many such women renounce men, but gratify the wish for a child by adoption. . . .

The largest proportion of adoptive parents, however, is recruited from among sterile married couples. Here the psychology of the adoptive mother is largely determined by the psychologic motives for sterility (if any) and by the woman's reaction to her renunciation. Has her fear of the reproductive function proved stronger than her wish to be a mother? Is she still so much a child that she cannot emotionally and consciously decide to assume the responsible role of mother? Is she so much absorbed emotionally in other life tasks that she fears motherhood? . . . Does a deeply unconscious curse of heredity burden all her motherly wish fantasies? And, above all, has the sterile woman overcome the narcissistic mortification of her inferiority as a woman to such an extent that she is willing to give the child, as object, full maternal love? . . . .

We must not forget that in such cases adoption constitutes an attempt to remedy a severe trauma, and that this trauma must be overcome before motherliness with its gratifications can fully develop. What kind of trauma it is, and the woman's reaction to the necessary renunciation of the hope of giving birth to a child, depend very much, as we have seen, upon the cause of sterility. The emotional difficulties of adoption may originate in the very conditions that have led to sterility, and the ghosts that were supposed to be banished by the renunciation of the reproductive function can under different circumstances re-emerge in the adoptive mother in a new form. The fear "I cannot have a child" will, for instance, assume the form. . . "The child will be taken from me." The adopted child can become the bearer of all the problems that have led to sterility, as well as of those that normally pertain to a child of one's own. The only difference is that here the conflicts have a more real background. . . .

There are women—I might call them female Pied Pipers—who use the bait of a cozy home and motherly care to lure children out of social institutions without regard for their nature, driven by a strong psychic urge to help children, to foster fledglings in their nests, and to hear the name "Mother" uttered by as many mouths as possible. . . . A masked kidnaperism may often lead a kind and reasonable woman to undertake the grandiose social task of becoming a replacing mother of the abandoned or neglected children of many mothers. I have heard such an addict of adoption speak with the greatest energy against social assistance to children: a child—every child—needs one mother, *the* mother. And she offered herself as such a mother to society. . . .

It is certain that similar individual motives, which remain completely unconscious, operate in adoptions.

Source: Helene Deutsch, "Adoptive Mothers," in *The Psychology of Women* (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1945): 395, 397, 420-421, 422, 423.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)



Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman

[Timeline](#)[People & Organizations](#)[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)[Topics in Adoption History](#)[Further Reading](#)[Document Archives](#)[Site Index](#)

## Discussion of the Role of Anthropology in Transracial Adoptions, 1956

*These meeting minutes document an ongoing discussion by staff members at Louise Wise Services, one of the country's leading adoption agencies in the post-World War II era. What to do about children of mixed or ambiguous racial background? This raised a number of thorny questions about who children were, where they belonged, and what their sexual and reproductive futures might hold, recalling the earlier debate about adoption and *eugenics*. Should agencies place children in white families in cases where they could "pass"? The Interracial Program of Louise Wise Services was launched in 1952 with the strong backing of *Justine Wise Polier*, daughter of the agency's founder, Louise Wise. This excerpt suggests the role that science played in legitimizing *matching* at a moment when the acknowledgment of racial differences within families was just becoming imaginable.*

Judge Polier then called upon Dr. Shapiro, the newest member of our Professional Advisory Committee. He is chairman of the Department of Anthropology and Curator of Physical Anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History. He has worked with all of the adoption agencies in New York City for the past several years in helping them to make decisions regarding children of interracial background. Generally it is a question of how the child should be placed. Dr. Shapiro said that the problem of mixed races is not purely biological, it is biological in a sociological setting. He said that it is not always simple to say what the child really is; he can only give an opinion of what a child is and what kind of a family he believes the child can fit into. The agencies must make the final decision.

In discussing the nature of racial differences, Dr. Shapiro said that racial differences were easy to see if the child is of unmixed racial background. When we cross individuals of certain racial backgrounds—as for example Negro and white—the child may fall within the range of Negro traits, or the child may be so white that we should think of him as a white child. In the latter cases, the Negro strain has been diluted out and the genes of the child are overwhelmingly white. If such a child should later marry a white person the couple would not have Negro children.

Dr. Shapiro stated that since most agencies like to place children very

young they send them to him at two to three months of age. However, he refuses to give an opinion then, and will not see the children until they are six months old. He realizes that this puts a burden on the agencies but yet he feels that it can save us from making mistakes.

There was some discussion regarding birth certificates for children who should be classified as white but whose original birth certificates indicate that they are Negro. In such situations, Dr. Shapiro writes a letter which the agency can use in having the birth certificate changed. . . .

Source: Minutes of the Child Adoption Committee, March 7, 1956, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 155, Folder 2, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Kathleen d'Ollier, "Case Work with the Unmarried Father," 1937

*Kathleen D'Ollier, Executive Director of Family and Child Welfare Departments, Catholic Charities, Rochester, New York, expresses here the moral condemnation that was frequently leveled against unmarried fathers on the rare occasions when they were discussed early in the twentieth century. In the era before reliable blood or DNA testing, paternity was "putative" rather than provable.*

---

Case work with the unmarried father is a subject which any case worker would approach with humility, not only because of the serious nature of the problem, but because when thought of as a separate categorical field, it is a seriously neglected one, and there is therefore less precedent to guide us in our approach.

Why should this be! For centuries, at least since the days of St. Vincent de Paul, much loving care has been given to the unmarried mother and her child, and still how incomplete is the picture. . . .

As to the social aspect of the problem, the man is often a more serious menace than the girl. Have any of you kept a file of putative fathers in your own agency and seen how often the same name is mentioned in different cases, or how often the names of two brothers may occur? I recall a young business man whose name is mentioned three times in our file, and this does not by any means limit the harm he may have done. The ease with which many of our young men and women forestall the consequences by use of contraceptives, or conceal them by resorting to abortions, makes illegitimacy no longer an index of immorality.

There are few social workers today who do not agree that the putative father should be located and given an opportunity to acknowledge paternity; and if he refuses to do so after an understanding and objective interview, and there appears to be sufficient evidence to prove a case, then he should be brought before a court which will, after hearing both sides, adjudicate, and if the decision be favorable to the girl, order a financial settlement, either in a lump sum or in small payments. There are still, however, some institutions that oppose this practice, feeling that charity is better served by ignoring the question of paternity entirely. . . .

No greater injury could be done to both mother and child than in the case in question [ignoring the birth father]. The child has been deprived of the social, educational and religious advantages of being born into a normal family. The mother, aside from the burden of bearing the child, must face, except in communities where public respect of chastity is lax, greater or less ostracism. . . . Now to repay this debt the man may marry the mother. However, this is not always possible, and often undesirable. Still the obligation remains, and by supporting the child, and if possible the mother also, it must be paid.

Source: Kathleen d'Olier, "Case Work with the Unmarried Father" (paper presented at the Twenty-third National Conference of Catholic Charities, 1937), 120-121.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

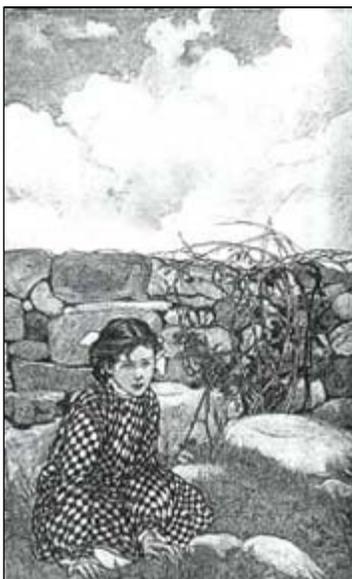
Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Annie Hamilton Donnell, "The Adopted," 1906



"Margaret heard, with a cold terror creeping over her. . ."

*This sentimental story about girlhood friendship and rivalry from early in the century illustrates not only the enduring theme of **telling** in adoption, but suggests that secrecy was closely tied to stigma. Perhaps more than anyone, children were aware that adoption was often kept **confidential** and was widely considered unequal and shameful.*

It was mid-May and school was nearly over. The long summer vacation stretched endlessly, lonesomely, ahead of Margaret. . . .

Usually at recess Nell—the Enemy—and Margaret had gone wandering away together with their arms around each other's waist, as happy as anything. But for a week of recesses now they had gone wandering in opposite directions—the Enemy marching due east, Margaret due west. The stone wall stretched away to the west. She had found a nice lonesome little place to huddle in, behind the wall, out of sight. It was just the place to be miserable in.

"I know something!" from one of a little group of gossipers on the outside of the wall. "She needn't stick her chin out an' not come an' play with us. She's *nothing but an adopted!*"

"Oh!—a what?" in awestruck chorus from the listeners. "Say it again, Rhody Sharp."

"An adopted—that's all she is. I guess nobody but an adopted need to go trampin' past when we invite her to play with us! I guess we're good as she is an' better, too, so there!"

Margaret in her hidden nook heard with a cold terror creeping over her and settling around her heart. It was so close now that she breathed with difficulty. If—supposing they meant—

"Rhody Sharp, you're fibbing! I don't believe a single word you say!" sprang forth a champion valiantly. "She's dreadfully fond of her mother—just *dreadfully!*"

"She doesn't know it," promptly returned Rhody Sharp, her voice stabbing poor Margaret's ear like a sharp little sword. "They're keeping it from her. My gran'mother doesn't believe they'd ought to. She says—"

But nobody cared what Rhody Sharp's gran'mother said. A clatter of shocked little voices burst forth into excited, pitying discussion of the unfortunate who was nothing but an adopted. One of their own number! One they spelled with and multiplied with and said the capitals with every day! That they had invited to come and play with them—an' she'd stuck her chin out!

"Why! Why, then she's a—orphan!" one voice exclaimed. "Really an' honest she is—and she doesn't know it!"

"Oh my, isn't it awful!" another voice. "Shouldn't you think she'd hide her head—I mean, if she knew?"

It was already hidden. Deep down in the sweet, moist grass—a little heavy, uncrowned, terror-smitten head. The cruel voice kept on.

"It's just like a disgrace, isn't it? Shouldn't you s'pose it would feel that way if 'twas you?"

"Think o' kissin' your mother good night an' it's not bein' your mother?" . . .

Margaret drove her hands deep into the matted grass. . . . It was—it was terrible! . . . The terror within her was growing more terrible every moment.

Then came shame. Like the vilest of the evil Things it had been lurking in the background waiting its turn,—it was its turn now. Margaret sat up in the grass, *ashamed*. She could not name the strange feeling, for she had never been ashamed before, but she sat there a piteous little figure in the grip of it. It was awful to be only nine and feel like that! To shrink from going home past Mrs. Streeter's and the minister's and the Enemy's!—for fear they'd look out of the window and say, "There goes an adopted!" Perhaps they'd point their fingers—Margaret closed her eyes dizzily and saw Mrs. Streeter's plump one and the minister's lean one and the Enemy's short brown one, all pointing. She could feel something burning on her forehead.—it was "Adopted," branded there. . . .

Something must be done—there was something she would do. She began it at once. . . .

"I have found it out," she wrote with her trembling fingers. "I don't suppose its wicket because I couldn't help being one but it is awful. It breaks your heart to find you're one all of a sudden. If I had known before,

I would have darned the big holes too. Ime going away becaus I canot bare living with folks I havent any right to. The stik pin this is pined on with is for Her That Wasent Ever my Mother for I love her still. When this you see remember me the rose is red the violet blue sugger is sweet and so are you.

MARGARET.

She pinned it on tremblingly and then crept back to bed. Perhaps she went to sleep,—at any rate, quite suddenly there were voices at her door—*Her* voice and—*His*. She did not stir, but lay and listened to them. . . .

"I've always expected Nelly to find out that way—it would be so much kinder to tell her at home. You know it would, Henry, instead of letting her hear it from strangers and get her poor little heart broken. Henry, if God hadn't given us a precious little child of our own and we had ever adopted—"

Margaret dashed off the quilts and leaped to the floor with a cry of ecstasy. The anguish—the shame—the cruel gibing Things—were left behind her; they had slid from her burdened little heart at the first glorious rush of understanding; they would never come back, —never come back,—never come back to Margaret! Glory, glory, hallelujah, 'twasn't her! *Her* soul went marching on!

The two at the door suffered an unexpected, an amazing onslaught from a flying little figure. Its arms were out, were gathering them both in,—were strangling them in wild, exultant hugs.

"Oh! Oh, you're mine! I'm yours! We're each other's! I'm not an Adopted any more!" . . .

Then Margaret remembered the Enemy, and in the throes of her pity the enmity was swallowed up forever. . . . She could never be too tender—too generous—to Nelly, to try to make up. And all her life she would take care of her and keep her from finding out.

Source: Annie Hamilton Donnell, "The Adopted," *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, November 1906, 929-930, 932-933.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Excerpt from Helen Doss, *The Family Nobody Wanted*, 1954



Two of the Doss siblings

*This classic [adoption narrative](#) was reprinted by Northeastern University Press in 2001.*

Our children never thought of themselves as looking particularly different from each other. One day, when Donny was eight and Alex a year old, Donny crouched on the floor to encourage his little brother to walk. Alex reached out both hands, took a hesitating step, and tumbled into Donny's arms. The high-pitched giggle interlaced with the hearty boy-sized chuckle, then Donny looked up at me, blue eyes wide and sincere under his thatch of blond hair.

"Mama," he said, glancing fondly at the Oriental ivory face beside him, at the black appleseed eyes that crinkle into slits when Alex laughs, "if he was seven years older, and if I had black hair, everybody would think that him and me was twins!"

They felt that much alike, our children, and often they took it for granted that this likeness would show. Naturally they could see that there were minor and inconsequential variations, that Rita had "the blackest, shiniest hair," that Teddy could toast browner in the sun than the rest, but persons bearing such unearned distinctions were polite enough not to gloat. There are only two times I can remember when differences within our family seemed to be of any concern, and then, each time, it was only because a small child developed a sudden fear that a minor dissimilarity might be a physical handicap to the bearer. Once Teddy looked into the mirror at his own brown eyes and then studied Donny, solicitude puckering his face like a walnut.

"Donny?" he asked, "how can you see out of blue eyes?"

Also there was the early-winter day when Timmy watched Carl trim brown spots from apples with the point of a knife.

"Why do you do that, Daddy?" he asked.

"Bad spots," Carl said.

Later I noticed Timmy staring at me, his usually frolicking brown eyes now worried. "Daddy gonna cut pieces out of you?"

"Heavens, no," I laughed. "What made you say that?"

His fingers slid gently over the freckles on my arm. "Bad spots," he said.

It is the outsiders who imagine that our family is made up of incompatible opposites. Those who have never ventured beyond the white bars of their self-imposed social cages too often take for granted that a different color skin on the outside makes for a different kind of being, not of necessity completely human, on the inside. . . .

Some of the skeptical find it hard to believe that people of all races are born with the same kind of vocal chords for speech, the same kind of taste buds in the tongue, the same type of digestive apparatus capable of assimilating a wide variety of foods. Differences between national or racial groups are mostly just differences in culture. It is not heredity but a cultural pattern that makes the British love their royalty, the Chinese reverence their scholars, and the Eskimos relish partially decomposed and frozen raw fish. Cultural mores, not genes, determine the language we speak, our notions as to the wearing of a sarong, a kilt, or a stuffy business suit, and whether or not we think it polite to belch after a meal.

We try to explain these things, whenever we think the backs of the misinformed are strong enough to bear the truth; but the boners go marching on. One afternoon a businessman was talking to Carl at our front door. Rita whizzed down the driveway sloping from the church to the road, made too sharp a turn and flew off her trike, landing square on her nose.

"Wow," Carl said, poised to take off at the first wail from down below. "My daughter took quite a spill."

But there was no wail. Teddy was beside her in an instant, helping Rita brush herself off. They giggled as both hopped back on their tricycles and sped off around the circle drive again.

Carl relaxed and smiled. "I thought she was going to yell her head off from that bump. She's a tough little kid, though, and a good sport."

The man shrugged. "Actually, coming from such a primitive stock, she couldn't possibly have felt it the way a *Caucasian* would have. I doubt if her nerve endings are very highly developed."

Primitive nerve endings! Our children don't need the studious anthropologists and ethnologists to tell them that such fantastic notions are hogwash, because they already know that people are more alike than different; nor do they need the proof of microscopes and IQ tests and statistics covering years of careful research, to believe that modern science finds no race superior to any other.

Source: Helen Doss, *The Family Nobody Wanted* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1954), 164-165, 166-168.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Helen Doss, "Our International Family," 1949



Helen (above) and Carl (below) with a few of their children.



The one question that always brings me up with a start is, "What is it like, having a family that is a miniature United Nations?"

From our point of view our family is no different from the average family, except that we probably have more fun because there are so many of us. We've enough right here in the house to play London Bridge on a rainy day. Meals are always a party. Even bedtime isn't so bad when a whole gang goes with you.

I think that perhaps the nicest part of all is the thrill of watching so many budding personalities unfold, each with such individual, fascinating possibilities.

The fact that none of my children was actually born to me rarely enters my consciousness. After all, even a biologic newborn is not always what his parents expected or hoped for, and all parents who honestly want their children love each little newcomer for what he is. In the long run it doesn't seem to make any appreciable difference whether the baby arrives via the stork or a social worker. Indeed, when parents approach adoption not solely on the basis of their own wishes but also to meet the needs of a rejected child, the groundwork is laid for ties of love that can be, and often are, far stronger than in biologic families.

Friends well acquainted with our children never ask, "How can you feel like a family with such foreign children?" Instead they exclaim, "They seem so much like brothers and sisters! It's hard to realize they represent so many races and nationalities."

After a discussion I heard the other day in the back yard, I decided that with *our* family almost anything can happen.

I was hanging up clothes when Donny, from the stump where he was preaching a vigorous sermon, suddenly announced, "When I grow up, I'm going to be a minister like Daddy."

Teddy, constructing an intricate steeple with lumber ends, squatted back on his heels, his brown face serious. "When I grow up," he piped, "I'm going to be a minister and build a new church."

"I'm going to be a minister and have babies," Laurie chanted, as she pushed by with her doll buggy.

"Girls aren't ministers," Donny decreed. "Would you like to *marry* a minister and have little minister babies?"

"Okay," Laurie agreed amiably.

"Me, too," black-haired Rita chimed in from over near the faucet where she and Susie were making mud pies. Susie chattered something and I called out, "What did you say," Susie? You're going to marry a minister too?"

"Three-year-old Susie looked at me, scorn in her blue eyes. "Not *me*," she stated emphatically. "I'm going to marry a fire engine!"

If you could see our children working, playing, sharing together, dark hair against fair, black eyes laughing into blue, I'm sure you would feel as we do: when there is love and understanding and a

common level of culture, artificial barriers of race or nationality disappear. Actually, we are more than an "international family." Our home, with its strong ties of mutual understanding and love, is symbolic of that most inclusive family of all, God's family.



Source: Helen Doss, "Our International Family," *Reader's Digest*, August 1949, 58-59.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Gloria Emerson, "Operation Babylift," 1975



*Gloria Emerson, whose book on Vietnam, [Winners and Losers](#), won the National Book Award for non-fiction in 1978, offers a sharply critical view of "Operation Babylift" in this excerpt. The effort to "rescue" thousands of Vietnamese children on the eve of the U.S. evacuation was mounted by a number of U.S.-based agencies and organizations, including [Holt Children's Services](#), the [Pearl Buck Foundation](#), [World Vision](#), and the [International Social Service](#). It was widely publicized and hotly debated after a military transport plane carrying around 300 passengers crashed on April 4, 1975, shortly after take-off from Saigon. More than 100 children were killed, along with at least 25 of their adult escorts. For other views of "Operation Babylift," see the text of the [New York Times ad](#) that ran on April 7, 1975, the ["Statement on the Immorality of Bringing South Vietnamese Orphans to the United States, April 4, 1975,"](#) and [Agency for International Development, Operation Babylift Report, 1975.](#)*

Operation babylift became a carnival: tearful, middle-class white women squeezing and kissing dark-eyed children, telling reporters that their new names would be Phyllis and Wendy and David. It is not over yet. A spokesperson for AID, the government agency providing military aircraft for the private agencies bringing the children here, and said it was an "open-ended operation." The arrival of nearly 2000 children from Vietnam—I won't call them orphans since we now know that some of them did indeed have parents—has aroused some of the emotions felt in 1973 when the American prisoners of war came home at last. Many people, so moved and so grateful, forgot that if the United States had not gone on bombing there would have been no prisoners. This time, only two years later, there is the same self-congratulatory spirit, a feeling of winning something at last, the need to prove to ourselves what decent people we really are. It is almost forgotten during these excited, evangelical scenes at airports that it is this country that made so many Vietnamese into orphans, that destroyed villages ripping families apart, this country that sent young Vietnamese fathers to their deaths. Now we have decided the Vietnamese we will "save" and "love" must be very pliant, very

helpless. . . .

Now the welfare of a few thousand children has become a most successful propaganda effort for us to defend and support the diseased government of Nguyen Van Thieu despite the opposition to him in the South. Babies are a nicer story than the 26 million craters we gave South Vietnam, nicer than the 100,000 amputees in that wretched country, more fun to read about than the 14 million acres of defoliated forest and the 800,000 acres that we bulldozed. It does not matter at all that on television a Vietnamese foster mother sobbed bitterly and strained for a last look at the child she had cared for as Vietnamese infants were put on a plane at Tan Son Nhut. There are clearly no attempts being made to find foster parents in Vietnam who could take a child; we do not want to give money for that. . . .

Vietnamese living in the United States have tried to reason that all children in their country must be helped and this can best be done by ending the war. The first step would be to stop sustaining the government of Thieu. "You have been killing us with your kindness for twenty years," Le Anh Tu, a 26-year-old Vietnamese woman living in Philadelphia, says. On a recent local radio talk show, called the "Saturday Night Special," she asked listeners in favor of adoption if they really cared for the welfare of Vietnamese children, if they would be willing to return the children once peace came. The answers were shocked refusals at such an idea. . . .

We will never have the happy ending we want. President Ford's chief refugee coordinator, Daniel Parker, the administrator of AID, suggested at a congressional hearing that 3000 to 4000 more Vietnamese children be airlifted to the United States. The confusion is immense. The argument grows a little louder, but not loud enough.

On the day of the crash of the U.S. C-5A transport plane carrying 243 children and 43 accompanying adults, a South Vietnamese army lieutenant spoke his mind. "It is nice to see you Americans taking home souvenirs of our country as you leave—china elephants and orphans," this officer said. "Too bad some of them broke today, but we have plenty more."

Source: Gloria Emerson, "Operation Babylift," *The New Republic*, April 26, 1975, 8-10.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Excerpt from David Fanshel, *Far From the Reservation*, 1972

First, the results of my research thus far support the view that the placement of Indian children in white homes appears to represent a low level of risk for the children with respect to safeguarding their physical and emotional well-being. The repeated interviews with the adoptive parents left the interviewers with the strong impression that the children were, by and large, very secure and obviously feeling loved and wanted in their adoptive homes. Even if the adjustment of the children proves to be somewhat more problematic as they get older—particularly during their adolescence when the factor of racial differences may loom larger—the overall prospect for their futures can be termed as “guardedly optimistic.” When one contrasts the relative security of their lives with the horrendous growing up experiences endured by their mothers—well documented in the summaries Arnold Lyslo received from agencies referring the children—one has to take the position that adoption has saved many of these children from lives of utter ruination. In this sense, the research offers supporting evidence for the continuation and expansion of these adoptions. . . .

Given that the children appear to be doing well in their adoptive homes, that the parents are highly satisfied with what they have consummated, that the appeal of Indian adoptions to couples applying to agencies is increasing, and that considerable monies are saved, is there any doubt that the transracial adoption of Indian children ought to be encouraged? The answer is yes—this is a doubt. . . .

It seems clear that the fate of most Indian children is tied to the struggle of Indian people in the United States for survival and social justice. Their ultimate salvation rests upon the success of that struggle. Whether adoption by white parents of the children who are in the most extreme jeopardy in the current period—such as the objects of our study—can be tolerated by Indian organizations is a moot question. It is my belief that only the Indian people have the right to determine whether their children can be placed in white homes. Reading a report such as this one, Indian leaders may decide that some children may have to be saved through adoption even though the symbolic significance of such placements is painful for a proud people to bear. On the other hand, even with the

benign outcomes reported here, it may be that Indian leaders would rather see their children share the fate of their fellow Indians than lose them in the white world. It is for the Indian people to decide.

Source: David Fanshel, *Far From the Reservation: The Transracial Adoption of American Indian Children* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1972), 339-342.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Marshall Field, Child Welfare League of America President, Address to National Conference on Adoptions, 1955



Marshall Field III with children brought to the United States during World War II, 1940



Marshall Field III, newspaper owner and devoted child welfare philanthropist

All of us can remember when adoption was considered a great risk; adoptive parents either saints or fools, and adopted children indebted beyond repayment. Then, as social agencies came more and more into the picture, great safeguards were introduced so that in a sense, adoptive parenthood became less risky than natural parenthood. Even after the war, with greater economic security and a resurgence of family life causing a greater demand for babies, many agencies were still clinging to rigid standards. Some agencies were refusing to place children who needed little more than eye glasses, while outside their doors a black market in babies boomed.

Then, in 1948, the Child Welfare League held its first conference on adoption. Seventy-five of the country's leading adoption agencies worked together to study the adoption picture, to examine their practices, to reevaluate their aims. About half reported that they would not consider placing a child who had a mentally sick parent. Eighty per cent of the agencies reported that their aim was to place only the perfect child with the perfect background. And "perfect" could be defined in ways which may surprise some of you. Anything from diabetes in the family background to an infant hernia could be a disqualifying factor.

The delegates to the conference seven years ago wrestled with many of their preconceptions. They faced up to the fact that by trying—with the best will in the world—to create ideal adoption situations, they were condemning thousands of children to purgatory. It was a firm step forward in the march of human progress when that conference announced: "Any child can be considered adoptable who can gain from family life, and for whom a family can be found who will accept him with his history and capacities." . . .

And while we are putting our new-found knowledge into practice,

let us take care that we let our fellow citizens in on the secret. If we no longer want the public to insist on rosy infants for adoption, we must also confess that we do not have a yen for handsome, 30-year-old parents and new ranch houses with home-made pies in the deep freeze. At least, I hope we don't. Maybe that's something that ought to be looked into at this conference, too. If we are going to admit that babies can be less than perfect and still be perfectly satisfactory, maybe we ought to give adoptive parents the same leeway, too. Nature isn't nearly as fussy as we've been, and she's been in the business a lot longer.

The fact is, I suppose, that couples who have sought babies from agencies and been rejected do not make the best possible spokesmen for agency methods. And yet we know that whatever mistakes are made, agency placement is the only sound way of adoption. We must keep on telling our story. Patiently, we must tell of the great gap between the numbers of available children and the couples seeking to adopt them. We must tell of the ways we are trying to lessen that gap in view of the large numbers of children needing homes who are not now getting them, and we must tell the public the factors we consider when we decide whether a home is suitable or a child able to prosper in it.

We must keep telling our story because we want public support. We want public understanding. We want public trust. Let us take but one example— individual placement of babies, still a very common practice in our country. No one condones the "black market" as an exchange for babies, but too many people think the kindly intercession of any individual is perfectly all right. We have not sufficiently emphasized the highly specialized processes in adoption. A good obstetrician would not attempt to transplant a cornea—he would refer his patient to a specialist. He should not try to transplant a baby either. And we have to show him—and the public—why not.

This week you will be scrutinizing facts and fancies, theory and practice. I have expressed some of my personal opinions about adoption. You may well prove them wrong, too.

Individual placement is only one of the aspects of adoption you will consider at this conference. You will range the field from grandparents to good nutrition, from twisted limbs to torts. You will cover different ground in your various groups, but I think you will all come to the same conclusion—nothing that we do is more important than bringing our innocent young from the "prison house" into homes of their own. Get to your work, and God speed you!

Source: Address by Marshall Field to the National Conference on Adoptions, January 26, 1955, pp. 1-2, 4, Child Welfare League of America Papers, Box 16, Folder 8, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Clarence Fischer, "Homes For Black Children," 1970



Members of the Child Placing and Adoption Committee of the New York State Charities Aid Association in the 1950s. The agency's Interracial Committee on Adoptive Homefinding was founded by [Sophie van Senden Theis](#) in 1939, making it one of the first programs in the country to systematically locate black homes for black children.

May 27, 1970, was an historic date for social work in Detroit. On this date the 100th child was placed by Homes for Black Children. This was over three months prior to the date set to achieve the goal and was less than one year from the time the first staff member joined the program. Following are some reflections on why we believe it has been successful.

The staffing consists of a program director, five social workers, and two secretaries. We have two white caseworkers and the rest of the staff are black. The publicity had to be built around a black program director for a positive response from the black community. Having a black receptionist to answer the phone and welcome families into the office also seems to have a major impact. While it seems to be essential for the majority of staff to be black, and particularly the program director and receptionist, we are aware of no particular problems in having some white staff members.

We have done no recruitment of applicants, beyond utilizing the excellent cooperation offered by the mass media. We have actually found it necessary to low-key our publicity, to avoid becoming overwhelmed with applicants. Long waiting lists must be avoided as a quick response is essential. We believe we could recruit enough black families in the Detroit area to keep 20 social workers busy.

Only one of the 100 placements has been with a white family. We quickly found we could recruit more white applicants than we could utilize so we started referring all white families to other agencies. It was believed that white families could more easily accept referral and be comfortable with the adoption process in other agencies, which in most cases were designed for white families. It was also possible to refer most black Catholic families to Catholic social services. This referral of applicants corresponds with a desire to assist all agencies in expanding services for black

children.

Recruitment aimed at eliciting sympathy is completely ineffectual in the black community. Some adoption publicity is highly insulting and derogatory to the black community, particularly the publicity which in effect says black families aren't interested in adoption and white families are. We try to build our newspaper articles and news releases around the concept that black families have always adopted at a much higher rate than white families, although the arrangements have usually been informal.

Recruiting, based on demonstrated concern and love for children by the black community, obtains the best results.

Source: Clarence D. Fischer, "Homes for Black Children, Part II," *Lutheran Social Welfare* 10 (Fall 1970).

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman

# The Adoption History Project



- [Timeline](#)
- [People & Organizations](#)
- [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)
- [Topics in Adoption History](#)
- [Further Reading](#)
- [Document Archives](#)
- [Site Index](#)

## Earnest Fowler to Mrs. Squires, Washington City Orphan Asylum, November 1, 1910

Falmouth Va.  
Nov 1, 1910.

Dear Mrs. Squires

I would like for you to find me another place as I don't like this one. I want it to be in the country where there is a man. I don't want to stay here no longer. If you can find a place let me know. If you can't find one, then I will

want to go to live with my dad. Write us soon as you can as I want to know. I rather be home if you can't find another good country place. Miss Lizzie and Mrs. Barber says I will have to go away, that she don't want me to stay here. Because I don't want to do what

Ten-year old Earnest Fowler was indentured in April 1910 by the Washington City Orphan Asylum for a period of more than five years. Just a few months later, he wrote this letter to an orphanage official.

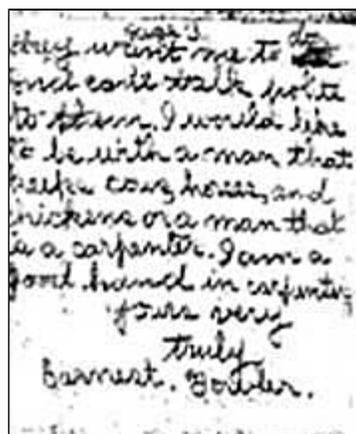
Falmouth, Virginia  
Nov. 1, 1910

Dear Mrs. Squires

I would like for you to find me another place as I don't like this one. I want it to be in the country where there is a man. I don't want to stay here no longer. If you can find a place let me know. If you can't find one, then I will want to go live with my dady. Write as soon as you can as I want to know. I rather be home if you can't find another good country place. Miss Lizzie and Mrs. Barber says I will have to go away that she don't want me to stay here. Because I don't want to do what they want me to do. And can't talk polite to them. I would like to be with a man that keeps cows, horses and chickens or a man that is a carpenter. I am a good hand in carpenter.

Yours very truly,

Earnest Fowler



I want to see you and I would like to be with a woman that has a cow house and chickens or a man that is a carpenter. I am a good hand in carpentry.  
Yours very truly  
Earnest Fowler.

Source: Earnest Fowler to Mrs. Squires, Washington City Orphan Asylum, November 1, 1910, Hillcrest Children's Center Papers, Box 3, Folder: "Indentures, Adoptions, Court Orders 1870-1923, 1941," Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Helen Fradkin, "Outline for Adoption Studies," 1954

*This outline suggests the therapeutic or even **Freudian** orientation of adoption **home studies** after midcentury. Especially notable is the emphasis on interpretation of unconscious or hidden factors—visible in the contrast Fradkin draws between the things "clients" actually say and the worker's impression or diagnosis of what they are actually feeling. The reference to O.W. is to out-of-wedlock births, or **illegitimacy**.*

### OUTLINE FOR ADOPTION STUDIES

- I. Presentation of Clients (How do they present themselves)
  - a. How do they come; tone of letter or telephone call; way of relating, participation, etc.
  - b. What do they know about the agency.
  - c. Worker's personal impression.
- II. What is their expressed comfort with adoption (what do they tell us)
  - a. Personal experience with it.
  - b. Limits and requirements expressed.
  - c. First reaction to discussion of whether or not they will tell a child of adoption.
  - d. Expressed knowledge of source of supply of children; attitude toward O.W.
- III. Our impression of their comfort with adoption (What do we think diagnostically)
  - a. Efforts to have own child.
  - b. Length of time involved in work-up
  - c. Difficulty and timing of decision to adopt
  - d. Reasons for delay.
  - e. Their attitude towards risks in adoption.

IV. Infertility and its implications (What does it mean to them)

- a. Reasons, definiteness.
- b. Medical exploration.
- c. Reality to couple or family
- d. Meaning to person and marriage
  1. How do they talk about it.
  2. Degree of acceptance.
- e. Hints of possible contributing psychological factors.

V. Marital Relationship

- a. Impression (with substantiating evidence)
- b. Cross background facts (emotional tones)
  1. Family relationships
  2. Childhood and adolescence
  3. Interests and hobbies
  4. Meeting and courtship
- c. Estimate of effect of background facts as evidenced by adult adjustments.
- d. Indications of break with child's role, readiness for responsibility and parenthood.
- e. Sexual adjustment.
- f. Impression of dependency balance in the marriage.

VI. Attitudes toward parenthood and children

- a. Expressed motivations for parenthood.
- b. Experience with children.
- c. Sensitivity to children and their needs
- d. Kinds of children they like; qualities they admire and disapprove.
- e. Expectations for a child; impression of pressures on a child.
- f. Sex preference
  1. Strength and expressed reason
  2. Suspected reason
- g. Impression of ability to take on and share a child.

VII. Ability to support a child

a. Financial position

1. Employment
2. Income
3. Insurance

VIII. Security with agency

- a. Re its decision in relation to selection of a child
- b. Ability to work with the agency

Summation:

Worker's impression of positives and risks for child as evidenced by material from interviews, medical reports, references, etc.

Disposition:

- a. What family were left with.
- b. How worker accredited them as people
- c. How worker prepared them for placement or rejection
- d. Clients reaction and expectation

—NOTE—

This Is Suggestive: Obviously, not all interviews will include all this. Rejections obvious early in the interview might omit whole sections and dwell on acknowledgment of all these people have and possibility of rejection notwithstanding, with reasons and preparation. Evidence supporting decision to reject should appear in dictation.

Source: "Outline for Adoption Studies," Used at Southern Regional Conference, 1954, Child Welfare League of America Papers, Box 15, Folder 7, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)





## Richard Frank, "What the Adoption Worker Should Know About Infertility," 1956

*In the course of this brief review of infertility and its treatment, Richard Frank, the Medical Director of Planned Parenthood in Chicago, mentioned the work of John Rock, who studied the question of whether or not adoption might be a "cure" for infertility.*

---

The question frequently arises as to when a couple should consider undergoing an infertility investigation, and it is usually accepted that one year of married life without use of contraceptives should pass, before an infertility work-up should be started. Another question raised is how long a couple should remain under investigation or treatment? If a factor or factors are found that will make conception impossible, the couple should be so advised and the investigation terminated. There are definite limits to our therapeutic ability, and it must be clearly stated that the use of hormones to produce or increase sperm production is strictly experimental, and that no sound basis exists at this time for such treatment. The same pertains to any hormonal treatment of absence of ovulation. There is today no known hormone which will, in the human female, stimulate or produce ovulation. In our endeavor to find such agents, we conduct clinical research in the course of which patients are given hormones. They must understand, however, that such treatment is entirely experimental and should be used only after all conventional means of treatment have failed.

If all tests are within the range of normal, the period of observation should extend over six to twelve months. During this time the above-mentioned steps toward improving the various factors are taken. At the end of that period, it is usually advisable to have a conference with the couple, explaining the satisfactory outcome of the study, and pointing out to them that another six to twelve months should pass without the possible anxieties involved in monthly observations and tests. If at the end of that period, now a total of three years, no pregnancy has occurred, plans for adoption should be discussed.

The term "functional infertility" is frequently used in lieu of a better term for a childless couple who have undergone all infertility tests and the entire period of observation without bringing to light any organic or physiological

pathology. And still no pregnancy occurs. It is in such couples especially, that we look for psychological reasons of the infertility. The field of the psychological influence on infertility is practically untouched. Even though almost everybody knows some couple who achieved a pregnancy after adopting a baby and tries to make the adoption responsible for the "relief of tension" which caused the pregnancy, the work of Rock and others put these experiences in the category of "chance." There is no question that many an infertile couple has psychological difficulties; it can also hardly be denied that undergoing an infertility study over a prolonged period of time and wanting a child desperately, can scarcely prevent the average couple from becoming anxious. . . .

If infertility factors are presented as the basis of the adoption request, it seems logical that a strict yardstick must be applied to the evaluation of the results as they are presented to the agency. A detailed medical questionnaire should be returned by every applying couple. . . . Agencies would do well to have on their staff a consultant gynecologist, who is an interested expert in infertility. The adoption worker should have occasion to discuss the infertility picture of every applicant with this consultant. It seems furthermore feasible that every adoption agency should have on hand a referral list of gynecologists who are interested in infertility and willing to cooperate with the agency to obtain or to complement the necessary study, so that couples are not deprived of the possibility of natural parenthood because they have been unable on their own to find a competent infertility expert.

Source: Richard Frank, "What the Adoption Worker Should Know About Infertility" in Michael Schapiro, *A Study of Adoption Practice, A Study of Adoption Practice, Volume II: Selected Scientific Papers Presented at the National Conference on Adoption, January, 1955* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1956), 117-118.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham, *Infants Without Families*, 1944



Anna Freud with Dorothy Burlingham and Grete Bibring, an emigré psychoanalyst and the first woman to be named full professor at Harvard Medical School, 1950



Anna Freud at work

It is recognized among workers in education and in child psychology that children who have spent their entire lives in institutions present a type of their own and differ in various respects from children who develop under the conditions of family life. . . . Superficial observation of children of this kind leaves a conflicting picture. They resemble, so far as outward appearances are concerned, children of middle-class families: they are well developed physically, properly nourished, decently dressed, have acquired clean habits and decent table manners, and can adapt themselves to rules and regulations. So far as character development is concerned, they often prove—to everyone's despair and despite many efforts—not far above the standard of destitute or neglected children. This shows up especially after they have left the institutions.

It is because of these failures of development that in recent years thoughtful educationists have more and more turned against the whole idea of residential nurseries as such. And have devised methods of boarding out orphaned or destitute children with foster families, (etc.). But since all efforts of this kind will probably not be able to do away altogether with the need for residential homes for infants, it remains a question of interest how far failures of the kind described are inherent in the nature of such institutions as distinct from family life, and how far they could be obviated if the former were ready and able to change their methods.

Careful comparison of our own residential children with children of the same ages who live with their own families has taught us some interesting facts. Advantages and disadvantages vary to an astonishing degree according to the periods of development. . . .

In our former chapters we tried to establish one main fact: that small infants in a residential nursery, though they develop community reactions and enjoy the companionship of children of their own age, search further for objects towards whom they can direct all their emotional interests which they would normally direct toward their parents. We have described how the grown-ups of the nursery are turned into parent-substitutes. It is our next task to discuss how far these emotional relationships satisfy the natural desires of the child and how far they are destined to fail in this respect. . . .

#### INDISCRIMINATE EXHIBITIONISM

1. Visitors to all residential war nurseries, ours not excepted, will notice that single children often run up to them and, in spite of their being complete strangers, show off their shoes, their dresses or other articles of clothing. This behavior is only shown by children who are emotionally starved and unattached.

2. Paul, two, came to us as a completely homeless and unattached child. At first he would claim everybody's attention with his only word "hello" and an empty smile with which he greeted friends and strangers alike. At the age of three, he would still show off to everybody minute objects (buttons, little sticks, tiny pieces of material) which he picked up wherever he went. He was not really interested in these objects, they only served to draw attention to himself.

3. Bob, another homeless child, who had never lived with his own mother, went through a period of exhibitionism at the age of three. He displayed his genitals indiscriminately in front of everybody. . . .

Early instinctive wishes have to be taken seriously, not because their fulfillment or refusal causes momentary happiness or unhappiness; but because they are the moving powers which urge the child's development from primitive self-interest and self-indulgence toward an attachment and consequently adaptation to the grown-up world. . . .

To sum up once more:

*The infant who shares his bodily pleasures with its mother learns in this way to love an object in the outer world and not merely himself. . . .*

The normal and healthy growth of the human personality depends on the circumstances of the child's first

attachments and on the fate of the instinctual forces (sex, aggression, and their derivatives), which find expression in these early and all-important relationships. . . .

Since we are used to seeing these developments happen under the influence of the Oedipal complex, i.e. the relationship to the parental figures, it is of great interest to us to investigate what happens when the whole family constellation is completely absent; how the child reacts to the lack of emotional response; how it substitutes for it by phantasy activity; and how the inner forces which control, transform or repress the instincts, will contrive to work under these circumstances.

Residential Nurseries offer excellent opportunities for detailed and unbroken observation of child-development. If these opportunities were made use of widely, much valuable material about the emotional and educational response at these early ages might be collected and applied to the upbringing of other children who are lucky enough to live under more normal circumstances.

Source: Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham, *Infants Without Families: The Case For and Against Residential Nurseries* (New York: International University Press, 1944), 11-12, 65, 81, 99-100, 128.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Harriet Fricke, "Interracial Adoption: The Little Revolution," 1965



Jan and Joe Rigert began adopting **African-American** and mixed-race children in 1962. Jan was a founding member of the Open Door Society, one of many new parent-led organizations founded during the 1960s to promote the adoptions of **special needs** and hard-to-place children. "Our family was not conceived or calculated to prove anything," Joe wrote in *All Together*, a book about their family. "A multiracial family, by its very nature, is an experiment in human relationships."

Two and a half years ago a committee of Minnesota social workers decided to promote the adoption of Negro children by white families. This decision, however, was made with misgiving, since it represented a sharp break with traditional philosophy and practice and opened the door to potential problems foreign to the adoption service. None of the committee members could consider himself an expert on Negro-white placements. Indeed, the usual "review of the literature" failed to produce even a mention of the subject.

Yet today it appears that much of the misgiving was unnecessary. Placements have been made and contemplated problems did not occur, while the concept of Negro-white adoptions has gained relatively wide acceptance, publicly and professionally. To date some twenty Negro children have been successfully placed with white families. These placements have been made by seven of Minnesota's thirteen private agencies as well as the Department of Welfare in conjunction with several county welfare departments. Given an opportunity, at least some of the remaining agencies would be willing to undertake similar placements. While not all agencies can be classified as ardent supporters, there has been no attempt to curtail the promotion of Negro-white adoptions.

With few exceptions, the children placed are youngsters readily identifiable as Negro. Although most have light complexions, there is no policy—official or otherwise—on pigmentation. It so happens that Minnesota's Negro population includes only a small percentage of very dark-skinned persons—a fact that is reinforced by the group of children available for adoption. Actually, the degree of color was not (and currently is not) an issue in Minnesota's Negro-white adoption program. The author knows of only

one situation in which it arose: a worker decided against placing a particular child with one white family because "The child is too light, my family wants a Negro child."

Minnesota's new program was the result of happenstance. Several years ago Minnesota's adoption agencies initiated a united publicity campaign designed to publicize the need for adoptive homes for Indian, Mexican, and particularly Negro children. The emphasis on Negro children resulted from the well-known fact that homes for this group are in shortest supply.

When the campaign was planned, no thought was given to the possibility—much less the practicality—of recruiting white homes for Negro youngsters. Composed of representatives of various agencies, the campaign committee naturally assumed that white couples would apply for Indian and Mexican youngsters, and Negro couples would apply for Negro youngsters. Several months after the campaign began, however, this assumption was disproved when a few white families applied for Negro children.

Source: Harriet Fricke, "Interracial Adoption: The Little Revolution," *Social Work* 10 (July 1965):92-93.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Arnold Gesell, "Child Adoptions in Connecticut," 1939



For many adoption reformers during the first half of the century, including **Arnold Gesell**, increased clinical control was synonymous with reducing risk in adoption. Measuring developmental norms was one of the **minimum standards** they advocated for making adoption safer and more predictable.

I appreciate the privilege of talking before this assembly of judges on the important problem of child adoption, a problem over which you have such fundamental and far-reaching control. I am especially glad that under the circumstances of your invitation, I can speak to you as a citizen of Connecticut rather than as an official of any organization. As director of a clinic for children I have had unusual opportunities to see the social significance of the whole problem of dependent, neglected, uncared for and illegitimate children. In the past ten years our clinic at Yale University has made careful and repeated mental examinations of over 1,500 such children prior to their placement in foster homes or institutions. The cases are referred by social agencies seeking diagnosis and advice. (Incidentally I should say that this work has been done as a public service by the University, without any cost to the taxpayers of the State.) . . .

For public and social reasons it seem especially important at this time to emphasize the solemn responsibilities of the court in this matter of child adoption. Abuses are unnecessary because the demand for adoptive children far exceeds the supply. It so far exceeds that the state is now in an excellent position to insist on high standards of adoption procedure.

I think that we are all agreed that the restrictions upon adoption should not be too severe, too stiff, too clumsy. We do not believe in undue red tape or undue publicity. We should think of adoption as a social resource which needs conservation. There are too many poor adoptions; not enough good ones. There are too many tardy adoptions, unnecessarily delayed because the foster children have been kept for years in boarding homes, or in the county "temporary" homes. The Bureau of Child Welfare of our State has in the last six years placed only 31 children in adoption. Many people think that social agencies have often been too strict, too inflexible in their well intentioned methods. Practical people point out that every good adoption of a young dependent child

saves the state many thousands of dollars in sheer maintenance expense.

The human values are beyond computation. Every good adoption makes a very rich addition to the sum of happiness. On the other hand, few things in life can cause more intense suffering than a botched adoption—heartaches for the adult; injustice and emotional distortion for the child. . . .

The state legislature created the institution of child adoption and created the court to put that institution into effect. Adoption is not merely a legal proceeding. It is an act of social adjustment. In last analysis the court is the most responsible participant in that act of adjustment. Social agents, public and private, through investigation and supervision must lend their assistance to make the adoptions safe and sound. But these agents are in essence servants of the court, aiding it to judge the merits of the issue. It is a court of petition, of examination, of decree. The child himself is mute and without defense. Only after he is fourteen years old is his signature demanded. His natural parents, his relative, the petitioning foster parents, their advisors, and their lawyers are adults. They speak for themselves and for their own interests. The child cannot speak except through an investigation of the court, delegated or otherwise. Complete justice to the child demands such investigation prior to the final decree.

Connecticut needs a simple law which will make investigation and probation mandatory and a matter of course. The public will support such a law. They will regard it as a strengthening of the authority of the court, not a limitation of its power.

Illegitimate births are on the increase, broken homes are on the increase, childless homes and child-rejection are on the increase. So is child adoption. Child adoption concerns the fundamentals of family life. For civic, as well as humane reasons, we need additional safe-guards under vigilant court control, here in Connecticut.

Source: Arnold Gesell, "Child Adoptions in Connecticut," pp. 1-3, 7-8, Arnold Gesell Papers, Box 45, Folder: "Adoption," Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, used by permission of Mrs. Joseph W. Walden.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Arnold Gesell, "Pre-School Children Deprived of Parental Care," 1923

*In his very first published mention of adoption, [Arnold Gesell](#) describes the [nature-nurture study](#) done by [Margaret Cobb](#), his assistant at Yale. According to Gesell, the study implied that most children available for adoption did not have promising educational potential. Gesell did worry, however, about the exceptional bright child who might be deprived of family life.*

Miss Cobb concluded that 18 per cent of the children would derive greater benefit from special class training than from ordinary school instruction; that 21 per cent could probably finish fifth or sixth grade and profit by practical continuation instruction; that 35 per cent gave promise of completing the grammar grades, supplemented with vocational and trade instruction; that 7 per cent would be competent to finish a high-school course, and 17 per cent more part of a high-school course; and 2 per cent apparently had mentality that would qualify them for college training. . . .

The more superior a child is, the more urgently does he demand placement in a home with optimum opportunity. The more defective a child is, the less he is harmed by institutional care. Indeed, he may be very much benefited by institutional training. We should not, however, go on the theory that all mentally deficient and border-line children are non-placeable. As a matter of fact, we should develop a differential type of placement, with quasi-probationary safeguards, for large numbers of children who are neither candidates for institutions nor for ordinary foster homes.

Source: Arnold Gesell, "Pre-School Children Deprived of Parental Care," in *The Pre-School Child from the Standpoint of Public Hygiene and Education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1923), 137-138.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact  
Ellen Herman**

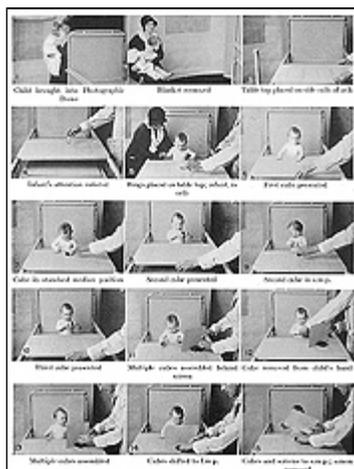
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Arnold Gesell, "Psychoclinical Guidance in Child Adoption," 1926



An illustration of how the normative examination procedures that Arnold Gesell devised were administered.

### Psychoclinical diagnosis in infancy.

From the standpoint of child adoption, therefore, the situation involved a paradox which contains an element of hazard as well as of promise. Infancy is the best time for adoption, but in the nature of things it is also the time when developmental prediction is most difficult. Can the hazard be reduced?

It can, if the development of infancy is essentially lawful; because all lawful phenomena, even the most complex, are theoretically within the scope of scientific formulation and forecast. It will be a long time before astronomical accuracy is attained in this field, because a child's orbit is not so simple as that of the sun and the moon. But that it is necessary to remain indefinitely in the dark would not be admitted even by those students who have gained the most knowledge of the intricacy of living things.

Infancy is the period of most rapid growth in the whole life cycle, except, of course, the intrauterine period of which it is but an extension. This very fact simplifies, more than it encumbers, the task of developmental diagnosis. The infant to be sure is very immature which tends to make him inscrutable; but on the other hand, he matures at an extremely rapid rate, and this tide of maturation brings him more repeatedly and more cogently within the purview of systematic observation. . . .

In principle, these considerations have a bearing on the question whether in time the adoption of infants may be brought under more adequate clinical control. The greater speed of growth has very practical diagnostic implications. It means that a probationary year prior to adoption may be made to yield more evidence in infancy than in any later period. In the first year of life four periodic developmental examinations may readily be made to determine the increments of mental growth, whereas a few years would be necessary to observe as many comparable

increments in later childhood. The older a child is the longer it takes to make a definite developmental advance; and so it follows that the diagnostic values of a probationary year tend to vary inversely with the age of the child. . . .

*An Attractive Infant, but Subnormal—Child B (age 26 months)*

This child was not seen before the age of 2 years. She was born out of wedlock. Concerning the mother there was only the brief annal, "she is untruthful and peculiar." The child was boarded in a high-grade family home where the foster mother became deeply attached to her and made plans for her adoption and education.

Postponement of adoption has been urged, because the child just now seems much brighter and "more acceptable" than she really is. She is in the "cute" stage of development which conceals her limitations.

In physical appearance she is attractive; in demeanor she is smiling, responsive, playful. She waves "bye-bye" very genially and plays gleefully with a ball. She is just the kind of child who would smite the heart of questioning adoptive parents. If they yielded to the impulse of affection on the first sight, they would then and there resolve to take her into their own home, give her every educational advantage, and rear her as a charming, refined daughter.

These parents would not be entirely disappointed, because the child is not definitely mentally deficient and her personality make-up is relatively favorable. However, the examination proved that she approximates the 18-month level much more consistently than the 2-year level, and the general quality of her attention was far from satisfactory. On the basis of all the clinical evidence it is extremely doubtful that she will ever be able to complete a high school education. She may have some difficulty in completing the grammar grades. In 10 fleeting years at least the educational limitations of this child will be more palpably revealed; and there may be genuine pangs of regret.

The economic status and educational purpose of the parents are an important factor in this particular adoptive situation. If at the outset the parents are not ready to relinquish their educational expectations, another child should be sought. Some parents are quite content with a favorable, likable personality irrespective of grammar-school success. Clinical safeguards and a probationary period will help to define the issues in advance and protect the interests of both child and parents. . . .

Clinical control of child adoption should be closely related to all precautionary and investigatory procedures. It should reenforce and direct rather than displace other methods of control.

Systematic psychoclinical examinations not only will reduce the wastes of error and miscarriage but will serve to reveal children of normal and superior endowment beneath the concealment of neglect of poverty or of poor repute.

Clinical safeguards can not solve all the problems of child adoptions but they can steadily improve its methods and make them both more scientific and humane. Most of all in the appealing but undefined period of infancy do we need a clearer light for faith.

Source: Arnold Gesell, "Psychoclinical Guidance in Child Adoption," in *Foster-Home Care for Dependent Children*, U.S. Children's Bureau Publication No. 136 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1926), 196-197, 200-201, 204.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

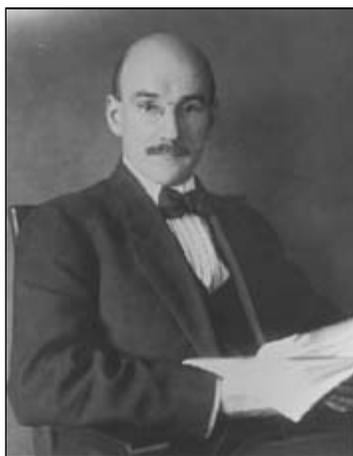
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Henry H. Goddard, "Wanted: A Child to Adopt," 1911



Henry Herbert Goddard

*Henry Herbert Goddard was Director of the Training School for Feeble-Minded Girls and Boys in Vineland, New Jersey. He was a national authority on intelligence testing, mental deficiency, and special education, but is probably best remembered for adding the term "moron" to the vocabulary of mental classification. In this excerpt, he explains the eugenic dangers of child adoption. Fears that many children available for adoption were "feeble-minded" led to disqualifying some altogether and consigning them to institutions. In many other cases, these fears encouraged practices such as mental examinations and matching, which attempted to place children with parents who resembled them intellectually as well as physically.*

The nineteenth century has been called the age of science or scientific development. It looks as though the twentieth century would be called the age of the application of science. Not that we have not already had many applications of the natural sciences to the arts; but we are now coming to apply the higher and more abstract sciences to the more difficult art of living.

The writer was recently asked to make an application of scientific facts to the problem of adopting a child. A friend sought advice about answering an advertisement asking for a home for a homeless child. This led to the question, Who are the homeless and neglected children? Why are they homeless? Why should any child be neglected? . . .

We may imagine a person ignorant of the facts attempting to answer these questions somewhat as follows: These children are not orphans, else the advertisement would have mentioned the fact; they cannot be the children of well-to-do parents, because such parents would take care of their own; they cannot be children even that have relatives, such as uncles or aunts or grandparents, or even cousins, who are in comfortable circumstances, otherwise the family ties would lead to their taking care of their homeless and neglected relatives. It would

seem then that they must be, in many cases, the children of profligate parents, children of families who are unable to maintain their footing in the community, or even provide for the necessities of life. And this is the condition not only of the parents, but also of the other relatives of the family. In other words, these children have no relatives who are sufficiently endowed with self-respect and intelligence to enable them to make a living for themselves, or to have interest enough to take care for their own kin. . . .

Now it happens that some people are interested in the welfare and high development of the human race; but leaving aside those exceptional people, all fathers and mothers are interested in the welfare of their own families. The dearest thing to the parental heart is to have the children marry well and rear a noble family. How short-sighted it is then for such a family to take into its midst a child whose pedigree is absolutely unknown; or, where, if it were partially known, the probabilities are strong that it would show poor and diseased stock, and that if a marriage should take place between that individual and any member of the family the offspring would be degenerates.

Lest any reader should be disturbed through fear that we are preparing to attack the plan of finding homes for the homeless, let me hasten to say that such is not the intent, nor is it the logical or necessary outcome of the argument. But no cause, scientific or humane, ever prospers through ignoring the facts; and in view of the hundreds and thousands of children that are annually placed in good homes and brought up practically as members of the family, and in view of the further fact now coming to be understood that disease and mental deficiency and possibly crime are transmitted from parents to children, grandchildren, and even to the fourth generation, it is not only wise but humane for us to consider the fact and perhaps revise our practice. . . .

I have before me a family chart of a girl normal in intelligence, bright, and attractive. Not even the experts can discover anything wrong with her. She has brothers, and a sister, also normal; altogether, it seems that the feeble-mindedness which is so evident in the mother has for some reason run out and come to an end, and that now we begin with these children a new race. Let us follow the possibilities in this case. As we have said, the mother is feeble-minded, her father was feeble-minded, with several brothers and sisters in like condition. But the mother dies, her family are already gone, and people rejoice that at last the hindrance, the taint in the family, has disappeared, and these children are left without any of it; it remains only to find them homes where they will be cared for until they are old enough to care for themselves, and all will be well. Accordingly, a home is

found for this girl, in a well-to-do family with three children of their own, but philanthropically disposed, with ample means, glad to take this nice-looking child into their home and bring her up as one of their own children. She grows up as one of the family, except that all know she is not their own child. She comes to young-womanhood, the son of the family falls in love with her, and there being no visible objection to a union, they are married. In due course of time a child is born and then another and another. As the years go by these children grow up and to the horror of all interested it is discovered that one or possibly two, even three of them, are feeble-minded.

When it first becomes evident that the children are not normal, the other people say, "Ah, well, the grandmother was wrong, the great-grandfather was wrong, it was a bad family." And so the old law so well expressed in holy writ that the condition of the father is visited upon the son to the third and fourth generation still holds and will always hold. In other words, the parents who took this child into their home and later allowed their own son to marry her might have known, had they taken the trouble to inquire, that the probabilities were strong that if children were born to that girl some of them at least would be feeble-minded. The fact that neither she nor any of her brothers and sisters showed mental defect was no evidence whatever that their posterity would be free from it. Indeed, statistics now clearly indicate a high probability that defectives will again appear in that line.

These are facts, and in view of these facts, ought we not to take some thought and care in this matter of finding homes for the homeless and neglected? We are now face to face with the question, "What ought we to do?"

In the first place, we ought to be honest, as I trust we are, although many of us can look back to the time when we were not. . . .

We must use every means to learn *all* the facts before we place these children in the care of other unsuspecting fathers or mothers who are willing to take care of them and give them a home.

It means that the family history of every homeless and neglected child must be ascertained just as far as possible, and that no pains or expense be spared to get all the information that can possibly be had. Then the prospective foster-parents should have before them all the information that has been acquired in regard to these children, so that they may guard not only their own children if they have them but other children from any alliances that are dangerous from a hereditary standpoint. If this results in

such families refusing to take these children, then we must provide for them in colonies. Charitable organizations, even the state, can well afford to do that rather than run the risk of contaminating the race by the perpetuation of mental and moral deficiency. . . .

It is neither right nor wise for us to let our humanity, our pity and sympathy for the poor, homeless, and neglected child, drive us to do injustice to and commit a crime against those yet unborn.

Source: Henry H. Goddard, "Wanted: A Child to Adopt," *Survey 27* (October 14, 1911):1003-1006.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Petition of Goldman, 1954

*In this case, the Massachusetts Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of that state's law requiring religious **matching**. Like many other states in the country, Massachusetts stipulated that "in making orders for adoption, the judge when practicable must give custody only to persons of the same religious faith as that of the child." The circumstances of this case involved a Jewish couple, the Goldmans, who had adopted twins born to Catholic parents. The children were placed in the Goldmans' home as infants and the Goldmans appealed when a lower court denied their adoption petition. Cases like this one, in which the written consent of the birth mother had been obtained, prompted the Catholic Church to modify its earlier position that parental rights to determine children's religion were absolute. In the 1950s, the church intervened in a number of cases to oppose **birth parents** who freely chose to ignore the matching mandate and place their children across religious lines. It is also notable in this case that religious difference was linked explicitly to differences in skin and hair color between the twins and their Jewish adopters, suggesting an enduring link between religious and racial identities and between transreligious and **transracial adoptions**.*

The petitioners, husband and wife, seek to adopt twin children, boy and girl, born at a hospital September 30, 1951. The cases were heard upon oral evidence and also upon reports filed by the department of public welfare. . . . The judge made findings of fact, concluding that it would not be for the best interests of the twins to decree adoptions in these cases, and dismissed the petitions. The petitioners appeal. The evidence is reported.

General Laws (Ter. Ed.) C. 210, §5B, inserted by St. 1950, c. 737, §3, is as follows: "In making orders for adoption, the judge when practicable must give custody only to persons of the same religious faith as that of the child. In the event that there is a dispute as to the religion of said child, its religion shall be deemed to be that of its mother. If the court, with due regard for the religion of the child, shall nevertheless grant the petition for adoption of a child proffered by a person or persons of a religious faith or persuasion other than that of the child, the court shall state the facts which impelled it to make such a disposition and such statement shall be made

part of the minutes of the proceedings." . . .

The petitioners obtained the children when they were about two weeks old from the hospital where they were born and have had them ever since. All of the evidence bearing on the ability of the petitioners to care for the twins, including that contained in the reports mentioned above, tended to show that the petitioners have a good home and sufficient means, are fond of the twins, and are giving them adequate care. The judge found that the petitioners are well equipped financially and physically to bring up the twins, and that they have treated them as their own children and intend to care for them and educate them to the best of their ability. The judge further found that the mother and "the natural father" of the twins are Catholics. There was ample evidence to support this finding. The mother did not cease to be a Catholic, even if she failed to live up to the ideal of her religion. If that were the test of belonging to a religious faith it is feared that few could qualify for any faith. The petitioners are of the Jewish faith and intend to bring up the twins in that faith. The mother consented in writing on both petitions to the adoptions prayed for. She has never seen or spoken to the petitioners, but she has stated that she knew they were Jewish and was satisfied that the twins should be raised in the Jewish faith. The petitioners were informed by their attorney before they took the twins of the law relative to religion in adoptions, but they decided to take a chance that the petitions would be allowed. The petitioners have dark complexions and dark hair. The twins are blond, with large blue eyes and flaxen hair. . . .

The judge also found that "there are in and about the city of Lynn [which is near the residence of the petitioners] many Catholic couples of fine family line and excellent reputation who have filed applications with the Catholic Charities Bureau for the purpose of adopting Catholic children of the type of the twins, and are able to provide the twins with a material status equivalent to or better than that of the petitioners, and with whom the twins would be placed immediately." This finding was in effect a finding that it was "practicable," within the meaning of that word in §5B, to "give custody only to persons" of the Catholic faith. . . .

Some argument is advanced that there was here no "dispute" as to the religion of the twins and from that it is apparently sought to draw the conclusion that the religion of the mother should be disregarded. It would seem that there is a "dispute," since the guardian ad litem, as the representative of the children, contends that their religion is Catholic, while the petitioners at one stage in their argument seem to contend that it is not. But even if there is no "dispute" we think that for purposes of §5B these twins, too young to choose a religion for themselves, must be deemed to belong to the Catholic faith for reasons hereinafter stated. . . .

It is contended that §5B is unconstitutional as a law "respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," contrary to the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and as in some manner contrary to art. 2 of our Declaration of Rights and to art. 11

and art. 46, §1, of the Amendments to the Constitution of this Commonwealth. With this we cannot agree. All religions are treated alike. There is no "subordination" of one sect to another. No burden is placed upon anyone for maintenance of any religion. No exercise of religion is required, prevented, or hampered. It is argued that there is interference with the mother's right to determine the religion of her offspring, and that in these cases she has determined it shall be Jewish. Passing the point that so far as concerns religion she seems to have consented rather than commanded and seems to have been "interested only that the babies were in a good home," there is clearly no interference with any wish of hers as long as she retains her status as a parent. It is only on the assumption that she is to lose that status that §5B becomes operative. The moment an adoption is completed all control by the mother comes to an end. . . .

The principle that children should, in general, be adopted within the faith of their natural parents has received widespread approval, as is attested not only by such decisions as *Purinton v. Jamrock* but also by the fact that most of the States now have statutes more or less similar to §5B. . . . We are not prepared to hold either such decisions or the statute unconstitutional.

Source: 331 Mass. 648-653.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

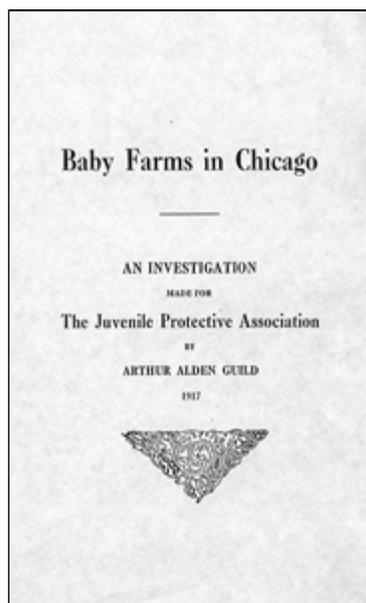
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Arthur Alden Guild, "Baby Farms in Chicago," 1917



During the fall of 1916 wretched conditions existing in several uncertified homes where children were boarded apart from their parents were discovered through the regular case work of the Juvenile Protective Association. . . . The Association then decided to make a thorough study of all baby farms, in the hope that the information would afford data upon which legislation might be secured that would require all homes where children were boarded apart from their parents to be licensed and supervised by some branch of the City or State Government.

One hundred and thirty-seven alleged homes were thus reported and later were investigated by the Association.

**Some Examples of Conditions Found in Homes.** Some of the worst moral conditions were found in the homes where the physical conditions were best and in good residential districts of the city. In one of the best neighborhoods of the south side, a home was found which was an unlicensed maternity hospital, a disorderly house, and a baby farm combined. It is not at all difficult to see the connection between these enterprises. The woman who operated this home made a specialty of taking in unfortunate girls for maternity cases, she then made inmates of them and charged them for the board of their children; or she would dispose of a child for the sum of \$25.00 or more. A warrant was taken out for this woman, she was tried and convicted.

**Commercialized Traffic in Children.** As a result of this baby farm investigation, it was found that there was a regular commercialized business of child placing being carried on in the City of Chicago; that there were many maternity hospitals which made regular charges of from \$15.00 and more for disposing of unwelcome children; and that there were also doctors and other individuals who took advantage of the

unmarried mother willing to pay any amount of money to dispose of her child. . . . One woman in charge of a baby farm sold a baby for \$100.000 during the time of the investigation. It was found that she had required \$25.00 to be paid at once and the remainder on the installment plan. Her trade slogan was, "It's cheaper and easier to buy a baby for \$100.00 than to have one of your own." . . . Many children placed in this manner were taken by people who could not have secured children through certified child-placing agencies because they were immoral, or wished to procure a child for a fraudulent purpose.

**Conclusions and Recommendations.** Children such as those found in baby farms need better care and protection from the state than children surrounded by normal family influences. . . . It should be unlawful for any organization or individual to place, or assist in placing, more than one child during one year in the permanent care of another without first obtaining a license for the business of placing children from the State Department of Public Welfare. Organizations and individuals thus licensed should be subject to supervision by that department. . . .

The State should make it unlawful for a mother or any other person to give away the permanent custody of a child. . . . The exclusive power to issue a decree of adoption should be vested in the Juvenile Court. The court should require a thorough investigation of the adopting family before permitting a child to be placed with such family for adoption. The adoption should not become permanent until a satisfactory six months' probationary period has elapsed. During the probationary period a visitor from the State Department of Public Welfare should make inspections to ascertain whether or not the child has been properly placed.

Traffic in children should be stopped. The passage of the laws recommended here would, of course, entail increased expense to the state. But money spent on such preventive measures would mean an ultimate saving and a better citizenship.

Source: Arthur Alden Guild, "Baby Farms in Chicago, An Investigation Made for the Juvenile Protective Association," 1917, Child Welfare League of America Papers, Box 44, Folder 4, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact  
Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Agnes K. Hanna, "The Interrelationship Between Illegitimacy and Adoption," 1937

One of the interesting situations found in a study of adoptions, field work in which has recently been completed by the U.S. Children's Bureau, is a wide variation in the use of adoptions in different States. . . .

Adoption rates in these States varied from 2 to 10 children per 10,000 children under ten years of age. The proportion of urban population in the State apparently affected the extent to which adoption was used. . . . It is probable that group attitudes toward the acceptance of children of other parentage into the family life and agency attitudes toward placement for adoption also affect the situation. The adoption records showed wide variation in the use of adoption by white families and by families of other races. In one Southern State in which 36 percent of the population are Negroes, only 28 Negro children were adopted as compared with 124 white children. . . .

Any study of the children for whom petitions of adoption have been filed will show that a large proportion of them were born out of wedlock. In the Children's Bureau study, we found that about 60 percent of the children belonged in this group. Furthermore, among the children adopted by persons other than relatives nearly three-fourths were of illegitimate birth. . . .

It is evident that a close relationship exists between adoptions and birth out of wedlock. One basic need would seem to be to know more about this relationship in terms of its extent. For example: Are illegitimate births increasing? What proportion of the children born out of wedlock are adopted? Is our adoption rate a fairly stable one? We have no exact answers to these questions but some suggestive information.

Birth statistics published annually by the United States Bureau of the Census show that in the States reporting during the entire six-year period 1929-1934 there has been an increase in the registered illegitimate births each year except 1933. Whether this increase represents more accurate registration influenced by increased tolerance and willingness to accept the situation or whether it is due to actual increase in the numbers of births, it is impossible to say. Of the total 78,898 illegitimate births reported in

1934, less than half of the children (35,547) were white and all but 1,339 of the remainder were Negroes. The increase in registered colored births from 1929 to 1934 was greater than in white births. In the States reporting during this period the number of white illegitimate births showed an average annual increase of over 700. This increase in the number of children born out of wedlock does not necessarily mean that more children are available for adoption. With the development of standards of child placing throughout the country, increasing emphasis is being placed on the suitability of a child for adoption as well as on the development of other means for adequate care of children handicapped by the status of their birth.

As to the number of children born out of wedlock who are actually adopted, we have little information about them. . . . No accurate State statistics on this situation are available, but theoretically a comparison of the number of illegitimate births during a year with the number of adoptions of children of illegitimate birth during a similar period should give some indication of the extent to which adoption occurs. In attempting to make such a comparison with the figures available, we were seriously handicapped by the fact that California and Massachusetts, two of the states included in our adoption study, do not report illegitimate births. We found on using this crude comparison of births and petitions for adoption in the remaining States that apparently nearly a fifth of the white children born out of wedlock were adopted. In one State having a high adoption rate, about 200 white illegitimate births are registered each year, and in 1934 petitions for adoptions were filed for 98 children of illegitimate birth, largely by persons who were not relatives. . . .

Let us assume that only a fifth of the white children born out of wedlock are adopted. Unquestionably, a large proportion of the remaining children are being cared for by their mothers or by other close relatives who have accepted this responsibility without recourse to legal methods for giving the children the family name and rights of inheritance. Almost equally unquestionable, in the opinion of many persons, is the possibility that a large number of these children are under the care of persons who are not relatives, but who fail to give the children the legal protection of adoption. Some of these children undoubtedly are passed from family to family as the interest of the foster parents wanes or some misfortune occurs. Assistance and advice given to the mother when she needs it the most, during pregnancy or at the time of confinement, would do much toward reducing this hazardous, unplanned care. . . .

I have presented to you only the barest outline of the interrelationship of illegitimacy and adoption and have made no attempt to discuss many of the pressing and immediate problems with which many of you are working. There are probably no two other subjects around which are centered so many strong emotional reactions, which are constantly preventing a rational and sound approach to the problem. . . .

Source: Agnes K. Hanna, "The Interrelationship Between Illegitimacy and Adoption," *Child Welfare League of America Bulletin* 16 (September 1937): 1, 4-6.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Frederick Hanson and John Rock, "The Effect of Adoption on Fertility and Other Reproductive Functions," 1950

Physicians and laymen have long thought that it is quite common for couples who have previously been childless to have a child of their own following adoption. Many people can cite one or more cases they know of personally, and when asked will preface their statement with a remark that the phenomenon is well known. Yet we find no report of an accurate survey of how often this sequence occurs nor, assuming its frequency, of what is its etiology. The theory grows among physicians that psychogenic disturbances play an important part in reproductive physiology and may influence conception. Proponents of this theory assert that adoption relieves the inhibiting psychogenic factor and allows the conception. . . .

### Description of Study

*Methodology.*—Through the aid of adoption agencies a study was made of 202 couples who adopted, approximately between 1938 and 1948. The cases of adoption in the six to twelve months immediately preceding the survey were not included as it was felt that sufficient time had not elapsed since adoption to make evident its possible effect on fertility. The couples were approached by means of a questionnaire asking whether or not they had had children following adoption, and other pertinent information. Advantage was also taken of the opportunity to discover what we could on the possible influence of adoption on some other aspects of reproductive physiology. Eighty-five of the 202 were studied by a more detailed questionnaire as to the etiology of their infertility. Of these eighty-five couples, eighteen wives were within the age group 20 to 29 years, sixty-three within the thirties, and four within the forties, with a high of 44 years.

*Results.*—Pregnancies were reported in fifteen cases out of 202. Eleven of these fifteen were studied as to the cause of presumed infertility and how it was relieved. . . .

### Discussion

Is adoption frequently followed by pregnancy? Fifteen, or 8 per cent, of the

202 adoptive parents achieved a subsequent pregnancy. This figure of 8 per cent is not remarkable compared to statistical surveys in general, since ten per cent of spontaneous cures are to be expected. Therefore, we can say adoption is not followed by normal pregnancy to any remarkable degree. . . .

### Summary and Conclusions

The literature affirming the therapeutic effect of adoption on infertility is quoted and discussed. It is all speculative and without proof. . . .

Source: Frederick M. Hanson and John Rock, "The Effect of Adoption on Fertility and Other Reproductive Functions," *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 59, no. 2 (1950):311, 314, 316, 317, 319.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Harry F. Harlow, "Love in Infant Monkeys," 1959



An infant monkey clinging to its terry cloth "mother."



After long periods of complete isolation and maternal deprivation, which produced disturbed behaviors, [Harry Harlow](#) experimented with monkey "group psychotherapy." After being placed in a zoo, the monkeys began to play together and groom one another, but they reverted to their abnormal behaviors when they were returned to Harlow's laboratory.

The first love of the human infant is for his mother. The tender intimacy of this attachment is such that it is sometimes regarded as a sacred or mystical force, an instinct incapable of analysis. No doubt such compunctions, along with the obvious obstacles in the way of objective study, have hampered experimental observation of the bonds between child and mother.

Though the data are thin, the theoretical literature on the subject is rich. Psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists commonly hold that the infant's love is learned through the association of the mother's face, body and other physical characteristics with the alleviation of internal biological tensions, particularly hunger and thirst. Traditional psychoanalysts have tended to emphasize the role of attaching and sucking at the breast as the basis for affectional development. . . .

Now it is difficult, if not impossible, to use human infants as subjects for the studies necessary to break through the present speculative impasse. . . . Clearly research into the infant-mother relationship has need of a more suitable laboratory animal. We believe we have found it in the infant monkey. For the past several years our group at the Primate Laboratory of the University of Wisconsin has been employing baby rhesus monkeys in a study that we believe has begun to yield significant insights into the origin of the infant's love for his mother. . . .

We have sought to compare the importance of nursing and all associated activities with that of simple bodily contact in engendering the infant monkey's attachment to its mother. For this purpose we contrived two surrogate mother monkeys. One is a bare welded-wire cylindrical form surmounted by a wooden head with a crude face. In the

other the welded wire is cushioned by a sheathing of terry cloth. We placed eight newborn monkeys in individual cages, each with equal access to a cloth and a wire mother. Four of the infants received their milk from one mother and four from the other. . . .

The monkeys in the two groups drank the same amount of milk and gained weight at the same rate. But the two mothers proved to be by no means psychologically equivalent. . . . Records made automatically showed that both groups of infants spent far more time climbing and clinging on their cloth-covered mothers than they did on their wire mothers. . . .

These results attest to the importance—possibly the overwhelming importance—of bodily contact and the immediate comfort it supplies in forming the infant's attachment for its mother. . . .

The time that the infant monkeys spent cuddling on their surrogate mothers was a strong but perhaps not conclusive index of emotional attachment. Would they also seek the inanimate mother for comfort and security when they were subjected to emotional stress? With this question in mind we exposed our monkey infants to the stress of fear by presenting them with strange objects, for example, a mechanical teddy bear which moved forward, beating a drum. Whether the infants had nursed from the wire or the cloth mother, they overwhelmingly sought succor from the cloth one; this differential in behavior was enhanced with the passage of time and the accrual of experience. . . .

Thus all the objective tests we have been able to devise agree in showing that the infant monkey's relationship to its surrogate mother is a full one. Comparison with the behavior of infant monkeys raised by their real mothers confirms this view. Like our experimental monkeys, these infants spend many hours a day clinging to their mothers, and run to them for comfort or reassurance when they are frightened. The deep and abiding bond between mother and child appears to be essentially the same, whether the mother is real or a cloth surrogate. . . .

The depth and persistence of attachment to the mother depend not only on the kind of stimuli that the young animal receives but also on when it receives them. . . . Clinical experience with human beings indicates that people who have been deprived of affection in infancy may have difficulty forming affectional ties in later life. From preliminary experiments with our monkeys we have also

found that their affectional responses develop, or fail to develop, according to a similar pattern.

Early in our investigation we had segregated four infant monkeys as a general control group, denying them physical contact either with a mother surrogate or with other monkeys. After about eight months we placed them in cages with access to both cloth and wire mothers. . . .

In the open-field test these "orphan" monkeys derived far less assurance from the cloth mothers than did the other infants. The deprivation of physical contact during their first eight months had plainly affected the capacity of these infants to develop the full and normal pattern of affection. . . . The long period of maternal deprivation had evidently left them incapable of forming a lasting affectional tie. . . .

The effects of maternal separation and deprivation in the human infant have scarcely been investigated, in spite of their implications concerning child-rearing practices. . . .

Above and beyond demonstration of the surprising importance of contact comfort as a prime requisite in the formation of an infant's love for its mother—and the discovery of the unimportant or nonexistent role of the breast and act of nursing—our investigations have established a secure experimental approach to this realm of dramatic and subtle emotional relationships. The further exploration of the broad field of research that now opens up depends merely upon the availability of infant monkeys. We expect to extend our researches by undertaking the study of the mother's (and even the father's!) love for the infant, using real monkey infants or infant surrogates. Finally, with such techniques established, there appears to be no reason why we cannot at some future time investigate the fundamental neurophysiological and biochemical variables underlying affection and love.

Source: Harry F. Harlow, "Love in Infant Monkeys," *Scientific American* 200 (June 1959):68, 70, 72-73, 74.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Reverend Hastings H. Hart, "Placing Out Children in the West," 1884

. . . . Gentlemen interested in public and private charities in various parts of the West and South have stated that many vicious and depraved children are sent out by the society; that they are hastily placed in homes without proper inquiry, and are often ill-used; that the society, having disposed of the children, leaves them to shift for themselves without further care; and that a large proportion turn out badly, swelling the ranks of pauperism and crime. . . .

The inquiry will be grouped under four heads:

First. Is it true that many vicious and depraved children are sent out? A few such were found, but there is no evidence that their selection was intentional. Six are known to have committed offences against the laws, of whom I shall speak later. Nine have been sent back by the local committees as incorrigible; and, in such cases, the society has promptly taken charge of them, paying all expenses. Three or four depraved adults have come to the State under the auspices of the society.

Second. Are children hastily placed in homes without proper inquiry, and are they often ill-used? Some five or six cases of abuse are reported. The society has recently prosecuted one case and is reported to be about to prosecute another. A third case was prosecuted, I believe, by the boy himself. In two or three less glaring instances, the children were transferred to suitable homes. Some false stories of abuse have been traced back to gossips or jealous neighbors.

To the first count of this indictment, however, namely, the hasty placing of children without proper investigation, we fear that the society must plead guilty. The plan is as follows: A representative of the society first visits the town where distribution is to be made, and secures three leading citizens to act as a volunteer committee, pass upon applications for children, and take general charge of the matter. A notice is published in local newspapers inviting applications and announcing the day of arrival and distribution. I was myself a witness of the distribution of forty children in Nobles County, Minnesota, by my honored friend, Agent James Mathews, who is a member of this Conference. The children arrived at about half-

past three P.M., and were taken directly from the train to the court-house, where a large crowd was gathered. Mr. Mathews set the children, one by one, before the company, and, in his stentorian voice, gave a brief account of each. Applicants for children were then admitted in order behind the railing, and rapidly made their selections. Then, if the child gave the assent, the bargain was concluded on the spot. It was a pathetic sight, not soon to be forgotten, to see those children and young people, weary, travel-stained, confused by the excitement and the unwonted surroundings, peering into those strange faces, and trying to choose wisely for themselves. And it was surprising how many happy selections were made under such circumstances. In a little more than three hours, nearly all of those forty children were disposed of. . . .

Third. Does the society, having disposed of the children, leave them to shift for themselves, without farther care? No, not in Minnesota. The agents of the society have revisited the counties where children are placed, —most of them repeatedly. These trips, being hurried, have not permitted visits to all of the children, special attention being given to urgent cases. Cases of incorrigibility reported to the society have received prompt attention, —homes being changed or the child removed from the State, as seemed best. . . .

Fourth. The crucial question is, Does "a large proportion turn out badly, swelling the ranks of pauperism and crime"? . . .

From our experience, we are positive in the opinion that children above the age of twelve years ought not to be sent west by the Children's Aid Society. In this opinion, I understand that the officers of the society concur. . . .

Our examination shows, with reference to the children under thirteen years old, that nine-tenths remain, four-fifths are doing well, and all incorrigibles are cared for by the society. If properly placed and faithfully supervised, we are willing to take our full share of these younger children in Minnesota.

Source: Rev. Hastings H. Hart, Secretary of the State Board of Corrections and Charities of Minnesota, "Placing Out Children in the West," Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities & Correction (St. Louis, 1884): 143-147, 149-150.

Site designed by:



**Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Rollin Hartt to Helen Sumner, May 10, 1915

May 10, 1915

Dear Miss Sumner,

Since your visit and the talks we had about adoption, I have got at a side of the subject that may interest the Children's Bureau as strongly as it interests me, and if you don't mind a lengthy letter I want to go over it pretty fully.

At luncheon the other day, Mr. C.C. Carstens of the S.P.C.C. spoke of what he called the "Traffic in Babies," and Mr. J. Prentice Murphy of our Children's Aid Society said, "There's a lot of that," but the conversation switched off to other aspects of the child problem and it was not till next day that I could challenge Mr. Carstens to substantiate his phrase.

He did it by making two points:

1. That a group of experts who are investigating newspaper advertisements of babies for adoption find rascality in a considerable proportion of cases.
2. That unless there is opposition, the courts do not investigate before sanctioning adoption.

When questioned further, Mr. Carstens said he had had to prosecute foster-parents for neglect or abuse of adopted children. He spoke of men who adopt babies because their wives complain of loneliness and want children as playthings; all goes well till they discover that the playthings are also burdens. However, he was inclined to discount the statement of Mr. Robert W. Kelso (Massachusetts Board of Charities) that there are people who adopt infants in order to get work out of them later; he said such people began with an older child.

But he did say, just as Mr. Murphy had, that sometimes babies are got possession of as a means of blackmail, so that when a man comes back to his mistress after a year, she can confront him with an infant and a demand for money. Or a mother may get her baby adopted with the

intention of visiting the foster-parents later on, begging its return, making "scenes," and allowing herself to be bribed into quitting the annoyance.

Mr. Cartens knows of white babies falling into the hands of negroes who have white wives. One such negro is now in prison after surrendering a nine-year-old white concubine.

Also he told of maternity homes that contract to get rid of the babies, and of baby-boarding establishments into which infants are put by mothers who stop paying and disappear, leaving them for the proprietress to dispose of. . .

Cordially yours,

Rollin Lynde Hartt

Source: Rollin Hartt to Helen Sumner, May 10, 1915, United States Children's Bureau Papers, Box 60, Folder 7346, "Adoption," National Archives II.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Harry Holt's 'Dear Friends' letter, 1955



Harry Holt in Korea, pictured with Mrs. Raetz, the wife of the Overseas Director of World Vision, and the children he would bring home to the United States as his own. The child cradled in Harry's left arm did not pass the physical exam.

Creswell, Oregon

Dear Friends,

. . . In some ways we are working in the dark. We have so many applications for children of white fathers and only the Lord knows how many there are. Many of the children have died there this winter. We surely thank God for everyone who has sponsored an orphan through World Vision. Only God knows how many little lives have been saved this way. One little girl that I prayed over last summer has just died and one of the little boys is in the hospital very ill. If this is true of the few that I knew personally over there, I can only wonder how many there are throughout the country.

Many of you have asked what the age limit is on prospective parents. We do not know the attitude of the Korean Government about this. I suppose they will give the preference to the younger couples. We still need many homes for the half-negro babies; also there are thousands of pure Korean children.

The plane fare is \$259 to Portland and, I believe, \$255 to Los Angeles. This can be paid in payments. Enclosed is a brief explanation of the difference between proxy and welfare adoptions.

I suppose most of you know that World Vision's own Dr. Bob Pierce and Billy Graham are over in the Orient now. We ask your prayers for them as they are very greatly in need of our prayer support.

I only wish the Lord would give me the ability to help you understand what the little ones are going through over in Korea. The little boy or girl that may be, by the grace of God, in your home by this time next year is right now lying on the floor in the cold Korean winter, huddled under

whatever covers they happen to have. They are always cold and there is never enough to eat. Most of them are weak with malnutrition and sick with colds and dysentery, and many others with the beginnings of tuberculosis. We should thank God for the Christian Koreans that are sharing what little they have and doing the best they can to take care of them. We would ask all of you who are Christians to pray to God that He will give us the wisdom and the strength and the power to deliver His little children from the cold and misery and darkness of Korea into the warmth and love of your homes.

Many people have asked how our own children are getting along. Except for some runny noses they are all in good health. Bobby has grown two and one-half inches and all of them have grown at least one inch. They all gained weight and are all happy. They did not begin to speak much English until they had been here about six weeks, this was probably because there were so many of them they could continue to jabber between themselves. But after that time, they began to talk and now they are learning words rapidly. They are a God-sent blessing to our family and we realize that we were not complete without them.

Yours in His service,

Harry Holt. . .

Source: International Social Service, American Branch Papers, Box 10, Folder: "Children—Independent Adoption Schemes, Holt, Harry, vol. I, 1955-1957," Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman





## Mrs. Harry Holt, *The Seed from the East*, 1956



The Holt family on the back stairs of their home in Creswell, Oregon.

*This is how Bertha Holt recalled the events that led her and Harry Holt to adopt eight Korean children and facilitate the adoptions of thousands of others. The story began in 1954, when the Holt family attended a meeting in Eugene, Oregon. Bob Pierce, the president of World Vision, showed several films, spoke about the organization's missionary efforts in Korea, and asked people in the audience to sponsor orphans for \$10 per month. In addition to their shared Christian faith, the contrast between Korean racism and American tolerance was fundamental to Pierce's appeal. Holts' subsequent efforts continued this theme, emphasizing Americans' special responsibility to act on behalf of the "GI babies" left behind by military men. Bertha Holt's book concludes with a special prayer "to help the mixed-race children of Korea. Father. . .we especially plead for the negro-Korean children." The Holts' *international adoptions*, and those depicted in *narratives* like *The Family Nobody Wanted* played crucial political roles during the Cold War, addressing racial dilemmas at home as well as humanitarian crises abroad.*

Then came the scenes that shattered our hearts. We saw before us the tragic plight of hundreds of illegitimate children. . .GI-babies. . .children that had American fathers and Korean mothers. . .children that had been hidden by remorseful mothers until it was no longer possible to keep their secret. Finally the children were allowed to roam the streets where they were often beaten by other children who had never known Koreans with blond hair. . .or blue eyes.

Following this documentary evidence of the shameful result of undisciplined conduct, Dr. Pierce related to the audience more of the things that he, himself, had seen. He told how he had driven a jeep by an army dump on one occasion and noticed what looked like a human form almost hidden beneath the garbage and flies. He stopped the jeep to investigate and found, beneath grime and indescribable dirt, a little boy. His skin was light. His eyes were blue. His hair was brown. He was a GI-baby. He had

been left there to die.

"The Koreans are very race conscious," Dr. Pierce said. "Mixed-race children will never be accepted into Korean society. Even the youngsters, themselves, are conscious of the difference. At a very early age they seem to sense that something is wrong."

Dr. Pierce continued with severe criticism of the men who had turned their backs on those tiny, outstretched arms.

I looked at Harry. He was motionless and tense. I knew every scene had cut him like a knife. I was hurt, too. There is so much we have never known. We had never thought of such suffering and heartbreak. We had never heard of such poverty and despair. We had never seen such emaciated arms and legs, such bloated starvation-stomachs and such wistful little faces searching for someone to care. . . .

To Harry and me had been allotted ten orphans. . . all from an orphanage near Taegu. They were divided evenly—five girls and five boys. The folders described them as being in good health. None were blind or crippled. None were mixed-race children. Their ages ranged from three to fourteen. The youngest and the oldest were both girls. Their parents had either been killed during the war or had succumbed to disease following the war.

We especially enjoyed the letters that came with the pictures. They were composed of carefully written characters placed horizontally across the page. Since the numbers are the same as ours we recognized the date of the writing (12/15/1954). The letters of the pre-school children were written by older children who lived in the orphanages with them.

Kim Un Lyon's letter was typical of those received.

"Dear My Sponsor, How are you getting along who are thousands of miles away? I am well and study hard with the help of God and Jesus Christ, our Lord, and your favor. Nowadays in Korea the winter has come and snowstorms are falling. I am very curious to know about the weather in the country where you are living. I am very happy when I think that my letter will be answered, after it is read by you, and I don't know what to do. Indeed I am very happy. Hoping your good care and love. Bye for now. Kim Un Lyon."

We all read our letters aloud. We loved each one. . . .

More and more I found myself wishing we could bring some of the Korean orphans into our own home where we could love and care for them. I would walk from room to room thinking of how we could put a cot here. . . and another bed there. It even occurred to me that some of the rooms could be partitioned and

made into two rooms without depriving anyone. In fact, some of the rooms even appeared empty as I looked at them.

There was certainly no problem where the other areas of the house were concerned. Our living room was never full except when we had a large Bible class attending. Our dining room might possibly be small. . .especially when we had company. . .but between the dining room and the living room was the library and that could just as easily be considered an annex to the dining room. Isn't it true that when we *want* to see something materialize, we're always able to make the necessary adjustments?

In thinking about particulars, I decided that eight would be the number we could actually absorb into the family. Any more might work a hardship for the children themselves. . . .

On Friday, April 15th, Harry voiced the burden on his heart.

"I've been thinking I'd like to go to Korea."

"I know. I've been hoping you'd go."

For a moment he just sat quietly and looked out the window. Then he spoke again.

"Every night when I go to bed, I see those pictures all over again. It doesn't make any difference where I am or what I'm doing. I think about those kids over there. I look out here at this beautiful playground God has so generously given us and something inside of me cries out at the thought of those poor little babies starving to death, or being thrown into dumps to be gnawed by rats."

Again there was silence but I knew he had more to say and would appreciate saying it as he felt it. So I just sat still and listened.

"I think we ought to adopt some of the GI-children."

"That's the way I feel, too."

"How many do you think we could take care of?"

I knew what I wanted to say. I had thought of it many times and I felt like bursting out with the number eight. Somehow, I lacked the courage. I knew Harry had thought long and hard about the matter, too, and I had no idea of the number he felt would be right. Finally I answered in a far-off squeaky little voice.

"I suppose we could care for six."

"Oh my. . .we have plenty of room for eight. . .or ten. . .or even more."

I felt a sudden, joyful release. Now I knew that Harry's number

even surpassed mine. . .and then I heard him continue to say, "Suzanne and Linda's bedroom is big enough for two or more beds. We can put cots in some of the other bedrooms; and the game room can be partitioned off along that ceiling beam to make a big double bedroom."

As I listened to Harry repeat almost word for word the very things I had told myself could be done, I realized that God was working in our hearts. Only God could bring about such a miracle.

Source: Mrs. Harry Holt, as told to David Wisner, *The Seed from the East* (Los Angeles: Oxford Press, 1956), 25, 37-38, 42, 44.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## “Homes Needed For 10,000 Brown Orphans,” 1948



The Colored Orphans' Home in Louisville, Kentucky, 1910s. Racially segregated private orphanages like this one were established after the Civil War, often by religious organizations like the American Missionary Society. By the early twentieth century, many were in terrible disrepair. The Louisville Home continued to care for children ages three to fifteen, sleeping three to a bed, because there was literally nowhere else in the city for African-American children to go.



Publicity materials designed to recruit black parents for black children typically depicted smiling children and well-dressed parents in settings, such as this outdoor patio, associated with middle-class family life.

### **HOMES NEEDED FOR 10,000 BROWN ORPHANS: Deserted tots find few would-be parents, excluded by color line in many orphanages**

In South Carolina recently, a mid-wife sold an infant for \$20 to collect her fee for delivery of the child.

In Chicago a two-hour-old tot was abandoned in a shoe box on a busy street by an unmarried mother.

In St. Louis a year-old youngster, happily adopted by a white family, was returned to an agency when she began to develop Negroid features.

These are some of the estimated 10,000 deserted, neglected, motherless Negro children who are in desperate need of homes. Victims of the breakup of some 581,000 colored homes (according to 1947 U.S. census bureau figures), these 10,000 brown babies are up for adoption but there are piteously few would-be parents who will take them into their homes. While for every one of the 150,000 white tots in 1,600 orphanages, there are 10 couples with outstretched arms anxious to make an adoption, Negro orphans find few takers.

Because so few childless colored couples adopt orphans and because so many orphanages strictly hold to the color line, there is a growing crisis for homeless Negro youngsters that rapidly is approaching calamitous proportions. Such responsible groups as the Illinois Children's Home and Aid Society were hit by 90 per cent increase in Negro tots and had to turn many away. The society was overburdened not only by the lack of parents willing to adopt the children and the shortage of foster homes but also by the refusal of some 90 per cent of the state's 106 institutions to accept Negro children for

keeping.

As a result these unfortunate children grow up unwanted and friendless in unfit homes or are kept in penal institutions in some states for lack of a better place – their only crime, that of being brown. . . .

Source: "Homes Needed for 10,000 Brown Orphans," *Ebony*, October 1948, 19.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## How Do Adult Adoptees Feel About Illegitimacy? 1968

*In spite of the growth of [adoption studies](#) and [adoption science](#) since the early part of the twentieth century, remarkably few researchers before 1970 considered adult adoptees a significant source of knowledge about adoption. Jean Paton was an important exception to this, surely because she was an adult adoptee herself and the founder of an early search organization, Orphan Voyage. Her 1954 book, [The Adopted Break Silence](#), began the process of publicizing [adoption narratives](#) and mobilizing a new social movement devoted to promoting [search and reunion](#), revising [confidentiality and sealed records](#), and other reforms. This excerpt is drawn from a small study conducted by Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota. The agency hoped to improve the information and preparation it gave to adoptive parents on the basis of reflections shared by twenty-two adopted adults ranging in age from 20 to 45.*

What are the adopted person's feelings about illegitimacy, especially during the adolescent years? What thoughts may an adopted person have if he knew that his biological parents were married when he was placed for adoption?

The discussion of illegitimacy elicited varied reactions and feelings from the group. Several generalizations can be drawn from the discussion, however.

(a) There was a definite difference between the feelings of the men and the women in the group. On the whole, the men did not seem to have strong feelings about illegitimacy. They felt that it may have been the circumstance of their birth but this did not affect them significantly as individuals. Some of the women in the group shared these feelings, but most discussed the subject with considerable emotional involvement.

(b) Most felt that the adopted person may know intellectually that his birth was illegitimate, but the person does not feel illegitimate.

(c) Several women in the group had strong negative attitudes toward unmarried mothers, in general. However, very few thought of their own biological mother in this way. As one woman remarked, "she was a good, Christian girl who made one mistake."

(d) Several older members of the group recalled the stigma of an earlier time which illegitimacy carried. Because of the derision which they endured when younger, some wondered if they did have a "moral weakness" or if there was such a thing as a "bad seed." Most felt that the state of knowledge and cultural attitudes today is such that this is no longer a problem for adopted children, or at least that it is a minor concern.

(e) Several women recalled that, during adolescence, they wondered if they might repeat the mistakes which their biological mother had made. For some, this caused confusion and concern in handling sexual thoughts and desires and they had difficulty relating to boys. However, the group felt that, in most instances, an adopted child's feelings about illegitimacy might intensify rebellious behavior during adolescence but would not be the sole cause of it.

In general, the group felt that the knowledge that the biological parents were married when a child was placed for adoption is more difficult to accept than the fact of an illegitimate birth. Knowing that one's parents were unmarried, perhaps quite young and unable to care for a child, is less threatening than knowing that a married couple did not want a child or perhaps mistreated it. In our culture, the group stated, illegitimacy is more understandable and easier to accept than parental irresponsibility or cruelty. Whatever the circumstances of birth, the group felt that this information was not necessary for the adoptive parents or child to have.

Source: "The Adopted Adult Discusses Adoption as a Life Experience: A Research Study Conducted by Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota" (Minneapolis, 1968), 30.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 7-11-2007  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## How Should Agencies Handle the Rejection of Adoption Applicants? 1950



**Viola Bernard** (left) with her lifelong friend and colleague, **Justine Wise Polier**. The two shared a strong commitment to the agency founded by Polier's mother, one of the **first specialized adoption agencies** in the United States.

*How exactly should applicants for adoptive parenthood be rejected? Should they be informed by letter or in person? Should they be told candidly about any disqualifying factors revealed during the **home study** or should they be let off the hook more gently, by referring to agency policies, baby shortages, or other equally impersonal factors? There were a wide variety of answers to this question in adoption practice, but it is fair to say that agency workers often withheld details from couples when they thought these might be needlessly destructive and hurtful. In the case described here, that is what happened. In consultation with agency staff, psychiatrist **Viola Bernard** suggested that greater honesty might have been a viable course in this case, but only if it ultimately served a therapeutic purpose. The excerpt is drawn from two separate documents: the case summary and notes summarizing the staff seminar about the case.*

---

This case is being presented as a springboard for discussion around the handling of rejection. . . . The question has been raised as to the validity of direct handling with the client around reality factors in rejection rather than the continued statement of the Agency's limitations.

### Identifying Information:

Mrs. S is 30 years of age, her husband 34, and they have been married for 9½ years. They requested the adoption of a child under a year of age. . . .

### Fertility Status:

The problem here is one of spontaneous abortion. There have been five altogether. The first occurred in 1940 and the second in 1945, all ending around the third month. In 1948 there was a six month pregnancy and delivery of a premature girl who lived for one hour and one-half. In

1949 there was another five month pregnancy again with the delivery of a premature girl who did not remain alive. . . . They wrote to us initially two months after the last miscarriage. They are presently using contraceptives and feel certain that they do not want to go ahead with any more pregnancies. . . .

Sexual Relationship:

Both Mr. and Mrs. S. presented material in this area with great pleasure and seemed always to want to center their discussions here. It was difficult to separate their feelings around infertility because of their stress of sexual denial made necessary by the miscarriages. Both felt that their inability to have a child was something which they should not be unhappy about but that their inability to have intercourse during this time did present serious problems. Mrs. S indicated to me that during the period when the doctor asked them to abstain her husband found this so difficult that he had to sleep in another bedroom. They had discussed this and decided that he would attempt masturbation during this time but he was unable to because he was "psychologically blocked". She told me with tears in her eyes that her one regret during all this time that they were trying to have a child, was that she did not have the courage to tell her husband that she would not object if he had intercourse with another woman. She stated that she is the sexual aggressor by her husband's wish.

Rejection:

In supervisory conference it was decided to reject by letter. Immediately following this Mrs. S called and asked to see me. I saw her three days after the letter of rejection was sent. She was visibly upset and indicated to me that since we were a casework agency, understanding the dynamics of human relationship, that she felt that her rejection here centered around problems within her husband and herself. She at no time indicated hostility but pressed for reasons. . . .

\* \* \*

This meeting was concerned with the handling of rejection. In general it was felt that a worker can handle a reject directly only if she has conviction about the validity of the basis for the reject and about the need for direct handling. Sometimes the worker can be more sure in her conclusions than about the way in which she arrived at them and that makes it difficult to handle with the client. Some of our

uneasiness comes out of our self questioning, which is good in the face of a problem of such complexity.

When rejection is handled directly we run into the possibility of a personal showdown and there is a natural hesitation to come face to face with the hostility of the client who has been rejected. We are seeking to achieve a balance between the personal feelings we have toward our clients and our objectivity which has to rest on our professional thinking. This balance is extremely important in handling rejection as well as in other aspects of the job. . . .

In discussing the S. case, Mrs. Goldart said that she had no doubt about the validity of the rejection altho she was not certain about the meaning of the material she got. Her thinking in rejection was based on (1) the feeling in this couple that their reproductive life was less important than their sexual life to the degree where there was an imbalance, (2) that their relationship was so close that the coming of a child might disturb it, and (3) their discussion about children was so vague and unreal as to indicate unreadiness on their part. Mrs. Goldart said that her conviction about rejection came out of the material which they presented, rather than about them as people, since she saw them as warmer and nicer than the material would indicate.

In interpreting the material Dr. Bernard felt that in view of the fact that habitual abortion represents habitual failure for a woman, it could well be that this couple's way of handling this problem was to establish a closer sex connection. The material which Mrs. S. gave us about the difficulty which abstinence created for them and her concern about not having urged her husband to seek satisfaction from other women rather than by masturbation, might be related to the fact that in our culture children are taught to believe that masturbation is wrong, and as adults we tend to look upon masturbation as the less desirable outlet.

As regards the maturity of the S's marital relationship, they seem to be somewhat narcissistic people who find their own idealized image in each other. If this is so it is valid to assume that their relationship may be based on a complementary neurosis which works for them both but which could be disturbed by the coming of a child. This impression of rather narcissistic immature people is borne out by their description of themselves as "model children," Mrs. S's activities since their marriage—college, part-time

irregular employment, etc. As for the emphasis which Mrs. S. put on their sex activity, it was Dr. Bernard's opinion that this would not necessarily militate against adoption, but could be a reaction to a repressed feeling of failure of her feminine potency, which is compensated for by her sex potency in another area. . . .

Dr. Bernard thought that rejection without clarifying our reason was an undefined threat, which left them only with the feeling that they needed in a vague way to get psychiatric help to find out the reason. A clear statement from us that we saw this togetherness as a liability in relation to a child rather than an asset, giving full recognition to how good that relationship is, could leave them with the freedom to disagree, and to then project their feeling on to us, rather than to turn it in on themselves. Dr. Bernard thought this would leave them as undamaged as possible under the circumstances.

Source: Summary for Dr. Bernard Seminar, Tuesday, November 29, 1950, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 161, Folder 5 and Minutes of Seminar with Dr. Bernard, November 28, 1950, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 157, Folder 4, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 6-22-2005  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Dorothy Hutchinson, "Factors to Consider in Family Study," late 1940s



Dorothy Hutchinson, a national authority on child placement, taught at the Columbia School of Social Work. She argued that "although there is no such thing as a perfect home, there is such a thing as a normal family." Finding these normal families was the major goal of adoption **home studies** and major responsibility of adoption professionals.

*These informal notes that Hutchinson used for teaching and consulting suggest the centrality of **infertility** to adoption **home studies** by midcentury.*

1. The quality of the marital relationship.
2. The quality of relationships with family and friends.
3. Functioning of husband and wife in all areas.
4. Reason for childlessness.
5. Degree to which couple have worked out trauma of infertility.
6. Effect of infertility on the marriage—emotionally & sexually.
7. Way couple have handled their frustration & disappointment—mutual supportiveness or destructiveness)
8. The emotional climate the child must grow in.
9. Reasons for wish to adopt...conscious—unconscious—feelings—fantasies—
10. How much discussion bet. Parents prior to adoption—how much thought given to parenthood as well as adoptive parenthood.
11. How much medical exploration has been done.
12. How were plans to adopt shared or not shared with family & friends. (inability to do so often reflects inability to accept infertility.)
13. Feelings of couple re: discussing adoption with the child.
14. Adjustment to sterility
15. Need to consider that often defenses are built to handle feelings about sterility. The reality of the adopted child can serve to break down the defenses. This can be destructive to the individual and/or the relationship.

16. Can the couple, as parents, identify with an adopted child. This is present with a biolog. child—but can it be with one born of another. Can they really consider the child theirs.

17. Can they relate to a child according to the child's needs rather than out of their own conflicts.

18. An unrealistic concern over heredity can reflect basic question as to whether the child can ever really be theirs.

19. Are they threatened by an O.W. child. What are attitudes in this area. Can reflect their own unresolved fears and conflicts about sexuality. The adopted child reactivates and intensifies this. They worry about the child as a potential delinquent—a source of trouble—shame—. This relates also to acceptance of a child not born of them. Places blame for potential failure outside of themselves.

#### Conflicts involved in Adoptive Parenthood

1. Inability to have a biological child—a narcissistic blow. Infertility of wife threatens adequacy as a woman. Infertility of husband threatens maleness—Stillbirths & miscarriages threatens mothers potential as a parent—it is as tho she kills the child. When bearing physical or mental defectives—threatens also. As tho mother injures the child—cannot produce a normal child. Will she be able to help child grow normally.

2. Accepting a child as one's own who is conceived, born & surrendered by others, usually strangers. These problems can threaten not only the individual but also the marital relationship. Can precipitate resentment & antagonism of the partner deprived of child. Emotionally mature people work thru the impact of the infertility. Emotionally mature people can bring capacities for parenthood to Adoptive parenthood. If no adjustment to sterility, adopt. child will only be symbol of the parents frustrations—their feelings of inadequacy—of their failure.

Source: "Factors to Consider in Family Study," Dorothy Hutchinson Papers, Box 1, Folder 11, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Indian Adoption Project Evaluation, 1958 through 1967

A total of 395 Indian children have been placed for adoption through the Indian Adoption Project as of December 31, 1967. One hundred nineteen of the children were placed in 1967, compared with 67 in 1966 and 49 in 1965. Of all the children placed, one child died prior to adoption, and two children had to be returned to their home state because the placement failed. . . .

### Major Accomplishments of the Project

One can no longer say the the Indian child is the "forgotten child," as was indicated when the Project began in 1958. As already reported, resources for the adoption of Indian children have been developed in 26 states and on territory of the United States. The adoption needs of Indian children have been well publicized through a variety of national media, and over the years the League has referred well over 5,000 prospective adoptive families for Indian children to agencies in every state in the Union. The Indian child's reception in the East has been primarily one of "sentiment for our first Americans." The prejudice which prevented his adoption in his own state has greatly decreased, due mainly to the receptivity of families in other states to adopt him. This reaction has caused social agencies in the child's home state to take a "new look" at the Indian child's adoptability with the result that many more Indian children are being placed for adoption in their own state. . . .

### Major Problems of the Project

1. Adoption services for families wanting to adopt Indian children are not available in all states. This lack of service usually extends to families wishing to adopt any out-of-state child, including the foreign child. The rationale, as stated by social agencies, is that their first obligation is to serve children who are residents of the state. As a direct result of this, in one area these families organized themselves into an adoptive parent group for minority children. This resulted in more adoption service and three families have now adopted Indian children.

2. Many more children could have been placed for adoption in 1967 had

they been on referral to our Project. All year the Project has had from 50 to 65 approved adoptive families on referral, with far fewer children referred. There are still many Indian children needing adoption who have not been referred to our Project. The Bureau of Indian Affairs and state departments of welfare need to have frequent periodic reviews of Indian children in foster care to make sure that those children who, in essence, are without parents receive services to make them eligible for adoption.

Source: "The Indian Adoption Project—1958 through 1967—Report of Its Accomplishments, Evaluation and Recommendations for Adoption Services to Indian Children," pp. 1, 6, 8, Child Welfare League of America Papers, Box 16, Folder 2, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Indian Child Welfare Act, 1978

Recognizing the special relationship between the United States and the Indian tribes and their members and the Federal responsibility to Indian people, the Congress finds:

Congress, through statutes, treaties, and the general course of dealing with Indian tribes, has assumed the responsibility for the protection and preservation of Indian tribes and their resources; that there is no resource that is more vital to the continued existence and integrity of Indian tribes than their children and that the United States has a direct interest, as trustee, in protecting Indian children who are members of or are eligible for membership in an Indian tribe; that an alarmingly high percentage of Indian families are broken up by the removal, often unwarranted, of their children from them by nontribal public and private agencies and that an alarmingly high percentage of such children are placed in non-Indian foster and adoptive homes and institutions; and that the States, exercising their recognized jurisdiction over Indian child custody proceedings through administrative and judicial bodies, have often failed to recognize the essential tribal relations of Indian people and the cultural and social standards prevailing in Indian communities and families.

### **§ 1902. Congressional declaration of policy**

The Congress hereby declares that it is the policy of this Nation to protect the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families by the establishment of minimum Federal standards for the removal of Indian children from their families and the placement of such children in foster or adoptive homes which will reflect the unique values of Indian culture, and by providing for assistance to Indian tribes in the operation of child and family service programs.

### **§ 1911. Indian tribe jurisdiction over Indian child custody proceedings**

#### (a) Exclusive jurisdiction

An Indian tribe shall have jurisdiction exclusive to any State over any child custody proceeding involving an Indian child who resides or is domiciled

within the reservation of such tribe, except where such jurisdiction is otherwise vested in the State by existing Federal law. Where an Indian child is a ward of a tribal court, the Indian tribe shall retain exclusive jurisdiction, notwithstanding the residence or domicile of the child. . . .

#### **§ 1915. Placement of Indian children**

(a) Adoptive placements; preferences

In any adoptive placement of an Indian child under State law, a preference shall be given, in the absence of good cause to the contrary, to a placement with (1) a member of the child's extended family; (2) other members of the Indian child's tribe; or (3) other Indian families. . . .

(d) Social and cultural standards applicable

The standards to be applied in meeting the preference requirements of this section shall be the prevailing social and cultural standards of the Indian community in which the parent or extended family resides or with which the parent or extended family members maintain social and cultural ties.

Source: United States Code, Title 25.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## International Social Service Memo, "Home Study Material for Intercountry Adoption Applications," 1957



Joe, one of the eight Korean children adopted by **Bertha and Harry Holt** in 1955, dressed as Davy Crockett. The expectation that **international adoptions** would lead to the easy assimilation of new Americans co-existed with concerns that **matching** pay close attention to racial and cultural differences.

Many agencies have asked us to outline the kind and amount of information we would like to have about families applying for a foreign child, and the form in which it would be most useful to ISS in the "matching" process. In the past few years we have accepted summaries or copies of home studies as they would be completed for an application for a local child, writing back for more information as needed. Agencies have been most cooperative, even though some of our requests involved extra interviews fitted into an agency's already heavy schedule. We feel that we now have had enough experience with the "matching" of family to specific child to be able to outline the information that can give us a clear idea of the type and age of child for which a particular family is potentially most suitable, in relation to the attitudes and facilities of their community. . . .

The same amount and kind of material usually compiled for the placement of a local child is also needed for a family who has applied to adopt a foreign child. It should be supplemented by an evaluation of the special qualities we have found valuable for the successful placement of foreign children. First of all, the family must be ready to understand and handle the differences in cultural background and, perhaps, race of a child from another country, and to accept a child who has had material and emotional deprivations in the early years. It goes without saying that the family must be able to accept a child as he is, along with the cultural and environmental factors that had a part in molding him, and without a need to Americanize him too quickly. . . .

### GUIDE FOR SUMMARY OF ADOPTIVE HOME STUDY

1. Basis for study and recommendations: Number of office interviews, and with whom; number of home visits, and with whom.
2. Reason for application for foreign child.

3. Description (for all members of the immediate family) of physical appearance; personality, activities and interests; education and ambitions, nationality background; family attitudes toward intercountry adoption; home and community.
4. Economic position: employment; income; assets, and resources.
5. Nationality and racial make-up and attitudes of community.
6. Medical report, current, completed by physician. (N.B. If medical basis for childlessness, add PAPs' emotional reaction to it.)
7. Describe PAPs: Experience in handling children, and reaction in discussion of common problems at various stages in a child's development and growth, and experience, if any, with people of other cultural backgrounds.
8. Discussion of type, age and sex of child for whom PAP and worker agree they would be suitable.
9. Worker's evaluation of motivation for adoption, and for adoption of a foreign child.
10. Any additional comments by worker or PAPs of special qualifications as adoptive parents.

Source: "Home Study Material for Intercountry Adoption Applications," pp. 1, 3, International Social Service, American Branch Papers, Box 11, Folder: "Home Study of Intercountry Adoption Applicants," Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## International Social Service Memo, "Telephone Calls Concerning Adoption," 1957

*This internal memo summarized the questions that many potential adoptive parents (known as PAPs) had about **international adoption**.*

1. PAPs often ask what are the qualifications needed to adopt a foreign child: Explain that the qualifications are the same as for adopting a local child. Also explain the role and way of working of ISS as an international agency, working through local agencies and through its Branches abroad. Applications should be made in writing giving the basic information (names, age, address, occupation and religious denomination, and stating what kind of child the PAPs have in mind in terms of nationality). Point out that the agency's aim is to find a suitable home for a child, rather than a suitable child for the client's home. Religious qualifications and special problems such as personality defects, or sickness, have to be handled by the local agency since the regulations vary from state to state.
2. Jewish Applicants: Ninety per cent of the telephone calls come from Jewish parents. There are no Jewish children available in Europe or Israel. Israeli government appeals in behalf of children in orphanages but will not release them out of the country. It is necessary to explain the situation in a positive way, pointing out the strong family ties in the Jewish culture. Explain the need for homes for Korean-American children who are available and could be considered since they have not been baptized and the father and mother in most cases are unknown. Wording of such suggestion has to be careful since it might be felt as discrimination by those Jewish people who themselves, feel that a half-Asian child is somehow regarded as "inferior."

Source: Group Consultation, Subject: Telephone Calls Concerning Adoption, December 3, 1957, International Social Service, American Branch Papers, Box 12, Folder: "Group Consultation Meetings," Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## International Social Service, "Proxy Adoptions," 1954-1956



**Bertha and Harry Holt** arranged to adopt eight Korean children in 1955, and then facilitated scores of other **proxy adoptions** for U.S. citizens. The picture of their large, happy, evangelical family was at odds with warnings by professionals that such adoptions were especially risky and dangerous for children.

The following story was . . . related to (International Social Service) by a county judge.

In 1950 the County Juvenile Court had occasion to make an investigation relative to the background history of a couple who had made application to the court, for adoption. The investigation of the court revealed that Mr. M., the prospective adoptive father, drank excessively, was unstable in his employment, and was suffering from a physical disorder. Investigation concerning the prospective adoptive mother revealed her to be an extremely tense and high-strung individual with a prior history of nervous breakdowns. Marital discord was noted in the family situation and there were several separations between the prospective parents as a result of this marital discord. As a result of this information, these people were rejected as prospective adoptive parents by this court on the basis of marital instability.

This couple, at a later date, applied to still another adoption agency, and after making an independent investigation the agency arrived at the same conclusion and also turned this couple down as prospective adoptive parents. At still a later date the couple again made application with a third agency and that agency, based upon the investigation material obtained during the prior two investigations, plus a review of their own, turned down the family.

Approximately one year and a half ago, a local newspaper carried in it a feature story on the placement of a child of Japanese birth with a couple in that area. It was quickly learned that the adopting couple was the very same couple that had been rejected by the court as being unsuitable. Investigation revealed that the adoptive parents had

adopted the child by proxy in a proceeding in the country of Japan and that no local court or unit of state government had in any way been consulted relative to the desirability of this adoptive placement. In view of this situation, and its prior history with this court, the matter was presented to the attorney general's office of the State, for a ruling. After considerable delay and with some degree of hesitation on the part of the attorney general, it was finally his decision that there was nothing that any local or State unit of government could do with regard to this particular type of placement.

Source: "Proxy Adoptions," International Social Service, American Branch Papers, Box 10, Folder: "Proxy Adoptions, 1954-56," Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Rael Jean Isaac, "What the Agency Looks For," 1965

*This set of guidelines aimed to demystify what social workers were thinking and expecting as they conducted **home studies**. Boiling the process down to a set of simple instructions about the attitudes and behaviors most likely to succeed—from how to recall one's childhood to what to say about one's sex life—undermined therapeutic approaches to adoption because they made home studies appear to be performances that depended on the skill of the actors rather than investigations devoted to children's well-being. In this excerpt, the author implicitly criticized the power that **social workers** wielded in agency adoption. Two years earlier, in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Isaac explicitly condemned the "amateur psychiatry" practiced by social workers, along with their efforts to eliminate independent adoptions and gain a family-making monopoly. "The public may well hesitate before bestowing upon the erring individuals of an agency the final godlike power to decree who shall be parents and who shall not."*

---

Following are a list of suggestions which should serve as a practical guide to a couple seeking to convince an agency that they have the capacity for adoptive parenthood. . . .

1. Use the pronoun "we," not "I." This is a deceptively simple point, but for social workers in adoption these pronouns are important diagnostic tools. The assumption is that the use of "we" by husband and wife is a favorable indicator of the quality of the marriage, since husband and wife do not speak as separate selfish selves but as a family unit.
2. A couple are fortunate if they can say that they get on well with their parents and relatives. Certainly the agency interview is not the time for a frank airing of hostilities on mother, father, even Aunt Emma. On the other hand it is foolish to pretend an unfeigned enthusiasm for any of these people, for the social worker will probably detect it as unfeigned. . . . The social worker expects that problems will exist; she is on the lookout to find if the couple have "handled" them maturely. . . .

Although it is important to the agency that the couple be on good terms with their parents or at least have come to a full understanding and acceptance of why they are not on good terms with them, they should not

appear so close to their parents that the social worker senses they are dependent upon them. The agency is looking for a mature couple, and one of the ways in which it defines maturity is that the couple stand on their own feet, not those of their parents. . . .

3. The couple must convince the agency that they are happily married. This sounds too obvious to be worth mentioning, but the relationship between husband and wife is the area in which the social worker will probably probe most deeply. A mistaken position in the face of this probing is to claim that husband and wife are in perfect agreement and never quarrel. The social worker will probably suspect any couple who claim to get along that well are concealing some hideous disagreements. A couple who literally never quarrel (is such there be) might at least speak of some of their divergences of taste. The agency is looking for masculine men and feminine women to provide models for the child in their respective roles. If the social worker feels that either husband or wife has been sucked up in the personality of the other—which may be her explanation for complete absence of disagreement—she will be afraid that one parent will not offer a suitable model.

4. Adoptive parents are fortunate if they can recall a happy childhood. The reason for this is the social worker goes on the assumption that those who experienced a happy home life are themselves more likely to offer one to a child. While there is no need to paint an idyllic picture, especially if such a picture is inaccurate, a couple should avoid dwelling on any experiences in early childhood that might be interpreted as traumatic. . . .

5. The couple should show that they are reconciled to their infertility. Social workers find that in the typical interview the wife weeps, confesses she is jealous of women who are pregnant, finds it hard to tolerate parties where the women sit talking of their children, feels she is inadequate, and has felt she was alone among women in her reactions. The man may confess that his pride is hurt because of his inability to have children. The social worker will expect a couple to be frank about the way they felt and to express it—if they do not she will feel they are suppressing it. But the couple should then go on to say how they adjusted to the situation through talking the matter out with each other, and coming to the realization that adoption was the answer. They can say that "time helped," that baby carriages no longer trigger tears, and that they are hoping soon to be wheeling one themselves for an adopted baby. Basically they are balancing on a tightrope. . . .

6. A couple must convince the social worker that their motives for adoption—conscious and unconscious—are healthy. . . .

8. Husband and wife, if the wife works, should both be happy in their jobs, but the wife should not be too happy. While it is important that the husband indicate fulfillment in his work, a social worker may feel that the wife who sounds too fulfilled may be reluctant to sacrifice her work for the routine of child care, and the vast majority of agencies insist, at least in

adoption by white couples, that the mother give up her work. . . .

10. The couple should not reveal any desperate need of a child. Agencies are looking for couples who would live comfortably together without children, and do not look upon adoption as a means assuaging their own pain. . . .

11. Although a couple should skirt the revelation of any deep feelings about adoption, they should try to show warm feelings for children and for each other. . . .

12. A couple should not indicate too much preference for a boy or a girl nor should they come with a list of demands regarding a child. . . .

13. The couple must be prepared to take in good part intimate questions regarding their background, fertility problem, and sex life. If the husband and wife are embarrassed in answering questions about their sex life, the social worker may decide that they will be embarrassed in dealing with their child's questions about how he came to be adopted. . . . The social worker often conducts a miniature psychoanalysis: Like the Freudian analyst, the social worker moves in a world of oral and anal personalities, sexually adjusted and maladjusted individuals. . . . Most social workers will want to know if a couple have an adequate sex life, since this is considered an index to a good marriage. Intercourse twice a week is apt to strike the social worker as an index of a good marriage—good without overdoing it. . . .

16. The couple should reveal no hesitation in regard to telling the child about his adoption. . . .

19. The couple's feelings toward illegitimacy should not be punitive. . . .

21. A couple should indicate that they would only consider adopting through an agency and disapprove of private adoption. . . .

29. Adoptive applicants should be relaxed, honest, self-searching, and unguarded. If this sounds contradictory after twenty-eight suggestions implying that a couple must be thoroughly on their guard, it nonetheless remains good advice. . . .

Source: Rael Jean Isaac, *Adopting a Child Today* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 23.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Excerpt from Benson Jaffee and David Fanshel, *How They Fared in Adoption*, 1970

### REVELATION OF ADOPTIVE STATUS

A long-standing and basic working assumption in the field of adoption placement has been that the telling of "the adoption story" to the child is one of the central and most critical tasks confronting adoptive parents. Both the recent literature and the reexamination of practice on the part of some agencies have revealed that the optimal timing, content, and manner of handling revelation are still unresolved issues. Little question, however, seems to have been raised that the need to resolve these issues in some way is one of the primary and unique responsibilities of adoptive parenthood which sets it apart from biological parenthood and that the kind of resolution arrived at by adoptive parents may well have great implications for the adoptee's future psychosocial adjustment.

In the light of these assumptions, our findings concerning the revelation practices of our one hundred adoptive families and the bearing of these practices upon subsequent adoption outcome are rather challenging. We discovered first of all that the way parents dealt with revelation was by and large a reflection of a more basic underlying orientation to child rearing in general. Families which tended to take a sheltering approach to the general upbringing of their children—e.g., supervising closely, not encouraging the development of autonomy and independence, etc.—were also likely to de-emphasize the adoption component in their children's lives. They tended to postpone revelation, to give minimal information about the child's biological background, to decrease the visibility of the adoptive status, and, in effect, to simulate a biological parent-child relationship. On the other hand, parents with a less protective orientation toward the rearing of children were likely also to be more "open" about adoption, to reveal more information about natural parents, and to acknowledge freely the nonbiological nature of their relationship with the adoptee. Revelation, in other words, tended *not* to take place as a separate and isolated parental activity but rather as an integral part of the overall task of the raising of children.

We were struck by our finding that the prevailing pattern among our group

of families had been to withhold from their children most or all information concerning the latter's biological parents and the circumstances leading to adoption. Seven in ten families reported that they had coped in this manner with the problem of the content of revelation although there were distinct differences in this regard among families who had adopted through different agencies. Only 12 percent of the parents had shared with their children the true facts of adoption as they knew them.

It is important to realize that these data offer no basis for assessing the relative merits of full versus minimal revelation. Nor are we aware of any rigorous research which might shed meaningful light upon this knotty question. It may well be, however, that it is not so much what and how much is revealed to the adoptee that is the decisive factor in the impact of revelation upon him as it is with the degree of comfort or ease his parents experience with their choice of approach. We would suspect that adoptive couples could choose to divulge everything they know about the adoptee's biological background or almost nothing and carry off either posture well or poorly depending upon the amount of anxiety it entailed for them. That stance which is most congenial to their emotional-psychological make-up, i.e., which is most ego-syntonic for them, may in the last analysis also be the most positive and constructive one for the adoptee with respect to his subsequent psychosocial adjustment.

We learned with some surprise that only a single aspect of revelation was definitely associated with the nature of adoptive outcome. Adoptees who showed marked curiosity about their biological past and desired to learn more about it than their adoptive parents knew or were willing to divulge tended to manifest a more problematic adjustment in a variety of life-space areas. None of the other ostensibly important aspects of "the telling"—the timing of the initial revelation, the nature and amount of material revealed, or the frequency of subsequent allusion to adoption—was appreciably correlated with outcome.

We consider this finding (as well as the foregoing data suggesting the nonparamount role of revelation in the child-rearing behavior of our adoptive couples) to be among the most important and provocative findings to emerge from our study. Because they run counter to some fundamental assumptions of adoption placement practice, we believe they are suggestive of the need for further investigation of the dynamics of revelation in adoptive families and its influence on the subsequent life adjustment of adopted children.

Source: Benson Jaffee and David Fanshel, *How They Fared in Adoption: A Follow-Up Study* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 311-313.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Ann Johnston, "Our Negro Daughter," 1960

We are the Caucasian parents of a Negro child in Kent, Washington, a community where there are very few people who are not Caucasian.

In our household for the past 17 years there have always been one or more non-white children. During this time ours were often the only children in the school who were not white. Our relationship with both the community and the school has been predominantly good. During the 13 years we were foster parents, we had in our home for varying lengths of time 96 foster children.

Our Negro daughter, Pat, is now 16 and has been our own since she was six weeks old. She is the youngest of our five children, another daughter and three sons by blood. All of them attended Kent Meridian School. Pat started in kindergarten there.

Patty, as we call her, is a wholesome girl with a warm and friendly personality. She is active, mature and intelligent. We are proud of her and feel deeply our responsibility as her parents. Our family believes it should be possible for an individual to live as a person among people, rather than a Negro among whites. We feel our experience could be useful to others if they find it an honest source of information. . . .

We frequently meet criticism. People say to us: "You have no right to do what you have done. In the cause of integration, you are willing to sacrifice your daughter; for you know you cannot keep her happy and safe." We agree we cannot. But we do not believe she could be happy or safe in she had to stay in a ghetto. We did not believe she would be happy or safe in the bombed schools of the South. We do not believe she can be happy or safe until there is no longer any race discrimination. We do not believe we can be happy or safe, either, for as many times as armies have swept back and forth across the world, we who call ourselves Caucasian speak only in degrees. Korea and Japan have the latest, not the first, soldiers' children.

Source: Ann Johnston, "'Our Negro Daughter'," *Ebony*, May 1960.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Alfred Kadushin, "Single-Parent Adoptions: An Overview and Some Relevant Research" 1970



Rosalind Martin, of the Los Angeles County Bureau of Child Adoptions, showing a child to a prospective [single parent adopter](#).

### The Single-Parent Adoptive Situation

Single-parent adoptions have been made in Los Angeles; Washington, D.C.; Chicago; Portland; Minneapolis; Indianapolis; and Bridgeport, Connecticut. In two instances, at least, the single adoptive parents have been men. . . .

In the first hesitant efforts to attract single-parent applications for adoption, agencies have made explicit the fact that such applicants are being accepted only if they are interested in the hard-to-place child. . . .

But if more and more children become "hard-to-place," then. . . agencies would have to begin to consider single-parent adoption as a possibility for more and more children.

Currently, then, agencies have moved from a stance of automatically rejecting the one-parent applicant to a highly qualified willingness to explore such applications in specific instances. The following standards, which are particular to the one-parent applicant situation, seem to be evolving:

1. Some assurance is sought that the applicant has close contact with an extended family. The availability of male relatives—uncles, brothers, nephews, etc.—would permit the possibility of intimate contact, for identification, with father surrogates. . . .
2. Some assurance is asked that the financial situation is such that the adoptive mother can adequately provide for the child without always doubling as a wage-earner, at least while the child is totally dependent. . . .
3. Greater consideration should be given to the question of sexual identification of the single applicant and the nature of the relationship with the opposite sex. The implied question is, if single, why single? if divorced, why divorced? if engaged in a

healthy, heterosexual relationship, why not married?

4. The health status of the single adoptive applicant is a matter of greater than normal concern in the adoptive study, since any illness robs the child of the effective care of the only parent available.

5. As in all adoptive studies, the question of motivation is a matter of concern. . . . Does the applicant act out of an aching loneliness, out of a need to have and control a source of love and affectional response?. . . .

### **The Single-Parent Family and Psychosocial Dysfunctioning**

Social work as a profession has made some decisions which establish a hierarchy of the relative desirability of the variety of child-rearing contexts. Maintaining the child in his own home is more desirable than any kind of substitute-care arrangement; a two-parent adoptive home is regarded as more desirable than long-term foster care; long-term foster care is regarded as more desirable than institutionalization. But where does the single-parent adoption fit into this hierarchy? Is it more or less desirable than substitute care in a good institution? Is it more or less desirable than maintaining the child in his own home with parents who have often neglected him and, on occasion, have abused him?. . . .

Perhaps the greatest component of the social worker's ambivalence and discomfort about single-parent adoption (and ambivalence and discomfort that result in assigning such a resource a low position in our hierarchy of preferences) is based on a dubious equation. This widely accepted and superficially convincing equation is that the single-parent family is likely to be a pathogenic family. However logical the equation may be, given the special problems of single-parent familyhood, what does the available empirical evidence tell us about the validity of this equation?. . . .

To recapitulate the principal point being made here, the equation which prejudices our view of the single-parent adoption suggests that child-rearing in the single-parent family is psychogenic. However, empirical research does not clearly support the equation that growing up in a single-parent family is associated with increased psychic vulnerability and a higher rate of psychiatric and emotional disability. The evidence is conflicting and ambiguous. . . .

Research seems to indicate that children are able to surmount the lack of a father and some of the real shortcomings of a single-parent home. To modify an old folk saying, lack of a father is not as bad as having a father is good.

The single-parent family appears capable of producing a product that in very many instances is as good as the product of the two-parent family. If, in addition, we maximize the inherent strengths of such a family by judicious selection of applicants, by special assistance through subsidization of the adoption, ready availability of casework help, imaginative exploitation of organizations such as "Parents without Partners," the single adoptive parent can be offered to children needing adoptive homes with some confidence that we are providing a good home. The single-parent adoptive family is likely to be the kind of single-parent family which is least pathogenic. . . .

We need to become more flexible in thinking about the alternatives, different but "undamaging," which can be productively employed for children needing substitute families.

Source: Alfred Kadushin, "Single-Parent Adoptions: An Overview and Some Relevant Research," *Social Service Review* 44 (1970):263, 264-265, 266, 267-268, 269, 271-272.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Randall Kennedy, "Orphans of Separatism: The Painful Politics of Transracial Adoption," 1994

Racial matching reinforces racialism. It strengthens the baleful notion that race is destiny. It buttresses the notion that people of different racial backgrounds really are different in some moral, unbridgeable, permanent sense. It affirms the notion that race should be a cage to which people are assigned at birth and from which people should not be allowed to wander. It belies the belief that love and understanding are boundaries and instead instructs us that our affections are and should be bounded by the color line regardless of our efforts. . . .

There is no rationale sufficiently compelling to justify preferring same-race child placements over transracial placements. One asserted reason for favoring same-race placements (at least in terms of black children) is that African-American parents can, on average, better equip African-American children with what they will need to know in order to survive and prosper in a society that remains, in significant degree, a pigmentocracy. This rationale is doubly faulty.

First, it rests upon a racial generalization, a racial stereotype, regarding the relative abilities of white and black adults in terms of raising African-American children. Typically (and the exception does not apply here), our legal system rightly prohibits authorities from making decisions on the basis of racial generalizations, even if the generalizations are accurate. Our legal system demands that people be given individualized consideration to reflect and effectuate our desire to accord to each person respect as a unique and special individual. Thus, if an employer used whiteness as a criteria to prefer white candidates for a job on the grounds that, on average, white people have more access to education than black people, the employer would be in violation of an array of state and federal laws—even if the generalization used by the employer is accurate. We demand as a society a more exacting process, one more attentive to the surprising possibilities of individuals than the settled patterns of racial groups. Thus, even if one believes that, on average, black adults are better able than white adults to raise black children effectively, it would still be problematic to disadvantage white adults, on the basis of their race, in the selection

process.

Second, there is no evidence that black foster or adoptive parents, on average, do better than white foster or adoptive parents in raising black children. The empirical basis for this claim is suspect; there are no serious, controlled, systematic studies that support it. Nor is this claim self-evidently persuasive. Those who confidently assert this claim rely on the hunch, accepted by many, that black adults, as victims of racial oppression, will generally know more than others about how best to instruct black youngsters on overcoming racial bias. A counter-hunch, however, with just as much plausibility, is that white adults, as insiders to the dominant racial group in America, will know more than racial minorities about the inner world of whites and how best to maneuver with and around them in order to advance one's interests in a white-dominated society.

To substantiate the claim that black adults will on average be better than white adults in terms of raising black children, one must stipulate a baseline conception of what constitutes correct parenting for a black child—otherwise, one will have no basis for judging who is doing better than whom. . . .

Is an appropriate sense of blackness evidenced by celebrating Kwanza, listening to rap, and seeking admission to Morehouse College? What about celebrating Christmas, listening to Mahalia Jackson, and seeking admission to Harvard? And what about believing in atheism, listening to Mozart, and seeking admission to Bard? Are any of these traits more or less appropriately black? And who should do the grading on what constitutes racial appropriateness? Louis Farrakhan? Jesse Jackson? Clarence Thomas? . . .

What parentless children need are not "white," "black," "yellow," "brown," or "red" parents but *loving* parents.

Yet another reason advanced in favor of moderate racial matching is that it may serve to save a child from placement in a transracial family setting in which the child will be made to feel uncomfortable by a disapproving surrounding community. It would be a regrettable concession, however, to allow bigotry to shape our law. One of the asserted justifications of segregation was that it protected blacks from the wrath of those whites who would strongly object to transracial public schooling and transracial accommodations in hotels and restaurants. When the *New York Times* editorializes today that "clearly, matching adoptive parents with children of the same race is a good idea," we should recall that not very long ago it was believed in some parts of this nation that "clearly" it was a good idea to match people of the same race in separate but equal parks, hospitals, prisons, cemeteries, telephone booths, train cars, and practically every other place one can imagine—all for the asserted purpose of accommodating the underlying racial sentiments of those who opposed "racial mixing."

Source: Randall Kennedy, "Orphans of Separatism: The Painful Politics of Transracial Adoption," *American Prospect*, no. 17 (Spring 1994):40-42.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

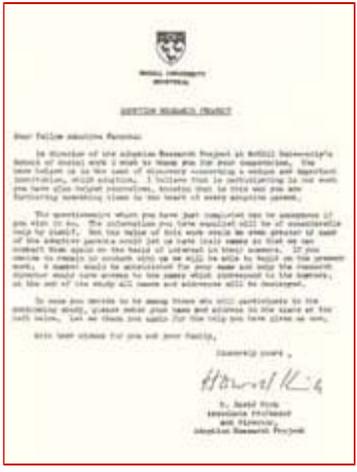
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



|                          |  |   |  |                                 |                                   |                            |
|--------------------------|--|---|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <a href="#">Timeline</a> | <a href="#">People &amp; Organizations</a> | <a href="#">Adoption Studies/Adoption Science</a> | <a href="#">Topics in Adoption History</a> | <a href="#">Further Reading</a> | <a href="#">Document Archives</a> | <a href="#">Site Index</a> |
|--------------------------|--|---|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|

### Excerpt from H. David Kirk, *Shared Fate: A Theory of Adoption and Mental Health*, 1964



The letter H. David Kirk used to request participation in his study. "You have helped us in the task of discovery concerning a unique and important institution, child adoption," he wrote to adoptive parents. "I believe that in participating in our work you have also helped yourselves."

#### THE THEORY OF ADOPTIVE RELATIONS

We are now in a position to summarize the theoretical argument which has been developed in these six chapters.

1. Childless couples entering upon adoption are confronted with a series of difficulties which we identified as role handicap.
2. This role handicap is reinforced by the attitudes of other people.
3. In the form of parental dilemmas, the role handicap is carried into the evolving family relationship.
4. To cope with their role handicap and feelings of alienation, the adopters take recourse to various supports for their roles. These coping mechanisms appear to be of two types: those which serve the adopters in denying that their situation is different from that of biological parents ("rejection-of-difference"), and those which serve the adopters in acknowledging that difference ("acknowledgment-of-difference").
5. The greater the original deprivation and the consequent role handicap suffered, the greater the likelihood that the adopters will lean toward mechanisms of coping by "rejection-of-difference").
6. For all parents in our society, certain cultural goals may be assumed. There is no doubt that adopters, along with other parents, seek to have families of stability and permanence, yielding personal satisfactions. Stability requires rules of conduct. Families that are not regulated by tradition must depend on the interpersonal skills of their members for their internal order. In the situation of adoption, these skills imply empathic and ideational communication with the child about his background.

7. Adoptive parental coping activities of the type of "acknowledgment-of-difference" are conducive to good communication and thus to order and dynamic stability in adoptive families. Coping activities of the type of "rejection-of-difference" on the other hand can be expected to make for poor communication with subsequent disruptive results for the adoptive relationship. . . .

## APPENDIX D

### Summary of Mechanisms of Coping with Role Handicap

Coping mechanisms with apparently similar objectives have been placed side by side.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>"Rejection of Difference"</i>             | <i>"Acknowledgement of Difference"</i>   |
| Changed Identity and Role                    | Reaching for New Symbols of Identity and Role<br>Desires for New Forms of Sanction                               |
| Infancy Adoption                             | Adoption of Older Children   |
| Simulation of the Biological Family          | The Heterogeneous Family   |
| Guarding Adoption Secrets from Outsiders     | Announcement-Explanation-Education<br>Evangelism-Recruitment<br>Group Membership as Role Support                 |
| Myth of Origin Defining Child's Status       | Celebration of Adoption Anniversary  |
| Removal of Natural Parents' Image            | Admission of Natural Parents' Image  |
| Shielding Child from His Origins             | Reciprocity in Parent-Child Problems<br>Empathy in Parent-Child Problems<br>Empathy with Child's Natural Parents |
| "Forgetting" the Adoption                    | Empathy with Adopted Child<br>Recall of Relative Deprivation<br>Recall of Relative Satisfaction                  |
| Myth of Origin Defining the Adopters' Status | Emerging Role Models   |

Source: H. David Kirk, *Shared Fate: A Theory of Adoption and Mental Health* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 98-99, 182-183.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Joan Lawrence, "The Truth Hurt Our Adopted Daughter," 1963

*In this excerpt, an adoptive mother challenged the consensus that children must always be told the truth about their adoptions. Her story suggests that it was not simply the fact of adoption that made **telling** problematic, but the combination of adoption and **illegitimacy**, still so shameful as to be literally unspeakable in the early 1960s. Few people at the time openly advocated lying to children, but a fair number of parents probably did, believing that their first and most important responsibility was to protect their children from pain. Today, parents are still expected to tell—and most surely do. But there is also much more sensitivity to the potential problems associated with adoption. It was the link between adoption difference and difficulty in her daughter's life that prompted Joan Lawrence to question the rule that children must always be told.*

---

"What was really wrong with me? Why did they give me away?" our eight-year-old daughter cried out one evening. My husband and I were stunned at the heartbreaking revelation. Despite our love and reassurance, our Amy was deeply troubled.

We had adopted Amy when she was just a few weeks old. By the time she was three, she had been told about this joyous event. She loved to hear us tell how we had waited and waited, how we had cried with joy when we heard the news that she would be ours, how her grandparents came racing out to the midwest from the east coast because they were too impatient to wait for us to bring her for a visit. When we talked about it, Amy would say, "Tell the part where Grandpa says, 'Oh, what a remarkable baby!'"

As she grew older, she continued to delight us. . . . But then, we began to see that something more than the ordinary problems of childhood was bothering Amy.

The story of how we got her was no longer enough. She became more concerned about her real flesh-and-blood parents. Though she seemed to have accepted our views—that real parents are the people who love and take care of you—nonetheless her thoughts turned increasingly to "the time before I was yours." I have since learned that this kind of doubt and wondering is characteristic of adopted children at about this age.

Then Amy began to have problems in school. Her teachers told us that she lacked self-confidence, that she often looked sad and alone in the classroom. She couldn't concentrate; she had trouble in reading, and she got behind her class in arithmetic. . . .

When she would ask us questions about what happened to her parents and why they had given her away, my husband and I continued to say what we had been saying all along—what we thought was the right thing to tell her. We said all that mattered was that Amy was ours. There must have been a good reason for her mother to give her up, but we didn't know or care what it was. The main thing was that we loved her and she was our little girl. . . .

Actually, Amy had been given up for adoption for the most common reason—she was born out of wedlock. Naturally, we didn't want to, and couldn't, explain that to her. But when we said, "They gave you up for your happiness," how could she have figured out good reasons for that? Why shouldn't her first parents have been happy to keep her? In posing these questions, we felt a greater appreciation of our daughter's dilemma. . . .

One night she herself brought out an album of baby pictures for us to look at together. We looked at the adorable baby she had been and it was then she cried out, "What was the matter with me? Why did they give me away?" This was what had been disturbing her. Nothing she had ever heard from us could change what to her seemed the only reason for her parents to give her up.

I was too shaken at the moment to do more than reassure her that she had been perfect in every way. Later, my husband and I . . . decided to tell Amy that her parents had died. This was the only explanation, we concluded, that her young mind could grasp. We would explain that we hadn't told her when she was younger because she might not have understood about death. . . . When she no longer needs the concept of death to explain her adoption, we feel sure Amy will forgive our lie.

This is the story of our personal experience. Perhaps it will be of some help to other adoptive parents whose children may need the special kind of reassurance Amy did. I know there are many respected adoption agencies who maintain that it is always best for a child to be told the truth. From our own experience, however, we have learned that children often draw mistaken conclusions about truths which they are too young to understand. We have talked to many other adoptive parents and have heard similar stories. . . .

From the extreme of considering adoption an almost taboo subject, we seem to have gone to the opposite extreme of insisting that adoption is almost synonymous with natural parenthood. With the best intentions, we may have minimized the differences between natural and adoptive families to such a degree that the inevitable, special problems of adoption surprise and frighten us.

Adoption is a healthy and meaningful way to create a family. And like all worth-while endeavors it has its challenges—and satisfactions.

Source: Joan Lawrence, "The Truth Hurt Our Adopted Daughter," *Parents' Magazine and Better Homemaking*, January 1963, 45, 105-106.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Excerpt from Ruth W. Lawton and J. Prentice Murphy, "A Study of Results of a Child-Placing Society," 1915

If social work is ever to develop into a profession, searching analysis and criticism of methods and results, no matter what the consequences may be, become prime essentials.

On October 1, 1913, the Boston Children's Aid Society added a research worker to its staff; the expense of her work for the first two years being met from a special gift coming from one of the directors. This director, and others of the board and staff, were anxious to have the society study in a broadly interpretive way some of the economic and social problems represented in the lives of the children coming to its attention. There was also a desire to see if our particular services as a child-placing society could not be stated in certain exact terms, with the hope that in so doing we might be able to establish certain standards by which we could measure our own work, and which might be of some service to other children's organizations, also inclined to self study. We hope to publish in greater detail certain portions of the study which are only slightly covered in this paper.

Moreover, in this process of measuring our own standards there was a still further desire to see wherein we were failing in our work; for social agencies do frequently fail: often because their professional technique is crude or faulty, and often because no methods short of a fundamental change in social institutions will correct the unsocial conditions so often found. A quick reporting of faulty lines of approach to better social conditions is something that society at large has a right to expect from every social agency, and this can only be done through careful interpretation of the work as it progresses. . . .

To our great surprise and disappointment we found in 1913, after superficial examination, that our histories as written records were of little value; that, although they represented many evidences of good and bad work, there were too few facts on which sound, wise studies could be based. The task, moreover, of getting supplemental data was, of course, entirely out of the question, for a number of reasons—chiefly that of

expense.

Most social agencies are prone to indulge in this same bromide, namely, that, given sufficient money, they could do so much in an educational way with their old history records. We do not feel that we are exaggerating when we say that it is perhaps possible to rattle off on the fingers of one hand the children's organizations, and the family treatment organizations as well, scattered over the country, whose records have any general social value whatsoever.

Source: Ruth W. Lawton and J. Prentice Murphy, "A Study of Results of a Child-Placing Society" (paper presented at the National Conference of Charities and Correction, 1915), 164-165.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Elizabeth A. Lee to Katharine F. Lenroot, August 6, 1931

*The adoption investigation described in this letter was prompted by an adoptee's request for help in finding his **birth mother**. The original request, written to the **U.S. Children's Bureau**, is **E. L. Beckwith to Grace Abbott, June 21, 1931**.*

---

RE: Capt. Beckwith

My dear Miss Lenroot:

The first thing I did was to try to verify the adoption of Ernest L. Beckwith. I found recorded in the Probate Court on September 30, 1909 a petition by Fred Beckwith and Annie Beckwith for the adoption of Clarence L. Andrews, born April 5, 1903, child of Frank C. And Blanche E. Andrews, deceased. Also another petition was filed by the Beckwiths for adoption of Edward H. Andrews, born May 19, 1907, a brother. These petitions were both allowed. I then verified the birth of these two boys and found that the mother was Blanche E. Beckwith.

Confidential Exchange showed several agencies interested in the Beckwiths, among them the Red Cross. I telephoned the Red Cross and was told that they had made every effort to establish parentage of Capt. Beckwith, had visited the Charlestown address but were not able to get any information to help. Notwithstanding this report, and armed with the information about the adoption of the two boys, I visited Fred L. Beckwith at 3 Albion Place, Charlestown. I talked with Mr. Beckwith who at first was quite impatient that another person had come to question him concerning Ernest. He says that the two boys referred to in the beginning of my letter were the children of his sister who had died and that Edward is living at the present time in Charlestown. Beckwith gave the following story concerning himself. Said that his first wife was Mary Detterline, born in Philadelphia of German parentage. They were married in 1892 in Camden, New Jersey. He says that in 1903 she came home one day with a baby boy about two months old and said that he was the child of a Mary Towne. She called him Ernest and said she had adopted him. He said he did not join in the adoption and never went into the Probate Court. Says that he remembers seeing some sort of a paper with the name Towne on it. He and his wife

separated soon after and she went to Philadelphia to her people taking this baby with her. He says that she has since died. As near as he can make out this child must now be thirty-four or thirty-five years of age. He insists that he never knew anything more about the child's parentage, that the only way to get any information would possibly be through his wife's relatives as she may have told them something about the child. His second wife was Annie B. Andrews and she has also died.

The name Towne appears in the records of the Probate Court only as follows: Henry William Towne and Ada L. Towne of Calais, Virginia adopted Alldanna McMillian, born February 5, 1895. Search of birth records shows a male child Towne, born June 24, 1898, parents Ernest and Mary McMillan. Father was a soldier. Checking up this birth at the Lying-In Hospital, no further information was learned. The Confidential Exchange furnished a long list of agencies interested in the Towne family.

I thought possibly that the child born June 24, 1898 might be our Capt. Beckwith but looking up the records of the Children's Friend Society I found that on March 12, 1907 this child who was known as Howard and John was in the Gwynn Home with his brother George who was born in 1899. A sister Sadie's record shows that Howard married in haste a girl of twenty-one years at Framingham. I have been trying through the various agencies to locate some of the members of this Towne family thinking that possibly there may have been an illegitimate child who was given away by the mother, but up to the present time I have been unable to do this. . . .

I am very sorry indeed that I have not been able to do anything to help out. . . .

Sincerely yours,

Elizabeth A. Lee

Source: Elizabeth A. Lee to Katharine F. Lenroot, August 6, 1931, United States Children's Bureau Papers, Box 548, Folder 7332, National Archives II.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:

**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact  
Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118



E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Katharine F. Lenroot, "Case Work with Unmarried Parents and Their Children," 1925

*This excerpt illustrates the commitment that many child advocates and policy-makers shared to keeping unmarried **birth mothers** and their babies together in the early decades of the twentieth century, even as it suggests the shame associated with **illegitimacy**. It also illustrates the combination of science, sympathy, and legal regulation that defined "social case work," the approach embraced by the new profession of **social work**.*

Of all problems in domestic relations with which the social worker deals, that of the family unsanctioned by Church or State, unrecognized by the community, is probably the most difficult. Although we speak usually of the "unmarried mother" and the "illegitimate child," nevertheless the situation involves all the elements of a family group—mother, father, and child. Each of these has certain rights, the parents have certain obligations, and the relationship of the members of the group to the community must also be given consideration.

"Every child has the right to be born with honor, and his birth should not be an obstacle to the fullest and highest development of his life and his social activities," is the opening clause of the "Code of the Rights of Children," adopted in November, 1924, by the First International Congress of Social Economy, in session in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and in January, 1925, by the Third Pan-American Scientific Congress, in session in Lima, Peru. Thus "nobody's child" of the English common law and the child who under the Code Napoleon was denied knowledge of his paternity, is, by the unanimous declaration of two international gatherings, declared entitled to the fullest opportunities, regardless of the circumstances of his birth. Humiliation and ostracism, those ancient weapons used by society in defense of the sanctity of the home and the family, are not to be employed against the innocent child.

The students of social relationships will take exception to such a proposition, but how is the ideal to be put into practice? How is the child to be safeguarded from social censure, from the deprivation of paternal love, care and support, and be given those things which are essential to a normal, happy childhood? The answers to these questions can be

developed only by the slow, painstaking processes involved in what we call "social case work," and by the gradual education of the public to a more just attitude toward the problem of illegitimacy.

The girl who becomes a mother out of wedlock is in a pathetically large proportion of cases a child herself. In various studies it has been found that from one-ninth to nearly one-fourth of such mothers are under 18 years of age. Her delinquency, made extremely difficult to conceal because of her maternity, is of the kind punished most drastically by society, and the girl fears not only suffering for herself but shame and humiliation for her loved ones. She is torn between the maternal instinct to love and care for her child, and the instinct of self-preservation which prompts her to conceal her trouble from the community and perhaps even from her own parents. She is usually in need of physical care, of financial assistance, of social adjustment, of vocational guidance, and of help in stabilizing her emotional life and strengthening her spiritual resources. If the girl is of subnormal mentality, she is doubly in need of protection and guidance.

Steady progress is being made in the development of methods of dealing with the unmarried mother and her child, but the problem of the unmarried father has been given comparatively little attention. The father's responsibility toward his child is primarily financial, as the mother's is primarily for physical care. . . .

A baby's first need is for his mother and his chances for life depend to a large extent on the meeting of this need. Infants born out of wedlock have been found by the U.S. Children's Bureau to be subject to a mortality rate almost three times as high as that for infants of legitimate birth. For example, in Baltimore in 1915 it was found that almost one-third of the babies born out of wedlock died before the age of one year. The early separation of mother and child, with the consequent feeding difficulties is perhaps the most important factor in this high mortality. A study of illegitimacy made in Milwaukee covering the year ending September 30, 1917, showed that more than half the children included in the study had been separated from their mothers and that in 45 per cent of these cases the separation had taken place within a month after birth. Studies made in Baltimore following the report of the Maryland State-wide Vice Commission in 1914 revealed the seriousness of the problem of early separation from their mothers of infants born out of wedlock and the high mortality prevailing among babies cared for in institutions apart from their mothers.

Maryland public sentiment was aroused and in 1916 a statute was enacted providing that no child under 6 months may be separated from its mother for placement in a foster home or institution. . . .

The Milwaukee program for keeping mothers and babies together during a three-months nursing period was put into effect in 1919. In the two-year period, 1916 and 1917, the mortality rate in Milwaukee for infants born out of wedlock was 256.8, or 2.5 times the rate for children of legitimate birth. The executive secretary of the Juvenile Protective Association, in describing the results of Milwaukee's program for unmarried mothers and babies after

the program had been two years in operation, comments as follows: "The results of these measures have been gratifying and far-reaching. The child-placing organizations, and the doctors and other individuals who formerly brought many babies a few days old into the city to be placed for adoption, are now required to have permits to board them until they are placed with adoptive parents. Commercial lying-in hospitals and maternity homes, which formerly permitted mothers to leave when their babies were only 10 days or 2 weeks old, without any effort at breast feeding, must now apply for a permit to keep the baby without the mother. This requirement gives an opportunity for a social investigation and for finding a way to keep the mother and baby together, in the city or elsewhere, during the three months' nursing period."

Under the Milwaukee plan, applications for separation or for exception from the three-months breast-feeding rule, are submitted to the Juvenile Protective Association. A study of applications for separation during the first eight months showed that 69 per cent of those who applied for immediate separation were persuaded to keep their babies and nurse them, and only 9 per cent of this group released their children at the end of three months. It has been the experience of the association that the appeal to the unmarried mother to nurse her baby at least for the minimum period of three months as a kind of reparation for having brought him into the world so handicapped is an almost unfailing argument. It has been found also that at the end of this period not only has there been opportunity for a thorough social investigation but the mother has had a chance to recover from her physical and mental strain and is more capable of deciding what she wishes to do for her baby and for her own rehabilitation.

Meeting the physical needs of mother and baby and securing financial support from the father are often less difficult than readjusting the mother to life in the community and providing for the future of the child. Here the most expert skill is required for study of the mother's needs and potential abilities and for wise decision with reference to such questions as marriage, return to the mother's parental home, employment, placement of mother and child, adoption, and for understanding supervision. Opinions differ greatly, even among experienced social workers, with reference to the circumstances under which marriage of the parents should be encouraged, the desirability of keeping mother and child together as a permanent plan extending beyond infancy, the policy with reference to adoptions, the extent to which placement at housework with the baby can be adjusted to the needs of the unmarried mother, and many other phases of the subject.

In Philadelphia in 1921 committees of the Conference on Parenthood worked out standards of case work with illegitimate families which were tentatively adopted in June of the year. Recommendations under the heading "Social Treatment" include the following: . . . .

"7. Adoptions.—The whole question of adoptions in relation to the children

of unmarried parents should receive most careful study. No matter how great the social pressure, no child should be adopted unless the social, medical, and mental findings indicate that this action will best serve the interest of the child, the parents, and the foster parents."

Practically no facts have been compiled concerning the results over a period of years of keeping together the unmarried mother and her child and the methods by which satisfactory adjustments are being made, and we have little or no information showing the extent to which it is possible for the mother to carry the burden of the child's care over an extended period, nor is it known how much the child suffers as he grows older from an unfavorable community attitude toward the situation. The Federal Children's Bureau is now securing case histories from social agencies which will, it is hoped, throw some light on these questions. Successful case work with unmarried parents and their children requires scientific study of individual capacities, such as that being developed by psychiatric clinics. Community resources sufficiently flexible to permit adaptation of treatment to individual needs are essential. Above all, it is necessary that there be a sympathetic and understanding approach to such problems, and infinite patience and tact in making the delicate social adjustments which are involved.

Source: Katharine F. Lenroot, "Case Work with Unmarried Parents and Their Children," 1925, pp. 1-4, 6-7, 9-11, U.S. Children's Bureau Papers, Information File, Box 135, F 7-4-3-0 L543C, National Archives II.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Katharine F. Lenroot to Eleanor Roosevelt on The Cradle, March 4, 1944

The photographs below illustrate that The Cradle prided itself on the quality of its advanced pediatric care. Critics conceded that its medical services were superior, but they insisted that its achievements in preventing and controlling infections obscured glaring deficiencies in The Cradle's social service program, which lacked many [minimum standards](#).



In the milk kitchen, all food was carefully sterilized. The only exception was orange juice.



This picture shows the cubicles in which babies were changed. Each was supplied with individual air-conditioning, one method used to prevent air-borne infections.

*This excerpt illustrates that top policy-makers at the [U.S. Children's Bureau](#), remained sharply critical of the amateurs who founded the [first specialized adoption agencies](#) well into the 1940s. These agencies involved too much commerce and sentiment, Chief Katharine Lenroot charged, and not nearly enough [social work](#). In comparison, she suggested that [child welfare](#) professionals were less enthusiastic about adoption and more likely to advocate family preservation over the separation of children from [birth parents](#). In cases where children had to be placed in new homes, they were also much more rigorous about investigation, supervision, and other [minimum standards](#).*

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

I am sorry not to have replied earlier to Miss Thompson's note of February 19 to Dr. Eliot asking for information with reference to The Cradle Society in Evanston, Illinois. I was away from the office most of last week and found that it had been held for my return.

The Children's Bureau has had no official contact with The Cradle but I have met Mrs. Walrath and Miss Colby of our staff has personally known its program over a long period of time. We have a considerable amount of information about it in the files of the Children's Bureau.

Mrs. Walrath founded the Cradle following her success in finding babies for members of her own family and several of her friends. She has received great personal satisfaction from her activities and has strenuously resisted the practices usually followed by qualified child-placement agencies. Instead she has relied almost entirely on her own individual experience and her personality.

Many people have been able to get children from The Cradle when they were not successful in obtaining children for



This picture shows a barrier unit featuring glass partitions between nurses and infants. Each section had its own air intake and exhaust. Air pressure was kept higher in the infant's section in order to prevent air from the nurse's section from entering when the glass window was raised.



This picture shows the glass barrier between nurse and infant partially raised.

adoption from other agencies. Experience has shown that when good social work has an opportunity to function the number of children eligible for adoption is usually smaller than the number of people desiring to adopt children. This is because there are often relatives or other resources within the family circle that can be developed. The Cradle places adoption on a commercial basis and accepts payment from foster parents who have received a child for adoption from The Cradle. The payments are substantial in amount. Only last week I talked with a professional person in another State who said that he and his wife desired to adopt a child but could not afford the price charged by The Cradle. I was also told last week that a New Jersey family had paid \$1000 for a child. This method of finance has not been considered wise procedure by social agencies. It is, of course, the method of support utilized by commercial adoption agencies. To accept payment from foster parents places the social agencies in an almost impossible position for further evaluation of the home and for supervision during the period preceding the final adoption. Such a period of supervision has been found to be very necessary to make sure that the foster parents and the child are suited to each other. The Cradle, however, does not believe in such supervision nor does it believe in giving the foster family information about the history of a child placed with them. Foster parents are given a sentimental letter for use with the child if he should ask questions about his own people. This letter attempts to explain to the child that his past history should be of no concern to him for he is now a part of his foster family. It is generally agreed that every human being has a right to know on reaching a proper age what his antecedents are and this practice is believed to be a very serious aspect of The Cradle's work.

A study was made of The Cradle by Mr Paul T. Beisser in 1941. He was at that time General Secretary of the Henry Watson Children's Aid Society in Baltimore. His report confirms information the Children's Bureau has concerning the superior medical program maintained by the agency. I understand that not only medical but psychological service is available.

For many years the social agencies of Chicago were greatly concerned about the practices of the agency. Finally, Mrs. Walrath turned to the social work field for help and applied for membership in the Chicago Council of Social Agencies.

One of the requirements for membership was the employment of a social worker. Such a worker was employed but we understand she was not permitted to function in accord with her own training and experience. We are unacquainted with the qualifications of their present social service staff but understand they have two workers neither of which is equipped to carry on a skillful piece of work such as should be available in every child-placing agency.

Recently efforts to enact a more satisfactory adoption law in Illinois were opposed by members of the Board of The Cradle. One of the standards which it is felt are necessary in adoption laws is that the child should reside with the proposed adopted parents for a time before a final adoption decree is issued. Such a trial period has been proved to be a very important method of assuring the permanency and success of an adoption. This, of course, has not been in accordance with the practice of The Cradle. Adoption of Cradle children are often made before the child has lived in the home of the petitioners.

As you will see, the picture is a somewhat mixed one. I am told that a number of Cradle adoption have been eminently successful. However, I believe that on the whole this type of organization should not be encouraged.

Sincerely yours,

Katharine F. Lenroot, Chief

Source: Katharine F. Lenroot to Eleanor Roosevelt on The Cradle, March 4, 1944, U.S. Children's Bureau Papers, Box 169, Folder 7-3-3-4, National Archives II.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)





## Letters from Adults and Children to the U.S. Children's Bureau, 1918-1943

*The U.S. Children's Bureau provided no adoption services. Yet hundreds of adults seeking children to adopt, birth parents in trouble, and children of all ages wrote heartfelt letters to the Bureau in hopes of forming families, finding help, and locating lost relatives. Each inquiry was answered promptly and respectfully, usually with referrals to local or state agencies whose staff and minimum standards were deemed reliable.*

### **W.H. Sullivan to U.S. Children's Bureau, April 27, 1918**

Gentlemen:

As mayor of the city of Bogalusa [Louisiana], am sending circular out to a large number of institutions that thought might be interested in placing some white babies in a progressive growing city. A large number of well to do citizens of the City have requested me to bring a carload of babies to Bogalusa. By a carload, mean about thirty to fifty. . . . There are sixteen thousand people and there are many families who have no children, who would like to have them. . . . The city authorities themselves will see that the children are placed in desirable homes and will look after them. . . .

We do not care to know anything about their antecedents or parentage. All we want to know is that they are healthy. We would be interested in about one half Protestant and one half Catholic children, both boys and girls. . . .

\* \* \*

### **Mrs. L.A. Parkhurst to U.S. Children's Bureau, September 3, 1919**

Dear Sirs:

I am thinking of adopting a little girl as I have only one, seven years old, and want a companion for her but would like information in regard to the chance one takes in bringing a child without blood ties into the home. Granted the home conditions are good is one taking a much greater chance than with their own? I would also like to know what age is best. I think I would like one about three years old? At that age would a child completely forget the past and be like my own?

I have lived in Baltimore long and would like to know how I can locate the most desirable orphans homes. I am not very particular about the child's looks if its health and disposition are of the best. Doesn't the ravages of influenza and the high cost of living make the number of orphans in this country unusually large at the present time?

\* \* \*

**Zilpha Warren to U.S. Children's Bureau, December 19, 1921**

Dear Lady,

I am a little orphan girl age 13, who wishes to be adopted by a woman who is mentally, physically and financially able to rear and educate me.

1. I am robust and healthy
2. I have completed the 8th grade at school and received a diploma.
3. I attend church and Sunday school
4. My mother died when I was less than one yr. old
5. I am both poetic and artistic
6. I am about 5 ft. tall, weight 112 lbs., have gray eyes and brown hair.
7. I never attend parties and dances as I think they are unelevating to the mind.
8. I now reside in the country, altho I was born in Kan. City, Oct. 6, 1908, residing there one yr. only.
9. My mother passed away ere I could remember and I pine, I long, for a God-mother all the while.
10. Here are some of my maxims.

(1) Perfect health, is a steadfast foundation for wealth

(2) If we people on earth are afraid, It is because our own Divine Master we have not obeyed.

(3) Wear a smile, it costs nothing so continue to wear it all the while.

(4) Do the very best that you can do, and the world in return will be proud of you.

(5) Sanitation helps to make a stronger and better nation.

(6) What e'er you do, do it well, for neatness the story will always tell.

If you will refer me to a dear, kind lady who desires a little girl for adoption, I am almost aware that God in Heaven will repay you many

times.

Enclosed I am sending a goose as seen running over one of my father's former snow-covered wheat fields.

Please ans. promptly.

\* \* \*

**Mrs. C.B. Sheppard to U.S. Children's Bureau, July 18, 1927**

Dear sir:

Will you please help me to get my Baby girl; I have Ben trying going on five long years now and I cant make no hidway She will Be 5 five years old 28 of this month. I cape her until she was Six 6 month old. and I was taking sick and they stold the Baby a way. and wondent let me no ho got her. I came down hear from the north two month before my Baby came and was a stranger here in Tarpon Spring [Florida] and I work hard to keepe my Baby with me until was worked down and was taking sick and then it seems as they wanted to run over me and take the Baby.

I said at I nevery will give my Boy up and I wont I nevery have Sined no pappers. and now I have got a nother Baby girl at will be wone year old in nick month and I would like to Bring them Both up together if I can I have talk it over with my husban and he is willin and would Be glad fore me to git the Baby But I want to take him on a Surprise if I can All I every as find out is at the Baby was putt in the hands of Blacks in St. Peterburg fla. But I was told at they was norther foaks. But still you no as mutch a Bout it as I do an I was told at you help monther out and don't charge any thing and if you can and will I shur will Be a happy mother a gain thank you

\* \* \*

**Louis Hooper to U.S. Children's Bureau, April 28, 1931**

My dear Miss Abbott:—

My wife and I want very much to adopt a little girl; we have talked the matter over with most of the child placement agencies in the larger cities from New Haven to Washington and from each we have obtained some points that were of value to us. But the matter is of such tremendous importance to us and to the child whom we hope to adopt that we would like very much the privilege of talking the subject over with you who know so much about children. If you can spare us just a little time we can come to your office any afternoon that may be convenient for you.

I am taking the liberty of enclosing a statement telling about the child that we want and about ourselves.

Mr. and Mrs. Hooper, who recently lost their only daughter, are anxious to adopt a little girl, one who comes from an American Protestant family, who is between five and ten years old, and who is in perfect health. They hope to find a child who possesses, besides these essential requisites, at least

some of the following: New England ancestry: an I.Q. of at least 110; a happy, loveable disposition; some social and cultural background.

Mr. Hooper was born in Worcester, Mass. in 1867; Mrs. Hooper in Toconderoga, N.Y. in 1885; both are of New England stock. They were married in 1913 and have had two children, a daughter born 1917, died 1930; and a son born 1919. They are both in the very best of health and their family physician assures them that they have yet many years to live. If, however, Mr. Hooper should be compelled to give up active work or should die, ample provision has been made so that the family will not come to want.

Mr. Hooper received his A.B. (magna cum laude) and his A. M. from Harvard, being of the fourth generation to have attended that college. He has taught at Harvard and at several preparatory schools; for ten years he was Head Master of the Washington School for Boys; and since 1911, he has had charge of the business affairs of the Columbia Institution for the Deaf. Mr. Hooper's brother, Horace E., was, before his death a few years ago, President of the Encyclopaedia Britannica Company; another brother, Franklin H., is the American Editor of the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

Mrs. Hooper, who is a graduate of the Oswego, (N.Y.) State Normal School was, at the time of her marriage, a supervising teacher in the public schools of Elizabeth, N.J. This year she has been doing part time teaching in Kendall School where she was formerly a full time teacher.

The family occupy a non-housekeeping apartment in one of the college dormitories and they take their family meals at a small faculty table with a few of the other officers and teachers. . . . Mr. and Mrs. Hooper receive in addition to their living a salary of \$3,000.00 a year. . . .

Mr. and Mrs. Hooper are planning to send their son to Harvard and they would expect to send their adopted daughter to a college of equal standing. . . . Mr. and Mrs. Hooper feel that they can offer any child whom they may adopt a very happy home and abundant care and love. . . .

\* \* \*

**Leonard King to Eleanor Roosevelt, U.S. Children's Bureau, March 3, 1943**

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

I deeply appreciate that this letter may or may not reach you but perhaps some one will interpret my motives and assist me in a problem.

My wife and sweetheart underwent some surgery that precludes any more children and she has one of those "motherhood aches" that only a woman could understand. We have a boy age 5 and a girl aged nine and we are most anxious to use our home for some one who could use the care of a father and a moH

Mrs. King has expressed a keen desire to have a girl companion for my

little girl and perhaps you may know of some one who may want a home. We are both fair complexioned and American birth—Protestant faith and would dearly love to either legally adopt or take to our hearts a little girl who could become one of us. If such a thing is possible please write.

Sources: W.H. Sullivan to U.S. Children's Bureau, April 27, 1918, Box 67, Folder 7-3-4-2; Mrs. L.A. Parkhurst to U.S. Children's Bureau, September 3, 1919, Box 67, Folder 7-3-4-3; Zilpha Warren to U.S. Children's Bureau, December 19, 1921, Box 211, Folder 7-3-4-2-1; Mrs. C.B. Sheppard to U.S. Children's Bureau, July 18, 1927, Box 292, Folder 7-3-2; Louis Hooper to U.S. Children's Bureau, April 28, 1931, Box 406, Folder 7-3-3-4; Leonard King to Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, March 3, 1943, Box 169, Folder 7-3-3-4, U.S. Children's Bureau Papers, National Archives II.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Letters from Prospective Adopters to Arnold Gesell, 1939-1950

*Letters written by would-be adopters to [Arnold Gesell](#) illustrate that the claims of [scientific adoption](#)—to decrease uncertainty and increase predictability—were welcomed by well-educated Americans interested in identifying children of normal or superior intelligence. Was it possible to determine, in advance, if any given child would turn out to be college material? This question appeared frequently in Gesell's files and was especially telling before World War II, when higher education was available to only a small minority of the population. While Gesell and other professionals clearly believed that developmental research could (and should) make adoption safer, these letters suggest that some adopters wanted children to live up to exacting specifications and hoped science might deliver on that promise.*

---

**March 29, 1939**

Gentlemen:

. . . We wish to start inquiries with you about adopting a child. We have a daughter who will be five years old this summer; and we have lost two children at birth, one two years ago and one this month.

We are desirous of securing a boy between eighteen months and two years of age with six months leeway either way on this limit. To make a satisfactory little brother for our daughter \_\_\_\_, and to compete with her successfully, the boy should be quite alert mentally and vigorous physically. Since we plan and probably will be able to provide a higher education for our children we should like to have the boy show evidence of a mental capacity which will warrant [sic] such an education. We have understood from our reading on the subject that you are able to judge mental capacity of a child with fair accuracy even at such an early age. We feel that adopting a baby is less hazardous if this is true. . . .

We shall welcome an investigation of our home and circumstances. . . .

Yours, very truly, . . .

\* \* \*

**July 11, 1940**

Gentlemen:

I have just had the pleasure of reading Dr. Arnold Gesell's book entitled "The Guidance of Mental Growth in Infant and Child."

This book was of particular interest to me, especially the chapter entitled "Clinical Guidance in Infant Adoption," as my wife and I are interested in adopting a baby girl. . . .

My wife and I have been married for twelve years and we have a fine, bright little daughter who is now seven years old. We have wanted her to have a brother or sister for some time; but due to two unfortunate operations which my wife had to undergo, we will be unable to have any more children of our own. We can give a child a great many advantages, and she would no doubt have the opportunity of a college education.

Out of fairness to ourselves as well as the child, we desire to avail ourselves of the latest scientific achievements, to insure a happy outcome to the venture and with this in mind, my purpose is to inquire how the Psycho-Clinic can help us. If we obtained a baby, I presume we could bring her to your clinic as soon as possible to permit you to make your first observations, and return at intervals of about 3 months for the remainder of the one year trial period. How long would your studies require each time? Can they be made of a Saturday, permitting the trip to be made over a week end? What is your fee for this service? . . .

Looking forward to your reply with considerable interest, I remain,

Yours very truly, . . .

p.s. It has just occurred to me to add to my letter, that my wife would like to get a baby as young as possible; but I feel after reading Dr. Gesell's book, that we should try to get a baby not younger than three months in order to better judge it's [sic] mentality. I would appreciate your advice on that point.

\* \* \*

**June 29, 1950**

Dear Professor Gesell:

My husband and I, being childless, have applied to adopt a boy. Being middle-aged, the agencies have advised us that only older children would be available to us. To this we agreed.

We have been offered for consideration a boy, aged 9, in good physical health. Mother unknown, probably of Polish extraction, her pregnancy having occurred in her third year in high school. Father completely unknown. Child placed in boarding home for which mother paid for a short time. He has spent most of his life with a German-Catholic family as a boarding child. . . . This family being disrupted, the child was returned to

an orphanage run by nuns in the New York area. The social worker mentioned that the boy was doing averagely well in school, was likeable, and had good manners which he used "because he knew he got things he wanted that way", was liked by other children, but that he would not talk about himself with the social worker, and at the discussion of his problems he would deliberately change the subject. . . .

I have waited many years for the fulfillment of my desire to have a child to care for, and have persisted against the advice of friends who tell me adoption will not be a satisfactory substitute for my own children; that I will find the adjustments too difficult for my admittedly "unsaintly" self; that I am too old and settled, etc., etc. However, when faced with this case history which seemed to me to be so meager, and being asked bluntly, "Are you interested in considering this child for adoption?" I became mentally panicky. Up until now I have had complete confidence in the wisdom of my plans, even though I have worried at times as to my fitness to handle all the problems which might arise. At this point, I feel that I need impersonal advice from a properly trained person who knows what may and may not be expected of children. Will you try to help me?

Have you any suggestions as to how we can fairly judge a child? What traits to look for in his favor, or against him as a subject for adoption? How much weight should be given to first impressions and feelings of liking, disliking, or pity? . . .

I am most anxious that this shall be a happy placement and shall avoid any elements of "martyrdom". I want very much to be unselfish and charitable in planning for the welfare of a child who needs help. Yet, at the same time, I feel it is only wise to try to be sure that I am not being led by sympathy and sentimentality into a situation which is essentially unworkable. . . .

Very sincerely yours. . . .

Sources: letter to Arnold Gesell, March 29, 1939, Box 45, Folder: "Adoption, 1923-43 [cases, with individuals concerning]"; letter to Arnold Gesell, July 11, 1940, Box 45, Folder: "Adoption, 1923-43 [cases, with individuals concerning]"; letter to Arnold Gesell, June 29, 1950, Box 45, Folder: "Adoption"; Arnold Gesell Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, used by permission of Mrs. Joseph W. Walden.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)



Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Louise Wise Services, Different Eligibility Requirements for Different Children, 1961

*In this form letter, Louise Wise Services Executive Director Florence Brown clarified something about adoption that has been as easy to see as it has been uncomfortable to admit: supply and demand shape the "market" for children and parents alike. Her agency, like most others, had different requirements for Jewish couples wishing to adopt healthy infants, for those willing to consider older children with *special needs*, and for "Negro" families interested in *African-American children*. Brown's mention of native children in need of adoption was a reference to the *Indian Adoption Project*.*

Dear

We have your inquiry expressing your interest in adoption. We appreciate how much this means to you and hope we may be able to help you.

Since the number of young Jewish children in need of adoptive homes is so small compared to the number of couples applying, it has been necessary for us to set up certain eligibility requirements for adoptive applicants. Infants, as well as the occasional pre-school age child, are placed only with childless Jewish couples where the wife is under thirty-five and the husband over forty years of age, who live in any of the five boroughs of New York, Westchester, Nassau and Suffolk Counties, and in a small area of New Jersey close to Manhattan. . . . Since it is required that couples be married at least three years and that they be citizens of the United States, we suggest that those who do not presently meet these requirements should write us again when they have been fulfilled.

If you do meet the requirements outlined above, we will appreciate your filling out and returning the enclosed form. You will hear from us as soon as we are able to invite you to a group meeting. This is the first step in our application procedures. . . .

Exceptions to our eligibility requirements are made for families applying for children of school age (6 to 14); for those who may be ready to consider a child with a physical disability; and for families interested in children of interracial background. Included in the latter are a group of American Indian children who have been referred to us through a special program of the Child Welfare League of America and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

In addition to helping Jewish families interested in adoption, the Louise Wise Services also places children for adoption with Negro families. Here, again, the eligibility requirements with respect to age, childlessness, residence, as well as the procedures outlined above, do not apply and we are able to offer immediate appointments.

We do hope that we can be of help to you.

Sincerely yours,

(Mrs.) Florence G. Brown  
Executive Director

Source: Louise Wise Services, form letter explaining eligibility requirements, June 30, 1961, Viola Bernard Papers, Box 116, Folder 5, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 7-11-2007  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Louise Wise Services, "Our Indian Program," 1960

*A pioneer in offering adoption to mixed-race children and children of color, Louise Wise Services placed a large number of children through the [Indian Adoption Project](#). This excerpt describes the agency's early role in that effort and suggests that [matching](#) played a somewhat different role in adoptions of native children during this period than for other children marked by visible differences.*

Miss Jenkins discussed our Indian Program as a whole, giving the background of the project which was created a little over a year ago by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Child Welfare League of America. There are very few services offered to Indian unmarried mothers who may want to give up their babies for adoption. The mother has very little communication with the Indian Bureau workers who are not geared to the unmarried mothers' needs and the mother has had to be dependent on state resources which have provided a limited number of homes for Indian children, and who would more likely place the child in a foster home than in an adoption home. The possibility of finding good Indian adoption homes has not been fully explored and not enough has been done in placing Indian children with non-Indian families. We are not sure how much prejudice has had a part in this and more interpretation is needed. It is hoped that some of these things may be resolved in this project. The project is for a period of three years and it is hoped that adoptive homes can be secured for 50 children and that the project will stimulate additional placements by the local agencies.

To date our agency has placed six Indian children and at present we have one child in care. The first two children referred to use were half Indian and they were placed with Jewish families, who had one child from us. The third, a little full Indian boy, was placed with an Indian family and it turned out to be very suitable as both the child and the adoptive father were from the same reservation in Arizona. The next two children, twins 2-1/2 years old, were placed with a Protestant family. The fourth child placed (with a Jewish family) was Peter, 2 years old.

Peter, a full Indian child, was born September 1957, came here October 1959, and was placed for adoption in December 1959. The ratio of Indian

blood is determined because as a member of the tribe Peter shares in the money the tribe accumulates, and Peter had money of his own. Peter's parents were on the verge of divorce and he was always the center of controversy between his parents. They had married very young and have three children; they were not able to take on the responsibility of a family with the result that the children were shifted from relative to relative. Peter had been in a foster home when his mother took him back and shortly thereafter his parents surrendered him.

Peter was placed in a boarding home on an Indian reservation in Montana. The plan was for Miss Jenkins to visit him and to help him get to know her, and in short, to make him comfortable enough with her so that she could take him back to New York. The Bureau of Indian Affairs worker was very helpful to Miss Jenkins, and worked with the Indian boarding mother in order to get her assistance in helping Peter to relate to Miss Jenkins. The help the boarding mother gave was outstanding and much careful thought was given in planning for the big change in Peter's life.

Peter managed beautifully on the 9 hour plane trip to New York, even though he was very frightened when the plane took off. He adjusted well in our boarding home where Miss Jenkins visited him every other day so that she could continue her relationship with him thus serving as the connecting link between his past and his future.

The family selected for Peter had originally attended one of the group meetings for applicants interested in older children; they were over-age for our regular group of young children. The leader of the group had been favorably impressed by them and felt they might also be interested in an Indian child. When this was explored they were most enthusiastic and wanted Peter immediately. The adoptive father grew up in Canada and knows quite a bit about Indians. Peter was placed with them and they are already speaking of adopting another Indian child. The placement is working out very well and Peter is beginning to acquire a sense of permanency.

The Committee found the presentation fascinating and enjoyed it very much.

Source: Minutes of the Child Adoption Committee, January 12, 1960, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 161, Folder 11, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



[Timeline](#)

[People & Organizations](#)

[Adoption Studies/  
Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in  
Adoption History](#)

[Further  
Reading](#)

[Document  
Archives](#)

[Site  
Index](#)

## [Louise Wise Services, Placement Contract, early 1960s](#)

## Louise Wise Services

\_\_\_\_\_ (date)

In consideration of having \_\_\_\_\_ born on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ a child in the custody of LOUISE WISE SERVICES, placed in our home and entrusted to our care with a view to adoption, we, the undersigned, represent and agree as follows:

1. We will care for the child with love and affection and will provide for the physical, mental, moral and religious development of the child.

2. Although we are taking the child into our care with a view to making the relationship permanent through legal adoption, we clearly understand that,

(a) Until legal adoption LOUISE WISE SERVICES continues to have legal custody and control of the child and we will not, under any circumstances, place the child in the care of any other person without the prior formal written consent of LOUISE WISE SERVICES.

(b) LOUISE WISE SERVICES has the right to remove the child at any time prior to legal adoption if, in the judgment of LOUISE WISE SERVICES, the welfare of the child would be served by such removal.

(c) We have the right to return the child to LOUISE WISE SERVICES prior to legal adoption if, for any reason, we decide that we should not, or that we cannot keep the child.

(d) We will not institute adoption proceedings without the prior consent of LOUISE WISE SERVICES, it being understood that LOUISE WISE SERVICES may withhold consent unless and until it is satisfied that the adoption will be in the best interests of the child.

(e) All legal papers must be approved in advance by LOUISE WISE SERVICES and copies of all legal papers filed with the court must be furnished to LOUISE WISE SERVICES, including a certified copy of the order of adoption.

(f) During the period prior to adoption we will welcome the representative of LOUISE WISE SERVICES to our home, will keep her informed of any change or contemplated changes in our situation, and will consult with her on any questions which may arise during this period.

3. We recognize and agree that we assume full responsibility for all the costs of providing appropriate care for the child, and should LOUISE WISE SERVICES consent to the adoption of the child, for the legal expenses of the adoption proceeding.

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Wife's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Husband's Name

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 7-11-2007  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## [Louise Wise Services, Press Release Announcing Recruitment of White Parents for Black Children, 1963](#)

Knowledge and experience in the adoption field have proved that a child need not be "matched" to look like adoptive parents in order to achieve a happy family for either the child or parents. In our changing world there are many families who can accept and love a child who looks different than themselves. The Louise Wise Services believes that race is not necessarily the sole criterion for placement. More important is the suitability of the prospective parents and their ability to care for and love the child as their own. The search for white families is to supplement and not supplant the agency's recruitment of Negro adoptive families, who are wanted more than ever. . . .

Negro-white adoptions obviously are not the answer to the problem of homeless Negro children in all parts of the country. But Louise Wise Services believes that a city like New York, with its varied cultures and cosmopolitan neighborhoods, ought to be able to welcome interracial families. The agency has found a warm response to its boarding families that have provided pre-adoptive care to children without regard to race.

The Louise Wise Services is fully aware of the questions raised by Negro-white adoptions. Not the least of these questions is: Is it fair to the Negro child to be placed in a white home? The answer must certainly be that there may be problems arising out of such a placement. But the agency is also questioning whether it is fair to keep a Negro child out of a white home if the alternative is for him to have no home at all.

Such adoptions have been carried out successfully in a number of communities in the United States and Canada. Minnesota has had an outstanding program. White adoptive parents there reported that they had anticipated far more problems than had actually arisen. They found great support from neighbors, friends and relatives. They found that family life was more interesting and fuller than ever before. A number of families have applied for second Negro youngsters. It must be noted that most of the Negro-white adoptions reported on are fairly new. None of the children have reached adulthood yet. But the adoptive parents involved do not

seem to worry about the future unduly. . . .

Source: Louise Wise Services, Press Release, November 12, 1963, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 162, Folder 7, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman


[Timeline](#)
[People & Organizations](#)
[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)
[Topics in Adoption History](#)
[Further Reading](#)
[Document Archives](#)
[Site Index](#)

## Louise Wise Services, Sealed Records in Adoption, 1975

*It is possible to see in these meeting minutes how one group of agency professionals responded to the [search and reunion](#) movement among adoptees in the mid-1970s, a moment of pivotal transition in the debate about [confidentiality and sealed records](#). Adult adoptees who demanded that agencies help them identify and locate their [birth parents](#) challenged standards of practice that most professionals had not only enforced, but championed as necessary to the protection of [child welfare](#). As of January 1, 1977, Louise Wise Services, located in New York, reversed its earlier policy. The agency began offering adoptees information and facilitating reunions whenever adoptive parents and birth parents consented.*

This is a most controversial subject. There is a group of adoptees who feel they have a right to find their biological parents. The number of articles would make it appear that a very large group are seeking the right to have their records opened to them. Mrs. Kreech said that the number is actually quite small when related to the large number of adopted people in the United States. People who are hunting their biological parents have a great need and we cannot minimize what this means to them. Some of our staff have been in conflict about this, and feel that people who are determined to search will do so with or without the help of agencies. Might it be better for agencies to have a role in this? On the other hand, staff is aware that any change in our procedures would necessitate changes in the law and could stir up a tremendous amount of anxiety and hurt for people who did not have this interest. We have to keep in mind the very large number who would be affected—biological parents and adoptive parents, as well as the adoptees. . . .

In conformity with the law, our agency in talking with grown adopted children who turn to us in their quest for information about their origins, makes clear that we cannot give them identifying information. Some of these people are satisfied and go no further; others feel strongly that they have a right to specific and identifying information.

In the past four or five years, a good deal of publicity has been generated by an organization of adopted people called ALMA or Adoptees Liberty Movement Association. Their goal is to change the laws in all the states

that seal adoption records since they believe that they have a right to know who they are, including the right to meet their original parents. (Arizona, Alabama, Connecticut and Kansas do not seal records.) ALMA's ability to secure publicity is surprising in the light of its size. Our information is that it has around 1,800 members of whom about one-third are mothers who surrendered children.

In the light of this controversy we were interested in reading two papers published by The Association of British Adoption Agencies reporting on the experience in Scotland and Finland. In these countries adopted people can obtain information about their original families from official records. . . .

In the [Scottish] group studied those who wanted to meet their original parents were those whose relationship with their adoptive parents had been disappointing and unsatisfying. Their hope was to develop a relationship, especially with the original mother, that would make up for what they had missed. Many in the group learned of their adoption in adolescence or later and resented having facts about their original family, and about why they were adopted, withheld by their adoptive parents.

The report from Finland has a different quality in that follow-up with adoptive families and parents who surrender is handled by the agency which is now responsible for arranging almost 50% of the adoptions in the country. Very few mothers return for information or meeting with their children. It has been found that when they do, it is at a time of crisis, and often they can be helped to recognize that the request in relation to the child is inappropriate or irrelevant to their problem. Similarly requests from adopted children are fully discussed and often withdrawn. Meetings between mother and child can be arranged if the child is 20 or older and if both child and mother wish it. The paper stresses with great sensitivity the need for the caseworker to prepare both very carefully if the meeting is to be at all meaningful. In the agency's experience permanent ties are seldom established.

Mrs. Asch stated that she read many articles and studies regarding a number of adopted adolescents and young adults who have been struggling with identity problems and a need to find out more about their geneological background. Some adults as well are requesting information and are in the process of searching out clues and facts that might lead to a meeting with their birth parents. . . .

Florence Fisher in her book, "The Search for Anna Fisher," her TV and radio appearances and in her interviews with the press, has attracted the most attention. She is now on a promotional tour on behalf of ALMA and her book and to tell people that "secrecy is evil."

A research project on Sealed Records has been completed in California by Arthur Sorosky, M.D., Annette Baran, M.S.W., and Reuben Pannor, M.S.W. They have lectured, authored many of the articles in professional journals and have written extensively in lay periodicals. Their findings are that adoption agencies must begin to reevaluate their position in regard to the

sealed record. In addition they feel that open access to information would create a more wholesome environment for parent and child. These and other findings are being prepared by them for a book to be published in late 1975. The list of current articles show that most of them are written by one of the members of this team. This would or could lead people to believe that this whole topic is more wide spread than it is in reality. . . .

The literature that Mrs. Asch reviewed, with the exception of very few articles, want the law to be changed and they want the child care agencies to review their thinking about Sealed Records. . . .

Mrs. Asch feels that if one of the original purposes of the Sealed Record was to protect the child from an illegitimate status, then the lack of stigma attached in today's society accounts for much of the current change in the attitude of some people. However, it is important to consider the Pandora's Box that could be opened by unsealing the records. This could have adverse effects on millions of lives of adoptees, adoptive parents and the natural parents. . . .

Mrs. Miller said that she had seen most of the people who came back to the agency in the past 10 years. In 1973 Mrs. Miller saw 30 people who returned asking about themselves. The youngest was 15 and the oldest 60 years of age. In 1974 there were 45 such people. LWS has placed over 7,000 children in the history of the agency; therefore 75 people in a two-year period is a very small number. Mrs. Miller does not have figures on the number of unmarried mothers returning for information about their children but she believes this was even a considerably smaller number. There is a common theme in many of these requests. . . . Many of them [their problems] are not related to being adopted; many will accept Mrs. Miller's suggestion for referral for help outside of the agency. In spite of the agency's efforts to help adoptive parents to discuss adoption with their children, some of these young people were not told they were adopted; they found an Adoption Order and became curious about the secrecy maintained in the family. What these young people seem to be looking for is not their identity. There is enormous relief when they are told that their natural parents could not do for them what they wanted to and that they were not just abandoned. There is great yearning to know who they look like. The stigma of being born out of wedlock is gone for most of these young people. They are helped to realize that some young people are not prepared to be parents. . . .

After the presentation Judge Polier asked Dr. Bernard for her comments. Dr. Bernard said that she feels we should have an open mind and not be rigid in our position. . . .

Source: Louise Wise Services, Board Minutes, March 5, 1975, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 155, Folder 5, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Charlotte Lowe, "Intelligence and Social Background of the Unmarried Mother," 1927

*The mentality of unmarried mothers and their children was considered a significant social problem, as well as a particular risk in adoption, during the first several decades of the twentieth century. Influenced by **eugenics**, many Americans suspected that unmarried mothers were either morally delinquent or mentally deficient. They endorsed policies, such as institutionalization and sterilization, designed to control reproductive behavior. Mental testers and developmentalists were among those who believed that science offered solutions to social problems. They probed the intelligence, age, occupation, education, family background, and even the leisure activities of unmarried mothers. Such studies were often linked to **nature-nurture research** as well as to the urgent question of **illegitimacy**. As this excerpt by a Minnesota state psychologist suggests, professionals worried about the public costs of female-headed families and about their ominous reproductive potential long before they agreed that adoption might be a positive option for either unmarried mothers or their children.*

---

The Research Bureau of the State Board of Control of Minnesota last year conducted a psychological study of a group of unmarried mothers. . . .

Eighty-two of the unmarried mothers, or 23.84 per cent, had I.Q.'s under 75—that is, would be classified as feeble-minded. This percentage is 4.6 times as large as the corresponding percentage among the school children, of whom only 5.18 per cent had I.Q.'s under 75. The percentage of borderline cases (I.Q.'s 75-84) is 2.09 times as large among the unmarried mothers as among the school children—24.42 per cent as compared with 11.65 per cent. On the other hand, the percentage of dull cases (I.Q.'s 85-94) is only 0.8 times as large among the unmarried mothers as in the school children; the average (I.Q.'s 95-104) 0.5 times as large; the bright (I.Q.'s 105-114) 0.3 times as large; and the very bright (I.Q.'s 115-124) 0.6 times as large. The percentage of superior cases (I.Q.'s over 125) is 1.25 times as large among the unmarried mothers, but the group is so small that this figure is probably not significant. . . .

AGE

The median age of the entire group was twenty years, and the age having the greatest number of cases was eighteen. Seventeen and seven-tenths per cent were less than eighteen years old, and 55.2 per cent were less than twenty-one years. Relating this to the intelligence, we find that the younger they are, the brighter they are, as shown in the following summary:

From 15 to 19 years average I.Q. is 92.0

From 20 to 24 years average I.Q. is 90.5

From 25 to 29 years average I.Q. is 85.2

From 30 to 34 years average I.Q. is 74.0

35 and over average I.Q. is 63.6

Interpreting these figures, we made the deduction that many of the brighter girls are delinquent because of the impulsiveness or emotional instability of youth, and need only the sobering effect of years to solve their problems. If this is so, does it not seem that the ideal social work would be to get in touch with these girls before they became delinquent? The facts seem to show also that so far as learning from age is concerned, the feebleminded remain forever young and therefore in constant need of supervision and protection. . . .

*The burden to the state.*—In 1924 there were 1,065 illegitimate births reported in Minnesota. About 50 per cent of all illegitimate children reported are supported by the state for at least four years. According to these facts, there are about 500 of these children added each year. This makes a constant number of about 2,000 who are being supported continually by the state. Computing from the five-dollar-a-week-board basis, which is a very rough computation, the state is paying half a million dollars every year for the support of these illegitimate children. And this does not tell half the tale. In the first place, a great many births are not reported to the state, but later these children become dependents. Secondly, a large number of those who are dependent the first four years of their lives are not adoptive and remain charges all their lives in one institution or another. It seems that it would be more economical for the state, first, to support more club houses and neighborhood houses where girls would be housed better, entertained better, and supervised better; second, to employ more social workers and visiting teaching; and third, to spend more money for the detection and care of the feebleminded.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

First, that every unmarried mother be given a mental test as the first step in the effort to understand her as an individual.

Second, that the ones found to be feebleminded be prevented, if possible, either by segregation, close supervision, or sterilization, from having any more children.

Third, that more ways and means be provided for reaching young girls before they have become delinquent.

Fourth, that the county superintendents, the social workers, and the churches of the small towns and country districts watch our for their girls leaving school to see what they do and where they go.

Fifth, that the churches, social workers, and teachers do not overlook the girls who are living at home, as they are just as apt to become delinquent as the girls who have left home.

Source: Charlotte Lowe, "Intelligence and Social Background of the Unmarried Mother," *Mental Hygiene* 11 (October 1927):783, 785-787, 793-794.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Arnold Lyslo, "Impressions on Meeting the Harry Holt Plane," 1958



The Holt family pictured during their first breakfast together in Oregon after the adoption of eight Korean children in 1955. The Holts' missionary zeal for rescuing Korean orphans through **international adoption** contrasted with the caution of child welfare leaders, who wanted to insure that more adoptions of all kinds would be arranged by trained professionals through licensed agencies.

A FEW IMPRESSIONS ON MEETING THE HARRY HOLT PLANE, THE "FLYING TIGER," WHICH ARRIVED IN PORTLAND, OREGON, DECEMBER 27, 1958, CARRYING 107 KOREAN CHILDREN WHO WERE ADOPTED THROUGH THE HOLT PROXY ADOPTION PROGRAM BY FAMILIES IN THE UNITED STATES.

While in Portland during the Christmas holidays I had an opportunity to see a few of the 107 Korean children who came to the United States through the Harry Holt Korean Proxy Adoption Program, and the process whereby the adoptive parents picked up their children at the Portland International Airport.

The age range of the children was from the infant child (2-3 months old) to 10 years. Of the 107, there were 50 infant children under one year. A few children were of Negro-Korean extraction, and they were adopted into Negro families. These were beautiful children! I have heard said that the combination of Negro-Korean is an especially attractive combination, and the children proved this. The Negro adoptive couples were thrilled with the children they received. The children tended to be of quite dark coloring.

Although I did not see the children come off the plane because I was a few minutes late, I did see the boxes that the infant children arrived in. These were white, heavy cardboard boxes, approximately three feet long and perhaps two feet wide. There were small round holes in the ends of each box, I understand, to enable the boxes to be stacked one above the other.

At the time I arrived the children were in the Immigration Headquarters having their physical examinations by the Public Health Doctors, and volunteer workers (I believe) were bathing and feeding the children. This room was not

open to the adoptive parents or "outsiders." One could only hear the many children crying.

Many of the children had colds and coughs, but I did not feel that their general physical condition looked too bad. The children were as a rule thin, but they did not look sickly. I understand that thirteen of the 107 children were ill and needed hospitalization.

There must have been about 200 people to meet this plane, including native Koreans who came in their native dress to see these children arrive. This number did not include the adoptive parents, but may have been members of the extended family. In some cases only one parent came to get the child because of the distance involved. I saw adoptive couples from Tennessee, Texas, Arizona, Colorado, Michigan, and the far western states. I asked one couple from Colorado the process they had gone through to receive their child, and they replied that their minister (Lutheran) had recommended them, and they submitted a financial statement including employment status. They did not mention anything else.

The adoptive parents were all huddled in one large room waiting for their name to be called by Mr. Holt's secretary indicating that their child was ready for release. The adoptive parents had in their possession papers from Mr. Holt notifying them of their child's arrival, plus a picture of the child they were to adopt. Some of the adoptive parents said they could recognize "their" child coming off the plane by the picture.

As a group, I would say that the adoptive couples looked like a lower to middle-class group. The Negro adoptive parents were the most strikingly dressed and groomed of the group. The preponderance of women without makeup, and extremely plain dress—almost drab, was startling. This might indicate that these particular families were of a strict religious sect. I felt that while the enthusiasm of the adoptive parents was generally high, that some of the people showed little affect, and had a "color-less" expression. This lack of affect even extended to a few of the adoptive mothers after they received their child. (I felt ill!) . . .

I could not help but feel that a few of the adoptive couples were disappointed in their child. The expression on some of their faces were revealing that perhaps this was not the child that they had dreamed of, and they were still bewildered at the appearance of the child and his inability

to make immediate response as they wished.

I came away from this experience ill and almost as bewildered as some of the adoptive parents themselves—that this could happen to children and parents in the United States today! My worries for these children have never ceased, and one can only hope and pray that they are doing as well as circumstances have allowed with such inadequate planning. I could only think how different this could have been with the participation of good social agencies who could work with these families to evaluate for their own good and the welfare of the child, their capacity to adopt a Korean child. How different the futures of these children might be with more adequate protective devices through proper legislation and the cooperation of all people interested in the lives of children, whether they be American, Korean, or any other children in such circumstances.

Source: Arnold Lyslo, "A Few Impressions on Meeting the Harry Holt Plane, the "Flying Tiger," Which Arrived in Portland, Oregon, December 27, 1958," pp. 1-2, 4-5, International Social Service, American Branch Papers, Box 10, Folder: "Children—Independent Adoption Schemes, Holt, Harry, vol. II 1958-1959," Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Arnold Lyslo, "Suggested Criteria to Evaluate Families to Adopt American Indian Children Through the Indian Adoption Project," 1962

The following criteria are designed to assist agencies in submitting adoptive studies of families interested in adopting Indian children through the Indian Adoption Project. These criteria were developed out of experience and through consultation with agencies who have participated in the Indian Adoption Project. It is hoped that these criteria will standardize the referrals of adoptive families, thereby including those essentials which will enable agencies to evaluate the capacity of a family to adopt an Indian child. This should not be thought of as a restrictive instrument, but rather a guideline to what we believe an adoptive study for an Indian child should contain. . . .

### H. Motivation of Family to Adopt (a) Any Child (b) an Indian Child:

1. When did the couple first think of adoption?
2. Are the parents equally motivated?
3. What experience has the couple had in caring for children?
4. Do the adoptive parents want the child for their own sake or that of the child? What do they say they expect of a child and how do they visualize their family?
5. When and how did the family come to the decision to adopt an Indian child?
6. What has been their experience with Indians?
7. Is the adoption of an Indian child considered second best?
8. Would the family adopt a child of a minority group other than Indian?

### Criteria

#### I. Attitudes of Adoptive Parents Towards Illegitimacy and the Natural Parents:

1. Describe attitudes of adoptive parents concerning the adoption of an illegitimate child. Are there any different feelings about an illegitimate Indian child or an illegitimate child of another minority race?
2. What are the feelings of the adoptive parents concerning natural parents who give up their child for adoption? Would these be different for Indian

parents or parents of other minority races?

3. How does the adoptive couple intend to tell a child about his adoption and his own heritage? Will they allow and help an Indian child to feel proud of his Indian heritage?

J. Readiness of Couple to Adopt:

1. Has the couple satisfactorily worked through their own feelings regarding childlessness to be able to make a positive transfer to an adopted child with his inevitable differences?

2. Could the couple assume the same risks with an adopted child that they would if they were having a child of their own? What are their goals for an adopted child?

3. Could they be flexible in relation to children referred including age, sex, physical and mental handicaps, and any other conditions in the child's background? Are they only interested in adopting an Indian child?

4. What are the color tolerances of the family in considering the adoption of an Indian child?

5. Does the family have any strong preferences for or prejudices against any particular Indian tribe? (If there is strong preference for a child from a particular tribe, the League attempts to find a child of this tribe. However, this cannot always be done.)

K. Attitudes of Adoptive Parents Toward the Rights of a Child Because He Is an Indian.\*

1. Could the adoptive parents accept tribal enrollment of an Indian child if this were the wish of the natural parent(s) or tribe? (A natural parent may, in some instances, preclude tribal enrollment of a child unless tribal regulations determine otherwise.)

2. Would the adoptive parents accept monies coming to an Indian child either through tribal enrollment, payment of a claim against the Federal Government, or from other sources? (These monies would be set aside through guardianship or other trust facilities according to state law where the child is being adopted until the child reaches majority.)

L. Since ours is a pilot project to evaluate the placement of Indian children with Caucasian families, would the adoptive parents agree to participate in the research aspect of the Project if selected to do so? The adoption of an Indian child is not contingent upon the adoptive couple's willingness to participate in this research. However, we like them to make this contribution to our study if it is geographically feasible for the League researcher to interview them.

M. Couple's Request

1. Age range and sex preferred

2. General statement as to color, health and any other significant factors relating to the couple's request in adopting an Indian child.

N. Worker's Evaluation of the Family and Recommendations.

ARNOLD LYSLO, DIRECTOR  
INDIAN ADOPTION PROJECT  
12/62

\*Indian children have certain rights which are theirs by birthright. That is, they have rights of tribal enrollment if they meet the requirements for enrollment set up by the tribe. As tribal members they have the right to share in all the assets of the tribe which are distributed on a per capita basis. The actual as well as anticipated benefits of an Indian child adopted through our Project are furnished by the Secretary of Interior. The Secretary of Interior, through the superintendent of the Indian agency where the child is enrolled, has the right to approve or disapprove of any plan made for the distribution of funds belonging to an Indian child.

Source: Arnold Lyslo, "Suggested Criteria to Evaluate Families to Adopt American Indian Children Through the Indian Adoption Project," December 1962, pp. 1, 3-5, Child Welfare League of American Papers, Box 17, Folder 3, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:

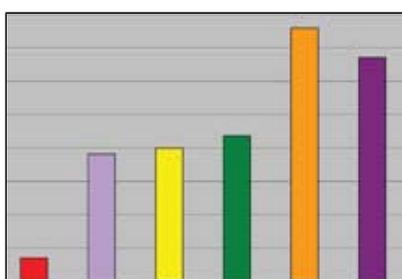


**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Penelope L. Maza, "Adoption Trends: 1944-1975"



For over 30 years the Federal Government collected and published information on adoption in the United States. Because the information is located in over 20 documents and very few copies of these documents are accessible to the general public, this research note compiles selected information from these documents.

Information on adoptions in the United States from 1944 through 1975 was collected and published by the Children's Bureau and the National Center for Social Statistics. The reporting system which provided the data base for these reports involved the voluntary cooperation of the States and territories utilizing court records. A high of 52 States and territories participated in the reporting system in 1961, 1962 and 1964. A low of 22 States participated in the reporting system in 1944. (See Table 1.)

The estimated total number of adoptions ranged from a low of 50,000 in 1944 to a high of 175,000 in 1970. (See Table 1.) The proportion of adoptions by related individuals steadily increased during this period until they constituted over 60% of all adoptions by 1975. (See Table 2.) This increase in the portion of adoptions by relatives continues a trend noted by Zarefsky when examining data from six States from 1934 and 1944. These data indicated the percentage of adoptions by related individuals had increased in the six States studied from 17% in 1934 to 41% in 1944.

The proportional increase in adoptions by related petitioners between 1944 and 1970 appears to be more a function of the decline in the estimated number of adoptions by unrelated petitioners than a function of an increase in the estimated number of adoptions by related petitioners. The number of adoptions by unrelated petitioners declined from a high of 89,200 in 1970 to 47,700 in 1975, while the number of adoptions by related petitioners remained between 81,000 and 89,000 during this period. (See Table 2.)

Between 1951 and 1975 the percentage of adoptive placements not made under agency auspices (i.e. independent adoptions) declined substantially from 53% of all adoptions in 1951 to 23% of all adoptions in 1975. The lowest percentage was in 1971 and 1972 when independent adoptions constituted only 21% of all reported adoptions.

This decline corresponded with the period when professional groups such as the Child Welfare League of America and maternity home groups highlighted some of the difficulties with independent adoptions. In addition, during the early 1950's Senator Kefauver conducted hearings which explored black market adoptions. The activities of professional groups and the Kefauver Hearings stimulated professionals in public and private agencies to reach out to provide a variety of services to birth parents and prospective adoptive parents. States responded to these activities by clarifying

regulations as to who may place a child for adoption. Consequently, between 1951 and 1975 the percentage of adoptive placements by public agencies more than doubled from 18% in 1951 to 39% in 1975, while the percentage of adoptions by private agencies increased from 29% in 1951 to 38% in 1975. The highest percentage for private agencies was 45% in 1970.

It is interesting to note that this period of decline in the percentage of independent adoptions coincided with the increase in the percentage of adoptions by related petitioners. Since almost all adoptions by related petitioners are handled independently, it is likely that by the 1970's a substantial proportion of the remaining independence adoptions were by related petitioners.

Current data collection activities related to adoption focus on children primarily being placed from public foster care systems. The data collection is conducted under the auspices of the American Public Welfare Association through the Voluntary Cooperative Information System. The data collection is now in its second year of operation. The recent Child Welfare Indicator Survey developed estimates concerning children in adoptive placement. According to that survey approximately 50,000 in the public foster care system were free for adoption in December, 1982. Of those children approximately 17,000 were in adoptive placements and the remaining 33,000 were still waiting for an adoptive home. There are no on-going data collection activities focused on children who are solely the responsibility of the private agencies or placed independently.

**Table I: National Estimates: Total Number of Adoptoins—1944 to 1975**

| Year | Number of States Reporting | Reported Total | Estimated Total |
|------|----------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1944 | 22                         | 16,000         | 50,000          |
| 1951 | 33                         | 36,732         | 72,000*         |
| 1955 | 39                         | 54,589         | 93,000          |
| 1957 | 46                         | 71,934         | 91,000          |
| 1958 | 47                         | 76,095         | 96,000          |
| 1959 | 47                         | 82,537         | 102,000         |
| 1960 | 50                         | 95,682         | 107,000         |
| 1961 | 52                         | 108,733        | 114,000         |
| 1962 | 52                         | 117,662        | 121,000         |
| 1963 | 50                         | 122,944        | 127,000         |
| 1964 | 52                         | 133,106        | 135,000         |
| 1965 | 51                         | 139,222        | 142,000         |
| 1966 | 51                         | 148,995        | 152,000         |

|      |    |         |          |
|------|----|---------|----------|
| 1967 | 51 | 154,166 | 158,000  |
| 1968 | 48 | 155,734 | 166,000  |
| 1969 | 49 | 161,295 | 171,000  |
| 1970 | 49 | 163,231 | 175,000  |
| 1971 | 50 | 159,844 | 169,000  |
| 1972 | 37 | 99,552  | 153,000* |
| 1973 | 41 | 112,849 | 148,000* |
| 1974 | 41 | 107,874 | 138,000* |
| 1975 | 40 | 104,188 | 129,000* |

\* Indicates estimates developed by the author. All other estimates were developed at the time the data were published.

**Table 2: National Estimates: Relationship of the Petitioner to the Adopted Child—1944 to 1975**

| Year | Estimated Total | Unrelated Petitioners | Related Petitioners | Percentage Unrelated Petitioners | Percentage Related Petitioners |
|------|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1934 | NA              | NA                    | NA                  | 83%**                            | 17%**                          |
| 1944 | 50,000          | NA                    | NA                  | 59%**                            | 41%**                          |
| 1951 | 72,000*         | 33,800*               | 38,200*             | 47%                              | 53%                            |
| 1955 | 93,000          | 48,400*               | 44,600*             | 52%                              | 48%                            |
| 1957 | 91,000          | 48,200                | 42,800              | 53%                              | 47%                            |
| 1958 | 96,000          | 50,900                | 45,100              | 50%                              | 50%                            |
| 1959 | 102,000         | 54,100                | 47,900              | 53%                              | 47%                            |
| 1960 | 107,000         | 57,800                | 49,200              | 54%                              | 46%                            |
| 1961 | 114,000         | 61,600                | 52,400              | 54%                              | 46%                            |
| 1962 | 121,000         | 62,900                | 58,100              | 52%                              | 48%                            |
| 1963 | 127,000         | 67,300                | 59,700              | 53%                              | 47%                            |
| 1964 | 135,000         | 71,600                | 63,400              | 53%                              | 47%                            |
| 1965 | 142,000         | 76,700                | 65,300              | 54%                              | 46%                            |
| 1966 | 152,000         | 80,600                | 71,400              | 53%                              | 47%                            |

|      |          |         |         |     |     |
|------|----------|---------|---------|-----|-----|
| 1967 | 158,000  | 83,700  | 74,300  | 53% | 47% |
| 1968 | 166,000  | 86,300  | 79,700  | 52% | 48% |
| 1969 | 171,000  | 88,900  | 82,100  | 52% | 48% |
| 1970 | 175,000  | 89,200  | 85,800  | 51% | 49% |
| 1971 | 169,000  | 82,800  | 86,200  | 49% | 50% |
| 1972 | 153,000* | 67,300* | 85,700* | 44% | 56% |
| 1973 | 148,000* | 59,200* | 88,800* | 40% | 60% |
| 1974 | 138,000* | 49,700* | 88,300* | 36% | 64% |
| 1975 | 129,000* | 47,700* | 81,300* | 37% | 63% |

\* Indicates estimates developed by the author. All other estimates were developed at the time the data were published.

\*\* Based on information from six States. No National estimates are available.

NA means data are not available.

Source: Penelope L. Maza, "Adoption Trends: 1944-1975," Child Welfare Research Notes #9 (U.S. Children's Bureau, August 1984), pp. 1-4, Child Welfare League of America Papers, Box 65, Folder: "Adoption—Research—Reprints of Articles," Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Muriel McCrea, "The Mix-Match Controversy," 1967

*In this conference presentation, a representative of the Montreal-based Open Door Society described the revolution in thinking about **matching** that accompanied the era of **special needs adoptions**. The emphasis on resemblance and similarity was supplanted by an appreciation for children's needs and adults' abilities to meet them. This transformed adoption from a selective operation that included promises of predictability and practices such as **home studies** to a much more inclusive and educational process that required everyone involved to tolerate uncertainty as well as difference. For more information on the research and theory of H. David Kirk, which is mentioned by McCrea, see the description of his classic 1964 book, **Shared Fate**.*

As all of you know here, we were on a matching binge for years and years. The pediatricians assured us that it would be a better adoption for the child and the family if we simulated the normal family in every way. If we had a family who wanted a baby and we got them a baby as young as possible, then this was the best chance there was for a successful adoption. Now research being done at the moment shows that the rate of success in these adoptions is actually not any higher than ones done in any other way.

We came to the point where we began to ask ourselves: what does create success in adoption? We have asked and studied, questioned and compared and we haven't reached very many conclusions, but I think that what we discovered in Montreal in working with the mixed race adoption program is a basic philosophy for social work which has since been substantiated by Dr. H. David Kirk in Shared Fate. He says adoption is not exactly the same as having a biological family. The success, happiness and security for a child and a family exists in knowing this, accepting it, and not being unsettled by it. In other words, from the newborn baby up to the oldest child, from the perfect match of blue eyes with blue eyes through to the complete mix-match, adoption is still different from giving birth. The most successful adoption is the one in which agency and family are very aware that there will be differences to be faced. They may not know all the answers to dealing with the differences; social workers haven't got all the answers because we were the happy-ever-after school that placed the

baby and then let the adoptive family find out how to work it out. So we haven't answers, but we know the families that pull through are the ones that live comfortably with difference.

When you talk about mix-match, I don't think it makes any difference what you're mix-matching. It's whether you have a child who needs a home and a family who can accept the difference that goes with him—the fact that he is adopted—that he may be a different color—that he suffers from a handicap they had never expected to work with. Whatever the difference, you find parents who can work with a difference and then the only thing you match is their potential with a child's need.

We made a chart one time of what bothered adopting parents. Do you know it's much harder to place cross-eyes than it is epilepsy? The proportion of people that will balk at the cross-eyed child is much higher than that of ones who will balk at epilepsy. It's just one of these things that is difficult to understand. We had theories that if people have dealt with a disability or had it in their family and have seen it that it wasn't an overwhelming problem, they are better able to cope with it. But this isn't true either. Sometimes you'll have a high proportion of people who've had a disability in the family and they say, "Well, I saw what a lot of trouble it was; I don't want that, but I'll take something else I don't know anything about. I'd rather be surprised."

So you write off having a pattern that you're sure you can put into your office manual, for instance, the formula that someone will come in and ask for an epileptic because he knows what it means to be an epileptic. As soon as you get it in your manual, he won't take the epileptic; he'll take the asthmatic and do beautifully with him. What you're measuring is not difference in the sense that some differences are good and some are bad. You're trying to find a universal parent—a person with the potential to accept the fact that this child isn't going to enter the home the same way as a natural-born child would have done; a person who's motivated to involve the child, include him, accept him, absorb him totally and completely as if he had come as a natural child; a person who requires no support of background, of appearance, of intellectual potential, no guarantees. This is not applicable just to mix-match. This is a basic sound philosophy of all adoption. . . .

Audience: If you don't match physically or intellectually, how do you decide what child will go to what family?

McCrea: We gave up matching (simulating is probably a better word to use)—we match need to potential. There's no problem at all. When your family comes in, you start this educative approach and say: "We have these kinds of children coming through our agency and this is the kind of thing they require." As you talk to the families, the ones that really want guarantees drop out. . . .

When you meet the parents you tell them what you know about the child and they talk to you about what they could work with and what they

couldn't. In the end what you match is what the child needs and what they can do for him. It isn't just drawing a name and picking a card. It's giving up the matching (the simulating) of externals and instead matching need to potential, which is what you do in any personnel office, isn't it, when someone comes into you for work?

Source: Muriel McCrea, "The Mix-Match Controversy," in *Frontiers in Adoption: Finding Homes for the "Hard to Place,"* A Report on a Conference and Its Impact, October 1967, 61-62, 65.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Lewis Meriam to Hastings Hart, July 28, 1915

*The view that **illegitimacy** was a significant threat to the health and welfare of newborns was pervasive among Progressive reformers, who believed that the answer to this problem rested with research and state action. They recommended birth registration procedures and more accurate **statistical data**. This letter from Lewis Meriam, Assistant Chief of the **U.S. Children's Bureau**, was directed to Hastings Hart of the Russell Sage Foundation, a well known figure in the world of **child welfare** during the early twentieth century. Meriam's opinion that birth certificates should record parents' marital status, but that legitimacy status should be kept confidential, "except where it is essential," anticipated record-keeping practices that **sealed original birth certificates** and substituted new ones after adoptions were finalized. What they had in common was appreciation for the stigma that **illegitimate** and adopted children faced and advocacy of government policies that would simultaneously increase knowledge about these children and protect them from harm.*

---

My dear Dr. Hart,

. . . . The registration records should, I believe, indicate the fact that the parents of the child are not married. Birth registration has two principal values: it notifies the authorities of the birth of a child, enabling them to bring to bear, in those cases where it seems necessary, such community forces as are at their disposal for promoting the welfare of the infant, and it furnishes the basis for the infant mortality rate which is a barometer indicating social and economic conditions.

The fact that the baby is born to an unmarried mother is, in itself, an indication that the baby is subject to a risk of death far greater than that to which a baby born to a married mother is subject. The record of illegitimacy is a red flag to the infant welfare worker, indicating peculiar need for such assistance as the community is in a position to give. In time, too, it may be possible to develop a system whereby the registration of an illegitimate birth may be made the act that puts in motion suitable legal machinery to enforce the responsibility of both mother and father so that there may be as little difference as possible between the economic and social position of the legitimate and the illegitimate offsprings of the same

general classes.

Statistics of illegitimacy by city districts and by rural districts may be made of great service in disclosing areas of peculiarly bad social conditions. The figures contrasting the alley districts and the street districts of Washington are striking. If it can be demonstrated that a large percentage of the illegitimacy of a community is contributed by a comparatively small number of districts, the practical remedies for the conditions in these areas can be found by intensive studies. For practical social engineering, then, the figures regarding illegitimacy would have great value.

I believe it is practicable to secure the registration of illegitimate births, though it is no doubt difficult. If the proper authorities prosecute all physicians, midwives, and other attendants who fail to register births, and utilize all the means that they have for detecting such failures, practically all births would be registered,—illegitimate as well as legitimate. . . .

The certificates of birth can well be the same for legitimate and illegitimate children with an arrangement whereby legitimate or illegitimate may be checked as the case may be. What data should be recorded regarding the putative father of an illegitimate child is one that has roused a good deal of discussion and has not yet brought any general agreement. . . .

Provision should, I think, be made whereby the fact of legitimacy or illegitimacy shall not be disclosed except where it is essential. Copies of the original certificate for use in connection with school attendance or child labor laws should not disclose the record regarding legitimacy. . . .

Very sincerely yours,

Lewis Meriam

Source: Lewis Meriam to Hastings Hart, July 28, 1915, U.S. Children's Bureau Papers, Box 60, Folder 7351, National Archives II.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)





## Maud Morlock, "Determination and Establishment of Paternity," 1940

*This paper, written by a [U.S. Children's Bureau](#) official, suggests that the World War II era was a crucial turning point in thinking about unmarried fathers. Many [social workers](#) who had previously concentrated on getting men to admit paternity and pay child support began to realize that fathers were people too. Men's reactions to unplanned parenthood, Maud Morlock pointed out, were shaped just as much by community attitudes and personal circumstances as women's. That made unmarried fatherhood a social problem equal to unmarried motherhood in the creation of [illegitimacy](#), although fathers had few legal rights in decisions related to adoption until the 1972 U.S. Supreme Court decision, [Stanley v. Illinois](#).*

Within recent years social agencies have recognized the importance of case-work procedures in dealing with the fathers of children born out of wedlock. Considerable interest has been expressed in this subject, particularly as to agency and community problems and practices. In order to obtain more complete information as to practices in different places, questionnaires requesting such information were sent to the 30 committees in different cities that are cooperating with the U.S. Children's Bureau in the development of programs for unmarried mothers and their children. . . .

Reports from the individual agencies showed that they had served 5,745 unmarried mothers during 1939. . . .

These agencies reported that paternity was established by court action in 1,115 cases (20 percent) and that paternity was determined by formal or informal agreement in 1,353 cases (24 percent). It is interesting to note that in 1,519 cases (27 percent), the father was not interviewed, although his identity was known; and in 941 cases his identity was not known to the agency. The reasons given for not interviewing the father and the lack of action to determine or establish paternity included: (1) failure or inability to get in touch with the alleged fathers, some of whom had left the city; (2) refusal of the mother to give information or to take action; (3) denial of paternity by the putative father following an interview, with no further action taken; (4) lack of evidence to support the mother's claim as to the man's responsibility; (5) the preference of the girl's family to make its own

plans; and (6) the promiscuity of the mother.

These figures as to the extent to which paternity is established compare favorably with previously available data on the subject, which indicate that in urban areas paternity is established through court procedure in 10 to 25 percent of the cases of children born out of wedlock. For example, state-wide statistics on all children born to unmarried mothers in Minnesota during a 12-year period (1918-1930) show that paternity was established by court adjudication in 20 percent of the cases; and by written acknowledgment or admission in 10 percent. In addition to these, 16 percent of the mothers married the father subsequent to the birth of the children. The total number of cases in which paternity was established through court order, or was voluntarily acknowledged through admission or marriage, constituted less than one half (46 percent) of the entire group. This figure may be higher than it would be in most States, since Minnesota has for many years, through its department of public welfare, offered assistance to unmarried mothers to an unusual extent. . . .

We have no composite picture of the father of the child born out of wedlock. In general, we think of him as young, perhaps a few years older than the mother, frequently from the low income group, and in recent years, frequently unemployed. He may or may not have responsibility for contributing to the support of others. In all probability he will within the next few years want to marry and will find that payment for the support of this child will be a distinct hinderance to the success of his marriage and a hinderance to the welfare of his legitimate children. He may or may not have been approached by an irate father of the girl. In all probability the majority of men involved did not anticipate or welcome parenthood and it is therefore a natural first reaction for a man to deny the existence of the child, at least as his child, and to try to escape from any responsibility for its maintenance.

It is not strange that under these complicated circumstances social workers and others are still bewildered by this subject. We have oversimplified the problem in all probability into fathers who showed some sense of responsibility for the situation as contrasted with fathers who were totally indifferent. One of the most difficult problems with which we are now faced, and one for which we still have no answer has arisen partly over our concern for the father as a person rather than just as a means of support. While the law gives him no legal rights in most States in regard to decisions for the child, what are his moral rights if he is interested in the child's future, and what have we as social workers done to him if we have aroused this interest and are not prepared to help the mother and the father to face and act wisely on their complicated relationships to the child throughout the future years? What is our answer to him if the mother wishes to give the child in adoption, and if he or his family wishes to assume responsibility for the child? What if the mother in her bitterness opposes such a decision and still insists upon adoption?

We would probably be more nearly in agreement on some of the other

fundamental problems.

1. The father in the majority of instances is not, at least in the beginning, a willing client of a social agency. He has not as a rule made the initial approach to the social agency asking its services. Rather, the agency has approached him on a subject that is too frequently unpleasant and one he would like to forget—certainly not a subject on which many men, as a first reaction, would choose to keep alive for 16 years. If, however, the situation is handled skillfully, and if he still has some respect and affection for the mother and a sense of responsibility for the child he may desire interviews. He may wish to discuss his own problems or he may show a willingness to assist in planning for the total situation.

2. Social work with the father is so complicated that where possible only case workers with the best skill and emotional maturity should be used, case workers who are aware and in control of their own attitudes as they relate to this problem.

3. While maintenance of the child is important our experience with this problem to date indicates that the amount contributed by the father is far from sufficient for the child's support, and that maintenance of the child can be approached constructively only when there is an awareness of emotional and social problems.

4. The relationship of the mother to the father may still be deeply important to her, regardless of what she fails to put into words. Social workers can do irreparable damage to the mother when they rush ahead in the first interview to obtain facts that to most people are sacred between two individuals involved.

5. We need to remember that the father is a human being and that the birth of a child out of wedlock—much as it may be regretted by society—is not a crime but only one manifestation of behavior to be approached by the social worker with objectivity and understanding.

Source: Maud Morlock, "Determination and Establishment of Paternity" (paper presented at the Committee on Unmarried Parenthood of the National Conference of Social Work, Grand Rapids, Michigan, May 29-30, 1940), 1-3, 17-19.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Site designed by:



**Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, "The Adoption Home Study Process," 2004

*Eligibility for adoption steadily expanded during the twentieth century. Children and adults considered ineligible for adoption in 1910, 1930, or 1950—because they were “feeble-minded,” older, single, racially ambiguous, homosexual, or abnormal in some other way—have been incorporated into the circle of family life, at least in theory. Considering the revolutionary changes heralded by the era of special needs adoptions, it is all the more striking that the basic rationale and elements of adoption home studies have remained constant over time. Interested readers might compare this twenty-first-century statement with home investigation outlines and reports from earlier eras.*

---

The laws of every State and the District of Columbia require all prospective adoptive parents (no matter how they intend to adopt) to participate in a home study. This process has three purposes: to educate and prepare the adoptive family for adoption, to gather information about the prospective parents that will help a social worker match the family with a child whose needs they can meet, and to evaluate the fitness of the adoptive family.

The home study process can be a source of anxiety for some prospective parents, who may fear they will not be “approved.” It may be helpful to remember agencies are not looking for perfect parents. Rather, they are looking for real parents to parent real children. With accurate information about the process, prospective parents can face the home study experience with confidence and the excitement that should accompany the prospect of welcoming a child into the family.

Specific home study requirements and processes vary greatly from agency to agency, State to State, and (in the case of intercountry adoption) by the child’s country of origin. This fact sheet discusses the common elements of the home study process and addresses some concerns prospective adoptive parents may have about the process. . . .

### **Elements of the Home Study Process**

There is no set format that adoption agencies use to conduct home studies. Many agencies include the following steps in their home study process,

although the specific details and order will vary. For more information, talk with the agencies you are considering.

### **Training**

Many agencies require trainings for prospective adoptive parents prior to or during the home study process. These trainings help prospective parents better understand the needs of children waiting for families and help families decide what type of child or children they could parent most effectively.

### **Interviews**

You will probably be interviewed several times by the social worker. These interviews help you develop a relationship with your social worker that will enable him or her to better understand your family and assist you with an appropriate placement. You will discuss the topics addressed in the home study report (see below). You will likely be asked to explain how you handle stress and past experiences of crisis or loss. In the case of couples, some agency workers conduct all of the interviews jointly, with both prospective parents together. Others will conduct both joint and individual interviews. If families have adult children living outside the home, they also may be interviewed during this process.

### **Home Visit**

Home visits primarily serve to ensure your home meets State licensing standards (e.g., working smoke alarms, safe storage of firearms, safe water, adequate space for each child, etc.). Some States require an inspection from the local health and fire departments in addition to the visit by the social worker. The agency will generally require the worker to see all areas of the house or apartment, including where the children will sleep, the basement, and the back yard. He or she will be looking for how you plan to accommodate a new family member (or members, if you are planning to adopt a sibling group). Social workers are not typically inspecting your housekeeping standards. A certain level of order is necessary, but some family clutter is expected. Some agencies would worry that people living in a "picture perfect" home would have a difficult time adjusting to the clutter a child brings to a household.

### **Health Statements**

Most agencies require prospective adoptive parents to have some form of physical exam. Some agencies have specific requirements; for example, agencies that only place infants with infertile couples may require a physician to confirm the infertility. Other agencies just want to know the prospective parents are essentially healthy, have a normal life expectancy, and are physically and mentally able to handle the care of a child. . . .

A serious health problem that affects life expectancy may prevent approval. If your family has sought counseling or treatment for a mental health condition in the past, you may be asked to provide reports from

those visits. Many agencies view seeking help as a sign of strength; the fact that your family obtained such help should not, in and of itself, preclude you from adopting. However, each family's situation is unique, so check with the agencies or social workers you are considering if you have concerns.

### **Income Statements**

You do not have to be rich to adopt; you just have to show you can manage your finances responsibly and adequately. . . . Many agencies also ask about savings, insurance policies (including health coverage for the adopted child), and other investments and debts.

### **Background Checks**

Most States require criminal and child abuse record clearances for all adoptive and foster parent applicants. . . .

Agencies are looking not just at your past experiences, but at what you've learned from them and how you would use that knowledge in parenting a child. Some agencies in some States may be able to work with your family, depending on the charge and its resolution. If the social worker feels you are being deceptive or dishonest, however, or if the documents collected during the home study process expose inconsistencies, the social worker may have difficulty trusting you.

### **Autobiographical Statement**

Many adoption agencies ask prospective adoptive parents to write an autobiographical statement. This is, essentially, the story of your life. This statement helps the social worker better understand your family and assists him or her in writing the home study report (see below). If you are working with an agency that practices openness in adoption, you also may be asked to write a letter or create an album or scrapbook about your family to be shared with expectant birth parents to help them choose a family for their child. . . .

### **References**

The agency will probably ask you for the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of three or four individuals to serve as references for you. References help the social worker form a more complete picture of your family and support network.

If possible, references should be individuals who have known you for several years, who have observed you in many situations, and who have visited your home and know of your interest in and involvement with children. Most agencies require that references be people unrelated to you. Good choices might include close friends, an employer, a former teacher, a co-worker, a neighbor, or your pastor, rabbi, or leader of your faith community. . . .

### **The Home Study Report**

Typically, the above steps culminate in the writing of a home study report that reflects the social worker's findings. Home study reports often are used to "introduce" your family to other agencies or adoption exchanges (services that list children waiting for families) to assist in matching your family with a waiting child.

In general, home study reports include the above-mentioned health and income statements, background checks, and references, as well as the following types of information:

Family background. . . .

Education/employment. . . .

Relationships. . . .

Daily life. . . .

Parenting. . . .

Neighborhood. . . .

Religion. . . .

Feelings about/readiness for adoption. . . .

Approval/recommendation. . . .

### **Conclusion**

Although the adoption home study process may seem invasive or lengthy, it is conducted to help you decide whether adoption is right for your family, prepare your family for adoption, and help your family determine which type of child you could best parent. The process also serves to ensure children are placed in loving, caring, healthy, and safe environments.

Flexibility and a sense of humor are vital characteristics when raising children, and they can be useful during the home study process as well. With perseverance and a positive outlook, you will be able to team with the social worker to make this a valuable learning experience—one that will help you do the best possible job in parenting the child who will eventually join your family.

Source: National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, "The Adoption Home Study Process," 2004, available online at [http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_homstu.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_homstu.cfm)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Single Parent Adoption: What You Need to Know

### Introduction

In 1970, if you had gone to an adoption agency as a single person and applied for a child, you would have, unfortunately, been turned down—it just wasn't done. In fact, in some States, there were laws against single parent adoption. Now, thousands of children in the United States and other countries are living with single men and women who have chosen to become parents and who have been given the opportunity to provide a loving permanent home for a child. In the last 20 years there has been a steady, sizable increase in the number of single parent adoptions—some people feel that it is the fastest growing trend in the adoption field. Approximately 25 percent of the adoptions of children with special needs are by single men and women,<sup>1</sup> and it is estimated that about 5 percent of all other adoptions are by single people. The outlook for single parent adoption is encouraging as it becomes more widely accepted.

In this factsheet, we will look at the reasons for the growing acceptance of single parent adoption and discuss some of the questions that you, as a prospective adoptive parent may ask as you begin the adoption process. We will explore, too, some of the issues facing a single adoptive parent, and learn about the available resources to guide you in this exciting new venture.

### Why Does a Single Person Adopt?

Why would a successful, independent single man or woman want to give up his or her freedom and assume the responsibilities of raising a child?

The desire to nurture and to share life as a family is a strong universal need that is felt by a large number of people and one that is not exclusive to married people or couples. Often a single person finds life incomplete, as one single woman expressed, "I had a stable job and could give a child many benefits. And I had love that needed to be given and a need to be needed. I wanted some purpose to my life other than my work and my cat." Because many women have pursued careers and put off marriage and having children until they are older, they find that they have reached their thirties, without a husband, but with a compelling desire for a child. Adoption becomes a viable option for single women who feel that having a child out-of-wedlock is unacceptable or who find that they are infertile.

Some men and women feel that they can provide a better life for the children living in institutions or foster care or in countries that cannot provide them with the basic necessities. One teacher said, "Because I continually saw children in my special education classes who lived in institutions or went from foster home to foster home, I decided that even as a single parent I could do more for a child."<sup>2</sup>

Loneliness may be another factor in deciding to become a single adoptive parent. As Dorothy Dooley, adoption director at the New York Foundling Hospital, said, "Loneliness cannot be your only motivation for adoption but it certainly could be part of it. The need to



## Why Is Single Parent Adoption Becoming More Prevalent?

share is a complex human response. If you care enough about children to want to share your life with one of them, that's a healthy need."<sup>3</sup>

A number of factors have encouraged the acceptance of single parent families. Perhaps most is the growing number of one-parent households due to divorce and to unmarried women having and keeping their children. A recent *New York Times* article reported that more than half of the Nation's 9.8 million African-American children under 18 years of age, nearly one-third of the 7 million Hispanic children, and one-fifth of the Nation's 51.1 million Caucasian children live with a single parent.<sup>4</sup> While women are the primary caregivers for most of these children, there are also one million single fathers in this country.<sup>5</sup> With so many children living in this type of home environment, adoption agencies have been more willing to consider unmarried men and women as prospective adopters.

Most of these single parents work full-time and are financially responsible for their families. While shouldering the economic burden, they continue to maintain the home and care for the children.

The issue of personal finances has become less important with the availability of adoption subsidies in almost every State for children with special needs. This has encouraged those with limited incomes who are otherwise capable and willing to adopt to pursue adoption.

The adoption picture has also changed. The number of healthy Caucasian infants available for adoption has decreased dramatically due to birth control, legalized abortion, and the decision of unwed mothers to keep their babies. Therefore, agencies have a shortage of babies to offer couples who are interested in adoption. Most of the children who are available for adoption are older or have disabilities. As the adoption agencies struggle to find homes for these children, single parent applicants have become more widely accepted.

Another factor is that single adoptive parents have proven to be very successful in encouraging their own acceptance. The latest research indicates that children raised in single adoptive parent families compare favorably with other adopted children and show a healthy involvement with friends and family as well as in the activities of their age group. It has been shown that it is the instability of broken homes, rather than the absence of a parent, that causes difficulty for a child.<sup>6</sup> In 1985, an 8- year longitudinal study of 22 single adoptive parents reported that the child care provided by the parents had been consistent and of high quality. The researchers stated that, "The single parents of this study lead busy lives and seem to manage the demands of jobs, home, and parenting with a sure touch."<sup>7</sup> The parents interviewed, who were both African-American and Caucasian, had adopted young children, most of whom were under the age of 3. The authors questioned whether a single parent placement would be as appropriate for an older child who has had difficult experiences, since more older children are available today.

These researchers concluded that "single parent homes may be particularly suited for children who need intense and close relationships and thus particularly appropriate for many of the older children in foster care who are now being prepared for permanent homes. For some children, such a close bond may meet a need and be a path to normal development."<sup>8</sup>

## What Are the Obstacles?

Despite the greater acceptance of single parent adoption, the traditional view of parenting, that a child needs a mother and a father for healthy growth and development, still exists. Mental health experts say that the "ideal" is to place a child in a two-parent home with a mother and father who are compatible and loving. However, there are many children for whom this "ideal" is not possible and many single people who feel that such bias is unfair.

Your family and friends may be your first hurdle. They may not understand why anyone would assume the responsibility for raising a child alone. They may ask if you have lost your senses. It may or may not be possible for you to convince them that you know what you are doing.

Agencies have varying policies in dealing with single applicants. Some don't accept them at all. Others may put your application and request for a home study (a family assessment) on the back burner while waiting to find a couple who wants to adopt. The children offered to you may have disabilities that you cannot handle or be 12-years-old when you requested a toddler. If you pursue independent adoption (a path to adoption with no agency involvement) birth mothers may balk when they learn you are single.

Single men face even tougher scrutiny as they are asked intimate questions about their sexuality, motives, friends, and living arrangements. They may be qualified to parent and still be turned down.

Going it alone is not easy. Adoptive parents and agencies, in preparing prospective adoptive parents, stress the importance of having friends and family who can lend support and serve as a back-up system. All the responsibilities will land squarely on your shoulders, such as caring for a sick child, picking the child up at his or her friend's house, choosing the right school, and speaking to school counselors. Having a strong network that you can rely on will ease some of this responsibility and provide relief from the constant role of parent.

It will also help if you can demonstrate to a potential adoption agency that you have thought through some of the long-term implications of being a single adoptive parent. For example, if you have evaluated your financial situation thoroughly before going to an agency, and can present a realistic picture of how you plan to provide for a child over the years, they will see how serious and stable you are. Also, expect questions about how you will handle your social life once you become a parent, and be ready to discuss your feelings about this in an open, straightforward manner. You are not expected to give up your adult relationships when you adopt. In fact it would be unhealthy for you to do so. However, you will need to strike a new balance in your life as you juggle the new role of parent with your other roles. It would be good for you to show that you have thought about these issues in a mature and sensitive manner.

As you approach agencies and other adoption resources, you have to believe in yourself. The process may not be a smooth one and you may have some doors closed to you. But as one successful adopter put it, "You have to believe that there is a child somewhere in the world waiting for you." Your determination and assertiveness can make your dream come true.

## Who Has Adopted?

All kinds of people choose to adopt—there is no one "acceptable" type. There are women and men who are highly educated with well-respected jobs, high school graduates with blue-collar jobs, people with grown children, and others who want to care for a child with special needs. They are all capable people who have a lot of love to share. Many are in the "helping" professions— psychologists, teachers, nurses—and want to improve the lives of children.

In spite of the many obstacles often put in their way, single men do adopt. In fact, 1 out of every 10 members of a national support organization, the Committee for Single Adoptive Parents, is a male. Traditionally, there has been a strong bias against male applicants by adoption agency personnel. They might think that, "a single man could not be sensitive to a child's needs;" or, "a boy needs a mother;" or, "I wonder what kind of man wants to raise a child alone."<sup>9</sup> These beliefs are diminishing as the number of men who are successfully caring for children grows. The rising number of divorced men with joint custody, coupled with the inroads made by feminists who expect men to take a larger role in childrearing, has led to an increase in the number of men who feel comfortable and are competent in raising their children. Adoption agencies have found that single fathers can be the best placement for boys who need strong role models and guidance in an accepting, loving environment. The men who have persevered and overcome the prejudice are outspoken advocates for adoption. Taurean Blacque, an actor and single father of nine, felt that "I had to give something back . . . to share something."<sup>10</sup>

## What Are the First Steps?

Lois Gilman, in her thorough and informative book entitled *The Adoption Resource Book*, suggests that as a prospective adopter, you should begin by exploring resources that will help you build your family and that will provide information and support in the coming years. Her advice is (1) make contact with adoptive families and parent groups, (2) obtain general information from social service agencies and learn any details about specific adoption programs, and (3) read.<sup>11</sup>

Single parents are almost unanimous in extolling parent groups as a rich resource. These groups can provide information about which agency to go to, which social worker to ask for, and exactly how to proceed. As the process gets underway, parent group members can provide support and encouragement as well as stories of first-hand experiences that can prove invaluable. A list of parent support groups in your area and other single parents to talk to is available by writing to the Committee For Single Adoptive Parents, P.O. Box 15084, Chevy Chase, MD 20825. The Committee serves as a clearinghouse for singles seeking information. The modest membership fee entitles you to a listing of agencies and other contacts, with updates, as well as recommended readings and information about recent adoptions (including country of origin and age of child).

Meeting or corresponding with other single parent adoptive families will help you learn more about adoption first-hand and guide you in focusing on the type of child you might consider adopting. For instance, if you think you want to adopt a foreign child, try to spend time with a family who has gone through an intercountry adoption and learn as much as you can about their experience.

To learn more about the adoption situation in your State, you will want to contact the State's Department of Public Welfare or Social Services and local public and private adoption agencies. Their addresses can be obtained from your local phone book or by

## How Do You Find the Child You Want?

contacting the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse. The Clearinghouse can provide listings by State of agencies and can answer specific questions about the types of children who are available. You may choose to find a child through a private or intercountry adoption, but as Lois Gilman points out, "touching base initially with local agencies gives you a better grasp of adoption in the United States and in your State today."<sup>12</sup>

Books on adoption in general and single parent adoption in particular may be available in your local library or book store. The bibliography included with this fact sheet may help you in gaining an understanding of some of the relevant issues. Books on child care and development are also relevant as you consider raising a child, especially books with sections on single parenting. The National Adoption Information Clearinghouse is a valuable resource that provides information free of charge and can recommend more books and articles on these topics.

Perhaps the most important concept to keep in mind in searching for a child is determination. Whether you work with a public agency, pursue an independent adoption or look to another country for a child, you must be your own best advocate and stay focused on your goal of becoming a parent. This perseverance will serve you well as you enter the adoption arena.

You may have a good idea of the type of child you are interested in adopting. Or you may still be open to considering a variety of children.

If you are willing to consider an older child, a disabled child, or a sibling group, you should approach a public or private agency. Many are responsible for children who are living in foster care or institutions, and who are waiting for permanent homes. Applicants must meet certain requirements, but depending on the agency, there is some flexibility in the selection process. Agencies are eager to place children with special needs. In general, an applicant needs to be at least 25 years old and need not own his or her own home or have a large income (subsidies are available for many of these children). Stability, maturity, and flexibility are characteristics that are highly valued by agencies. In assessing single applicants, social workers are particularly concerned with your plans for child care, the kind of support network (friends and family) that can serve as your back-up, and your ability to provide male or female role models.

A growing number of public agencies acknowledge that a single adoptive parent may, in fact, be the "placement of choice" for some children. Kathryn S. Donley, former Executive Director of New York Spaulding for Children sees single adoptive parents as having special capabilities that can be especially helpful to children who have had traumatic histories. They can provide (1) a high caliber of parenting potential (the screening process for singles is so exhaustive that only the most persistent survive), (2) a simplified environment where the number of complex relationships is reduced to a minimum, and (3) focused nurturing. Since the single parent has fewer distractions, he or she can perhaps spend a fair amount of time analyzing and responding to a child's needs and building a relationship.<sup>13</sup>

Many of the children available through public and private agencies are from minority cultures. Most agencies are hesitant to place a child of one race with a parent of another race, and try, whenever possible, to find a parent of the same ethnic, religious, and racial

background. Some private agencies have religious affiliations and work primarily with adopters of that religion.

If you have your heart set on finding an infant or if you find that a public or private agency is not responsive to your needs or eager to work with you, there are other adoption resources available.

A number of foreign countries will consider single adoptive parents and have a wider range of children from whom to choose. At this time, Brazil, El Salvador, Honduras, Peru, and Bolivia are among the countries who accept single applicants and have infants and young children available for adoption. The volatile nature of the governments in these countries makes it difficult to know, with certainty, what the adoption policy will be over a long period of time. Most require that an adopter be at least 25 years old.

Pursuing an intercountry adoption is expensive and can be complicated, time-consuming and fraught with uncertainties. It also may be your best chance of adopting a young, healthy child. To help you determine whether you are truly interested in pursuing this type of adoption, an experienced intercountry adoption agency, Holt International Children's Services, has devised a series of questions and comments for prospective adoptive parents to consider. They deal with issues of race (since most of the children are of Asian, Indian or African heritage) and of your motivation for adoption. A copy is included at the end of this paper.

If you are considering foreign adoption, try to find people who have adopted children from abroad and meet their children. Attend parent group meetings where children accompany their parents and look at photographs of children from other countries. A child from Chile looks different from an Indian child or a child from El Salvador. See if this type of adoption "feels right" for you.

Betsy Burch, Director of Single Parents Adopting Children Everywhere (SPACE), a Massachusetts support group, thinks that singles should consider adopting siblings. "If you want more than one child, and you want both children from the same country, you may want to adopt them at the same time," she says.<sup>14</sup> In doing this, you will not have to deal with the very changeable international adoption scene, where a country may accept single adopters one year and close their doors the next year. It may also speed the process, since, countries are eager to keep families intact and will let you adopt, for instance, an infant with his 3-year-old brother. The Committee for Single Adoptive Parents can provide a listing of adoption agencies that will work with you to locate a foreign child or children.

Another way to adopt a baby is through an independent or private adoption. It is important to find out if it is legal in your State and then find an attorney or physician willing to work with you. Like other adoption sources, singles compete with couples for available children. In this situation, it is often the birth mother who makes the final selection. There are pros and cons to pursuing an independent adoption. Those who are against this method of finding a child feel that the screening process for adoptive parents is not rigorous enough and that birth parents don't receive adequate professional counseling before deciding to make an adoption plan for their child. In some cases, this lack of preparation may lead to an uninformed decision and a contested adoption later on. If for some reason the placement doesn't work, there is no licensed agency to accept responsibility for the child. The child would then become a charge of the State agency.

## What Are the Costs?

Those who have adopted independently cite the lack of bureaucracy and restrictive selection by an agency as a positive aspect, especially if you are single, older than 40, divorced, or physically handicapped. Many welcome the chance to speak to and possibly meet the birth mother and to have some knowledge of her educational or socioeconomic background. Like foreign adoption, the costs are high and you may need to travel to pick up the child.

Fees at adoption agencies vary. Some agencies charge no fees—these are usually public agencies where the children often have special needs and subsidies can be offered to help defray the costs of raising the child and taking care of medical expenses. The subsidy may include a monthly care payment, medical assistance coverage, and a one-time cash grant to offset initial adoption costs. Other agencies operate on a sliding fee scale, based on a family's income.

Private agencies deal with children of all ages. Today many of these children are older and have special needs. Private agencies operate differently from public agencies and are usually set up as nonprofit organizations with a governing board of directors, rather than as a department run by a city or State. Many have religious affiliations, and birth mothers are often referred by clergy. Most, though, will place children of all religions. In the case of older child adoptions, they may also offer subsidies and may charge no fee or a minimal one based on income. In the rare instance where an infant is placed with a single parent, the adopter sometimes assumes responsibility for the birth mother's expenses until the child is placed in a permanent home. These expenses could include sheltering, legal, or medical costs which could range from \$5,000 to \$20,000. The higher figure would be for a long sheltering period and for a difficult delivery and extended hospital stay.<sup>15</sup>

Stanley B. Michelman and Meg Schneider, authors of *The Private Adoption Handbook*, explain that the costs of independent adoptions can vary dramatically. They offer a breakdown of fees, estimating the range to be from \$3,000 to \$20,000. They advise that fees over \$10,000 do not necessarily mean that the adoption is "black market" or illegal. They state that, "If your lawyer believes the expenses are necessary and he or she is willing to fully disclose to a judge the entire amounts paid, you can assume that he or she thinks the amounts involved are reasonable, justifiable, and legal expenses." They say to "trust your own feelings and your lawyer's reputation."<sup>16</sup>

Foreign adoptions are expensive as well. While the costs in each country differ, they often are in the same range as domestic adoptions. The costs will vary depending on whether you must travel to the country to complete the adoption, and if you must stay there for a period of time, how much those expenses are. To familiarize yourself with the types of fees associated with intercountry adoption, you might refer to the aforementioned *Adoption Resource Book* for a detailed listing,<sup>17</sup> or to the Clearinghouse factsheet "Intercountry Adoption."

## What Services Are Available After the Adoption?

For some children who are adopted, the adjustment period takes a few months; for others it takes years. Bringing a child home is not the end of the process. And despite your strong motivation and readiness for the job, you may need some help in making the adjustment to parenthood.

You may find that your shy teenager has become belligerent, refusing to obey the rules you have established. Or maybe you have started to resent the demands on your time that your baby makes—you are tired and overwhelmed. Or your daughter refuses to sleep at night and has nightmares when she does. She may be afraid that you are not going to keep her, if she has suffered serious rejections in the past. All children pose issues for their parents at various stages of their development. Adopted children have additional questions about their identity and heritage that will need to be addressed.

Whatever the issues, there is help in the form of postadoption services. Postadoption services include support groups, therapy, workshops for adoptive families, and books and articles that address parenting issues with a focus on adoption.

More and more licensed adoption agencies now offer these services and would be the first resource to contact for help. If you've adopted through an agency, you probably have a contact there who can guide you.

Support groups can be invaluable in providing encouragement, suggesting resources, validating your feelings, and recommending therapists. By this point, you are probably already connected to one. If not, The Committee For Single Adoptive Parents can help you locate a local group and put you in touch with experienced single adopters.

It is important to realize that asking for help is not a sign of weakness or an indication of failure. As a single parent, it was your determination that enabled you to find a child and get through the adoption process. Using this strength and resourcefulness to work on family relationships is a positive way to establish a new lifestyle, and one that will benefit you and your family.

*Written by Mady Prowler of the National Adoption Center in 1990. Revised by Debra G. Smith of the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse in 1994.*

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Piasecki, Marlene, "Who Adopts Special Needs Children," National Adoption Center, (1987):9.

<sup>2</sup> Dougherty, Sharon Ann, "Single Adoptive Mothers and Their Children," *Social Work* Vol. 23 (1978): 612.

<sup>3</sup> Gertz, Kathryn R., "Single Parenthood," *Harper's Bazaar* Vol. 114 (August 1981): 185.

<sup>4</sup> "Rise in Single-Parent Families Found Continuing," *The New York Times*, National Edition (July 15, 1990): 17.

<sup>5</sup> *Real Life With Jane Pauley*, WNBC, aired July 17, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Wooderson, Glenna, "Single Parents Making Progress," available from NAIC.

<sup>7</sup> Shireman, Joan F. and Johnson, Penny R., "Single Parent Adoptions: A Longitudinal Study," *Children and Youth Services Review*, Vol. 7 (1985): 332.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

- <sup>9</sup> Marindin, Hope, *The Handbook for Single Adoptive Parents*, Chevy Chase, MD: Committee for Single Adoptive Parents (1987).
- <sup>10</sup> Sanz, Cynthia and Armstrong, Lois, "Generations' Star Taurean Blacque Becomes a Single Father to Nine," *People* Vol. 32 (Oct. 9, 1989): 101.
- <sup>11</sup> Gilman, Lois, *The Adoption Resource Book*, New York: Harper & Row (1987): 14.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.
- <sup>13</sup> Donley, Kathryn S., "Single Parents As `Placements of Choice,'" workshop handout available from National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (1977).
- <sup>14</sup> Adamec, Christine A., *There Are Babies to Adopt: A Resource Guide for Prospective Parents*, Bedford, MA: Mills and Sanderson (1987): 168.
- <sup>15</sup> Canape, Charlene. *Adoption: Parenthood Without Pregnancy*, New York: Henry Holt and Company (1986): 35.
- <sup>16</sup> Michelman, Stanley B., and Schneider, Meg, *The Private Adoption Handbook: A Step-by-Step Guide to The Legal, Emotional and Practical Demands of Adopting a Baby*. New York: Villard Books (1988): 20.
- <sup>17</sup> Gilman: 77.

## Bibliography

### Books

- Adamec, Christine A. *There Are Babies to Adopt: A Resource Guide for Prospective Parents*. Bedford, MA: Mills and Sanderson, 1987. Revised edition, 1991.
- Canape, Charlene. *Adoption: Parenthood Without Pregnancy*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986.
- Curto, Josephine J. *How to Become a Single Parent: A Guide for Single People Considering Adoption or Natural Parenthood Alone*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1983.
- Gilman, Lois. *The Adoption Resource Book*. New York: Harper & Row, 1987. Revised edition, 1992.
- Klein, Carol. *The Single Parent Experience*. New York: Avon Books, 1973.
- Marindin, Hope. *The Handbook for Single Adoptive Parents*. Chevy Chase, MD: Committee for Single Adoptive Parents, 1987. Revised edition, 1992.
- Mattes, Jane. *Single Mothers by Choice*. New York: Times Books, 1994.
- Michelman, Stanley B. and Schneider, Meg. *The Private Adoption Handbook: A Step-by-Step Guide to the Legal, Emotional and Practical Demands of Adopting a Baby*. New York: Villard Books, 1988.

**Articles**

"A Bachelor with 31 Adopted Kids." *Ebony*, Vol. 40 (1984): 95.

Brancham, Ethel. "One Parent Adoptions." *Children*, Vol. 17. (1970): 103-7.

Dougherty, Sharon Ann. "Single Adoptive Mothers and Their Children." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 13, 1990: 1-A, 10-A.

Gibbs, Nancy. "The Baby Chase." *Time*, Vol. 134 (Oct. 9, 1989): 88.

Horne, Juliet. "Single Adopters in the U.S." *Adoption & Fostering*, Vol. 8 (1984): 40-1.

Kerchner, Gerhard. "Warning! Adoption Is Contagious." *OURS*, Vol. 20 (1987): 40-2.

Linder, Judy. "Reflections from a Fortunate Single Mom." *OURS*, Vol. 22 (1989): 40-1.

Oliver, Stephanie Stokes. "Single Adoptive Fathers." *Essence*, Vol. 12 (1988): 114-6, 146.

Sweeny, Diane T. "Opposite Sex Role Models." *OURS*, Vol. 21 (1988): 40-1.

Volk, Judy. "Becoming a New Parent in Middle Age." *OURS*, Vol. 21 (1988): 38-9.



## National Committee for Adoption, "About Adoption and Privacy of Records," 1982

*This document defended **confidentiality and sealed records** by arguing that privacy, including a woman's right to surrender a child anonymously, was a cherished American value under attack by adoption activists. The text is drawn from a draft pamphlet that Bill Pierce, National Committee for Adoption (NCFCA) founder and open records opponent, circulated for comment. By the early 1980s, access to records was the overriding concern of the adoption reform movement, including organizations like the Adoptees' Liberty Movement Association (ALMA) and **Concerned United Birthparents**, both mentioned here. This fact contrasts sharply with the view, also expressed here, that only a small number of maladjusted **birth parents** and disgruntled adoptees were actually interested in **search and reunion**.*

There's a revolution underway in adoption, with many aims but one major opening goal: to unseal confidential adoption records and files.

The movement includes many organizations at the national level, and several hundred local affiliates. It started, most agree, with Jean Paton, creator of an organization called "Orphan Voyage." A book by that name and Paton's 1953 book, The Adoptee Breaks Silence\*, are credited with being the founding documents of the search movement.

It's called a search movement because people working with it say:

"Our specific need is to help us find one another; to open communications between us; to support one another and by sharing our experiences, thus help others to search, find and contact their surrendered children. . . ours is strictly an underground operation so we may feel free to express ourselves with no guidelines or restrictions of any kind. We encourage you to share your stories of search—and hopefully of finding and contacting—your child, EVEN IF UNDERAGE. We will offer help and suggestions, even if your child is underage."

Marsha Riben, Find and Seek, Vol. 1, No. 1.

Perhaps the destructiveness and intrusion exemplified by this approach is what bothers most Americans. They question the fairness of knocking on the doors of minor children, of disrupting the lives of couples who adopted with the guarantee that they'd be protected from such outrageous behavior, that they have a right to mental peace and tranquility—to privacy.

Just as some biological mothers assert the right to intrude into the lives of minor children, so also do some adults who were adopted as children. The most famous of these is Florence Fisher, the president and founder of the most influential of the adult adoptees' search groups, Adoptees' Liberty Movement Association (ALMA). Fisher does not believe that a woman has a right to plan a confidential adoption:

"To perform a sexual act that brings another human being into the world is to render oneself accountable to that child for all time. It is indefensible for the adoption agency to indemnify the natural mother against the accountability by granting her anonymity from her own child. It is unconscionable for the agency to influence the natural mother to root her "new life in a lie built on the grave of her child's human rights to save her own skin."

New Jersey hearing, Dec. 9, 1981, p. 10.

A third group, ORIGINS, should also be mentioned. This is the group which was involved with a state employee, providing "middle-man" services between the employee and those who wanted to buy sealed, confidential adoption records. NBC-TV exposed the scheme by taping the actual "sale." Although illegal, the man's only punishment for selling hundreds of confidential files was the loss of his job and a \$1,000 fine—paid for by his supporters among the search groups.

#### INTRUSION AND ILLEGAL ACTS

These three examples illustrate what's at the center of the revolution in adoption: a willingness to disrupt not only the lives of adoptive parents but even of minor children; rejection of a woman's right to plan a private and confidential adoption for her baby; a claim that illegal acts are justified.

Who's behind this movement and the various groups? The three examples given above help tell us. The woman who believes in intruding in the lives of underage children has been a member of ALMA. She is currently a member of ORIGINS and the largest organization of biological parents (birth-parents is the preferred term of the search group), Concerned United Birthparents (C.U.B.). Most experts believe that individuals like this woman, with memberships in several anti-privacy groups, account for the hard core of activists—probably less than a thousand—who've made adoption so controversial.

One thing is certain—the groups are working together for common goals,

share common members and even have their own national network called "The American Adoption Congress."

Yet, most agree—the complaints about confidential adoption are coming from a tiny, unhappy minority for whom adoption did not work. Unfortunately, that loud but tiny group of individuals, with nearly 10 years of unchallenged activity, have hurt many. . . .

#### THE BETTER WAY: VOLUNTARY REGISTRIES

There is a better way. Thanks to the work of hundreds of adult adoptees, adoptive parents, biological parents, agencies and others over the past two years, a model law has been written which, if passed by a State, would allow people who want to have contact to do so. . . .

The registry works on a simple principle: voluntary, mutual consent. If all of the people involved—the adopted person grown to adulthood, the biological mother and the biological father—register their interest in contact, a trained and sensitive social worker will work with them to achieve as much contact as they want.

Unlike other attacks on privacy, the registry recognizes the sanctity of the contract—or promise—made at the time adoption was planned. . . .

\* \* \*

\* The title of Jean Paton's book was *The Adopted Break Silence*. It was published in 1954.

Source: National Committee for Adoption, draft of pamphlet "About Adoption and Privacy of Records," 1982, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 158, Folder 5, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## National Council for Adoption, "Protecting the Option of Privacy in Adoption"

NCFA does not oppose the opening of past adoption records when birthparents and adult adopted persons consent. We do oppose the unilateral and coercive opening of adoption records without the knowledge and consent of both sides. Both birthparents and adopted persons should be able to control the release of their identifying information and whether and when contact occurs.

The principle that should guide the opening of confidential adoption records is mutual consent, not unilateral coercion. Unwanted, unilaterally imposed reunions are often very disruptive and painful for everyone involved. Through the courts and adoption agencies, adopted persons can obtain medical information confidentially, without exposing birthparents' identities.

For understandable and legitimate reasons, some women facing an unplanned pregnancy prefer the option of confidential adoption. They should have the right to choose this option. Removing the option of privacy in adoption would mean that any woman facing an unplanned pregnancy, who wanted to protect her privacy, would have no private choice but abortion. As observed by Jeremiah Gutman, Director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and former Chairman of the ACLU's Privacy Committee: "A pregnant woman unable or unwilling to rear a child may find her choice of options limited if she cannot rely upon the promise of confidentiality and secrecy to protect her privacy. She may be inclined to bring the pregnancy to term rather than secure an abortion, but, if she cannot rely upon the adoption agency or attorney and the law to protect her privacy, and to conceal her identity for all time, her choice to go the abortion route may be compelled by that lack of confidence in confidentiality."

At least nine state legislatures in 2002 considered the controversial policy of unilaterally opening confidential records of past adoptions and eliminating the option of privacy in future adoptions. Not one of the nine states decided in favor of this harmful policy. Despite the persistence of a small but vocal and organized group of activists over many years, states

continue to reject this policy, whenever they hear the arguments against it. They reject it because it would violate the basic human right to privacy and harm the institution of adoption and the countless children, birthparents, and families it serves.

Source: National Council for Adoption, [www.ncfa-usa.org](http://www.ncfa-usa.org)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Navajo Tribal Council, "Tribal Policy on Adoption of Navajo Orphans and Abandoned or Neglected Children," 1960

*Following is one of the first Tribal Resolutions regarding the adoption of Indian children by non-tribal members, adopted by the Navajo Tribal Council in 1960.*

---

Navajo Tribal Council, Tribal Policy on Adoption of Navajo Orphans and Abandoned or Neglected Children, 1960

WHEREAS:

(1) By Resolution No. CN-63-60 the Navajo Tribe has established a procedure for adoption of members of the Tribe who are brought in person before a court of the Navajo Tribe, and said resolution is applicable to adoptions either by Navajos or non-Navajos, provided the child is a member of the Navajo Tribe and is brought in person before the Tribal Court.

(2) By Resolution CN-60-56, the Navajo Tribe has specified the following ground among those authorizing removal of any non-Navajo from Navajo tribal land: "Removing or attempting to remove any Navajo minor from the Navajo Reservation without prior approval of the Advisory Committee of the Navajo Tribal Council, except for the purpose of attending school under a non-sectarian program approved by the Bureau of Indian Affairs."

(3) Heretofore the Navajo Tribal Council has not established a definite policy either in favor or in opposition to the adoption of Navajo children by non-members of the Tribe.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

(1) The Navajo Tribal Council favors the formal adoption of Navajo children in accordance with the provisions of Resolution No. CN-63-60 in all cases where the parents of such children are dead or where said children are being regularly and continuously neglected by their parents, or where the parents have abandoned said children. The Navajo Tribal Council looks with disfavor upon informal arrangements for the custody of such children except for temporary periods pending their formal adoption.

(2) In the cases referred to in the preceding section of this resolution, the

Navajo Tribe neither favors nor disfavors adoption of Navajo children by persons who are not members of the Navajo Tribe, but states its policy that each case shall be considered individually on its own merits by the Trial Court of the Navajo Tribe.

(3) The Navajo Tribe looks with disfavor upon the adoption of Navajo children by non-members of the Tribe in cases where the parents of the children are living, in good health, and have not abandoned or continuously neglected said children.

(4) The Navajo Tribe condemns the removal or attempted removal of any Navajo minor from the Navajo Reservation by any non-member without the prior approval of the Advisory Committee, except for the purpose of attending school under a non-sectarian program approved by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, provided however, that the Navajo Tribe does not condemn the removal of Navajo children from the Navajo Reservation by their adopted parents pursuant to a final judgment of adoption rendered by the Trial Court of the Navajo Tribe under said resolution.

(5) Subparagraph O of paragraph 2 of Resolution CN-60-56 (Navajo Tribal Council Resolution, 1956, p. 168) shall not apply in cases where a Navajo minor is removed from the Navajo Reservation by its adopted parents, or by persons who have received custody of such child pursuant to an order of the Trial Court of the Navajo Tribe.

(6) The Chairman of the Navajo Tribal Council is hereby directed to cause an investigation to be made of missionaries and other non-Navajo persons who may have been violating said subparagraph of Resolution No. CN-60-56, and where there is ground to believe that such missionaries or other persons propose to continue violating said subparagraph, to cause them to be excluded from the Navajo Reservation. In case such missionaries or other persons operate from islands of fee-patent land on the Navajo Indian Reservation, the Chairman is nevertheless authorized, in accordance with the procedure prescribed in section 6 of said resolution, to have said persons physically removed from Navajo Tribal land.

Adopted November 18, 1960.

Source: Steven Unger, ed., *The Destruction of American Indian Families* (New York: Association on American Indian Affairs, 1977), 85-86.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Peter B. Neubauer, "The One-Parent Child and His Oedipal Development," 1960

*This case study from the New York Child Development Center reminded readers that father absence could jeopardize child development as seriously as maternal deprivation, which attracted a great deal of attention in the 1940s and 1950s. Rita, a child raised by her mother after being abandoned by her father shortly after birth, was first seen at three and was followed until the age of six. The interpretation of this case illustrates the influence of the Oedipal theory, a developmental crisis that [Sigmund Freud](#) believed all pre-school children faced. This crisis was resolved only when children finally accepted the sad fact that they could not compete for love with the parent of the opposite sex. Having two heterosexual parents, in other words, was a necessary condition of normal development. This helps to explain why so many Americans feared that growing up in a [single parent family](#) would be psychologically damaging to children—resulting in gender disorders and homosexuality as well as general maladjustment—and believed that even parentless children should never be placed with single adults. (It is interesting that this case is about a girl. Considerably more worry was expressed about what might happen to boys if they grew up without fathers.) The author of this case history, psychoanalyst Peter Neubauer, worked closely with [Viola Bernard](#).*

---

Reviewing the literature on children who grew up with only one parent, we find that attention has been paid mainly to the preoedipal period, and recently more to the first year of life, particular to the absence of mothering in the need-satisfying phase and its effect on further development. These studies of maternal development, as summarized by Bowlby and by Glaser and Eisenberg demonstrate the inexorability with which the infant requires need satisfaction through one consistent, empathetic mother; if the infant's needs are not fulfilled, e.g. through separation from the mother in the first year of life, his future may be threatened by vegetative dysfunction, and disturbance in object relations and ego structure. . . .

As indicated, our own study deals with the effect of disturbances in the oedipal triangle, and the variety of oedipal solutions adopted by children under these conditions. We will attempt, then, to single out the effect of

parental absence during the oedipal phase of development, a step which may permit a closer examination of processes of sexual identification and superego formation. . . .

#### CASE HISTORY

Rita M. was brought to us by her mother in July, 1955, at the age of three years six months. The mother's difficulties were expressed in the three problems which concerned her most: (1) how to deal with the disinterested, absent father, and Rita's questions about and wish for him; (2) the excessive eating, which Mrs. M. considered to be a forerunner to Rita's becoming a fat, ugly child, as she describes herself as having been. In this connection, Mrs. M. expressed guilt about the punitive way in which she handled the eating problem; and (3) Rita's sexual confusion and expressed wish to be a boy, which Mrs. M. felt at a complete loss to deal with. . . .

Rita's father, who had begun a clandestine affair during his wife's pregnancy, left one week after she was born, excusing his departure with, "This is a good time to leave, before I establish a relationship with the child." He had, as we have stated before, expressed preference for a boy, and his aversion to accepting a daughter has never diminished. He has visited her only twice, on her second and third birthdays, and then only upon the mother's insistence.

We find Rita, at the age of three and a half, approaching phallic development. Her previous longing for her absent father now changed to overidealized fantasies about him, accompanied by sexual confusion, expressed in her preference to be a boy. At this time, too, begin the bouts of excessive eating; the complaints of feeling itchy, of her clothes being too tight or too rough; and an intensified meticulousness. These are connected with earlier prephallic problems, such as difficulties in feeding, skin sensitivities, and concern that doors and drawers be closed, or rugs and blankets be smooth. While in the past she had accepted many important separations from her mother without showing overt signs of being disturbed, now she reacted with severe anxiety. . . .

Rita's wish for a penis was accompanied by increasing castration anxiety. We are not sure of the extent to which her identification with this mother prepared her for the fantasy of a phallic girl, or whether the penis envy was stimulated primarily by the exposure at school to the anatomical differences, as expressed in sexual games to which she, a fatherless, only child, may have come unprepared. The mother not only failed to permit the prephallic regression which might have protected Rita against the castration fear, but she also set the example of the powerless woman who has to be rescued by the man. Rita tried to turn away from her mother and seek help from her father. But then she had to face the specific condition for his acceptance—that she be a boy. The wish for a penis, therefore, was a defense against the castration anxiety, as well as the only means at her disposal to reunite with her father; the wish was not only to be *like* father

but to be *with* father. In this case, the penis envy was in the service of the positive oedipal relationship. . . .

For the next two years, Rita tried to live up to her one-sided bargain with her father, to become a boy in order to maintain his love. She preferred pants to dresses; in the Child Development Center's nursery, she played the role of a father or a cowboy; and she augmented the masculine fantasy with belligerent, demanding, controlling behavior (though this was not without prephallic determinants). . . .

As a boy, she would have to make a choice to give up mother and stay with father; this forced her to change the child's sex back to a girl, and then back and forth again, interminably. We see, in her contradictory phallic wishes, her inability to find a solution; and ambivalence, in her need for both parents. . . .

The mother's plan to remarry when Rita was six years old gave us an additional opportunity to study the development of this child. We had several questions in mind: Would she continue to cling to the fantasied image of her father, particularly since she had neither introduced substitute fathers into her play, nor had she in reality formed any attachment to another man; or would she shift her relationship to a stepfather and then continue with him where she had left off with father, namely, to seek phallic completion from him. . . ? Would she regress, or how far would she progress toward facing a true oedipal conflict in the continuous presence of a man? . . .

Very much to the relief of mother and stepfather, Rita became a good girl, that is to say, obedient, happy, wishing for the marriage and thereby an early realization of her family dream. . . .

#### DISCUSSION

We shall now compare our clinical material with similar studies in the literature. Though the cases described do not show a unique clustering of symptoms, there is characteristic pathology of phallic fixations, whether the parent of the same or opposite sex is absent, leading to homosexuality; and superego disturbances, expressed in either a too severe superego with sadistic features or a harsh, preoedipal quality or a deficient superego which allows incestuous acting out. . . .

The lack of oedipal stimulation, normally found in the continuous day-to-day interplay between the child and each parent, and especially as evidenced by the relationship of the parents to each other, imposes a primary imbalance. *Synchronization* and dosing of oedipal experiences in a continuous reality context, within which phase-specific events can be absorbed, is not present. In the absence of the parental interplay—that is to say, in the absence of the primal scene with all its social equivalents—developmental forces crystallize too suddenly around events, rather than being slowly but continuously interwoven in experience, and hence have an extraordinarily traumatic effect. . . .

Just as the autonomous ego is structured by need satisfaction through mothering, so does, as it seems to us, the oedipal Anlage, "the readiness for oedipal experience" described by Anna Freud, require the stimulation of both parents for the unfolding of all the complexities of the oedipal organization.

Source: Peter B. Neubauer, "The One-Parent Child and His Oedipal Development," *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 15 (1960):286, 287, 293, 295, 297, 298, 299, 302, 303, 305, 308.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## New York Coalition for Families, "*Beyond the Best Interests of the Child Is Being Used to Legitimize the Destruction of Poor Black and Hispanic Families,*" mid-1970s

*It is interesting to contrast this blunt critique of [foster care](#) as a system that destroys poor and minority families with [Smith v. OFFER, 1977](#). In that case, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that foster parents had limited constitutional protections in comparison with [birth parents](#), even in cases where psychological ties were strong and long-lasting. For an excerpt from the book being described here, see [Joseph Goldstein, Anna Freud, and Albert J. Solnit, Beyond the Best Interests of the Child, 1973](#).*

As a group of professionals working in the field of child welfare, social work, and law, we are deeply concerned with the uses to which psychiatry and psychoanalysis are being put under the influence of BEYOND THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD, by Goldstein, Freud and Solnit.

New York, like many states, uses foster care as its primary form of child welfare service to poor Black and Hispanic families. Poor parents in distress are not offered the supportive services they need to keep their families together; rather, they are induced to place their children in foster care as a form of "help". The children are placed in agencies whose financial support depends on maintaining as many children as possible in foster care. These children and their parents are then but small cogs in the industry of foster care.

Once the parent places her child in foster care, that parent must confront every bureaucratic obstacle imaginable to see her own child, much less to regain custody of her own child. For example, the system systematically seeks to alienate children from their parents by severely restricting contact between them, by placing New York City children in rural and suburban foster homes though the parents cannot afford the carfare to see their children, by placing children of one ethnic background in foster homes of an entirely different ethnic background, by telling children that their foster mother is their new "mommy" and by devaluing children's ties to their parents in countless other subtle and not so subtle ways.

Because of pervasive racial and class bias, foster care, established as a

system to help families, functions as a system to destroy families.

BEYOND THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD, uses psychoanalysis to legitimize and reinforce the operation of the foster care system as a brutal form of social manipulation of the poor.

The concept of the "psychological parent" works to free agencies and social workers from any guilty sense they may have that they are violating civilized norms by taking people's children away from them. Now they are told by the "experts" that the "psychological family" is not only better for the child but will create a better society for us all.

These propositions have of course never been proved. BEYOND THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CHILD is not a study, but a polemic. However, unless exposed as such, its teachings will be taken for gospel.

We hope the enclosed articles will stimulate a real debate of the book's scientific basis as well as of its totalitarian implications.

Source: New York Coalition for Families, "Beyond the Best Interests of the Child" Is Being Used to Legitimize the Destruction of Poor Black and Hispanic Families, Viola Bernard Papers, Box 286, Folder 28, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## New York State Charities Aid Association, Records of Foster Home Investigations, 1910s

*The development of child-placement manuals was an important part of the campaign to standardize the work of child welfare and establish **minimum standards**. The following examples are drawn from one early manual based on cases from the New York State Charities Aid Association, one of the first agencies in the country to professionalize its child-placement and adoption activities. The authors offered numerous examples, not only of good and bad homes, but of good and bad **home studies**. The first report excerpted below, about Mr. and Mrs. Hasbrouck, was presented as a thorough report on an excellent adoptive home. The second report was considered inadequate because "the investigation had failed to penetrate far enough to get at the real situation." The child placed with the Peters was eventually removed because of the cruelty of the mother. If the agent had asked more questions about the period during which the couple cared for the children of Mr. Peter's sister, the authors argued, this unfortunate situation might have been anticipated and the placement would never have been made. Investigators needed to guard against "accepting the superficial instead of getting down further into the facts to see what underlies the promising surface."*

When we place a child in a free foster home we feel that if everything goes well he will be a member of that family for life. . . . It is true that until he is of age or legally adopted the foster child is actually a ward of the agency. Nevertheless, the agency prefers not to stress that fact, except in certain crises of supervision. It tries to give both child and family the sense that the child belongs, first and last, to the family. . . .

There are certain generalizations which one can make about when to risk and when not to risk a placement about which one is uncertain. There are so many more homes available for all young children of fair history than there are children available that there is no reason for using a home which may turn out badly. In fact, for almost all the normal and fairly attractive children there are enough reasonably safe and good homes. . . . But for some types of children, for example, those of unpromising history, the doubtful home may be the only alternative to an institution. . . .

**An Approved Home.**— The home which is described as follows is a good

example of the best type of foster home—not wealthy, but substantial and sound:

Application of Mr. And Mrs. Robert Hasbrouck.

**Home.**— The apartment is on one of the main streets, nearly opposite the public library. . . . The apartment is on the third floor, and well planned and convenient in every way. There are six rooms and bath; it is heated by steam and lighted by electricity. It is light and well ventilated. It has hardwood floors, but is furnished in an inexpensive way, in simple and good taste. They have a piano and a victrola. It is well kept up in every particular. . . .

**Occupations.**— Mr. Hasbrouck has always been in the hardware business. He worked his way up from the time he was a boy and for the last five years has been a member of the firm of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ Main Street, \_\_\_\_\_. This is a first class firm and has a good trade. . . . He estimates his net income at about \$5000 a year, and says the stock in the business is worth about \$2500. He has no other investments. He carries about \$11,000 in life insurance. They do not own any real estate. Mrs. Hasbrouck has never been in business.

**History and Family.**— Mrs. Hasbrouck is an American, thirty-four years of age. She would be good looking only she is too stout. She has regular features, brown hair which is waved, and gray eyes. She wore a simple embroidered blouse and plaid skirt. She is not well educated, but has refinement and uses good English. She has a good deal of poise, and is naturally reserved and quiet so that one does not feel acquainted with her in one visit. She seems intelligent and impresses one as a capable, practical person. She is positive and has depth of feeling. It was hard for her to mention her baby who died. She is not at all temperamental or emotional, and has a pleasing personality. She seems sincere and natural. . . .

Mr. and Mrs. Hasbrouck had one son, born two years ago, who only lived twenty-four hours. Mrs. Hasbrouck had a hard time when the baby was born, and the child was not strong enough to live. She says she has recently had an examination, and her physician knows of no reason why she should not have more children. . . .

Mr. and Mrs. Hasbrouck were married February 1, 1907, at \_\_\_\_\_, by the Rev. \_\_\_\_\_. Mrs. Hasbrouck's maiden name was Margaret Davis, and it is the only marriage for both. After marriage they lived at \_\_\_\_\_, where Mr. Hasbrouck had a hardware business. They have lived in their present town for the last eight years. . . .

The atmosphere of their home is most harmonious. . . . Mr. and Mrs. Hasbrouck have musical tastes, and it seems to be rather a complete family circle, except for the absence of children.

They are members of the Episcopal Church. Mr. Hasbrouck is a tenor soloist in St. John's Church, and Mrs. Hasbrouck is organist. Mr. Hasbrouck

is a member of the \_\_\_\_\_ Lodge and the \_\_\_\_\_ Club. They are both athletic and enjoy outdoor sports. . . .

**Family's Plan for Child.**— Mr. and Mrs. Hasbrouck want to take a boy between the ages of three and eight for adoption. They do not object to the child being a foundling or illegitimate. They would like to know as much as they can of the history, but feel that with a child as old as that they can tell pretty well how he is going to develop, and except for hereditary diseases or mental deficiency or insanity, would probably consider one of average history. They do not care particularly for the student type, but want a happy-natured, responsive, intelligent boy who would be refined enough to take into their home. Mr. Hasbrouck would like to take him into his business, but would want the boy to develop along his own lines. He would not force him to do anything that was not interesting to him. They would want to give him a High School education. They would like him to join the church choir. . . .

**Agent's Opinion.**— Agent recommends the home very highly. It seems to be a rather unusual choice for a little boy where he will be brought up well and have a most happy childhood. Agent thinks Mr. and Mrs. Hasbrouck are just the right type of people to make good parents.

\* \* \*

Application of Mr. and Mrs. Peters.

**Family.**— Mr. Peters is an American, thirty-nine years old. He is a little below the average height, and is rather slender and dark. He seems to be a fairly sensible and intelligent person, but is not well educated. He went to grammar school, but never attended high school. He seems to be quite an industrious man, and is evidently thrifty and temperate. He told the agent he had been wanting to take a child for some time, but had been hoping that he could find one whose history he would know. He has decided that he is willing to take a foundling if he can get an attractive one. He is evidently in good health.

Mrs. Peters is also thirty-nine, an American. She is stout and rather motherly looking. She is not at all well-educated, but seems quite intelligent and sensible. She has good ideas about child training. They are plain people, of the rather ordinary village type. They belong to the Methodist Church and are quite religious. They would expect a child to attend Sunday school regularly, and would send one through high school.

They have never had any children of their own. At one time they took two of Mr. Peter's sister's children. Her husband was alcoholic, and she left him and finally obtained a divorce; recently she married again and took the children back without a word of thanks to the Peters, who had kept them for five or six years and had grown very much attached to them. They are very lonely since the children left, and for this reason are doubly anxious to obtain a child.

**History.**— Mrs. Peters' father died when she was a baby, and since her

mother was unable to care for her she was adopted by a family friend. She has always gone by the name of Jones, which was the name of her foster parents. . . . Mr. Peters has lived in \_\_\_\_\_ all his life. He went to public school and afterward worked at various kinds of employment. They were married sixteen years ago in \_\_\_\_\_. Agent noticed their marriage certificate in a broad gold frame hanging on the parlor wall. . . .

**Home.**— The town is a very ordinary village of possibly 2000 inhabitants. In the summer there are a good many boarders. The house is in a good neighborhood in the central part of the town, two blocks from the Methodist Church, and very near the public school. They have a frame cottage of six rooms, which was exquisitely neat and clean and furnished in very plain country style, and portraits, gorgeously framed, on the walls; carpets on the floors, and very shiny, varnished furniture. The place was in very spick and span condition throughout. . . .

**Finances.**— Mr. Peters earns an average of \$18.00 a week the year round. In the summer he works in the laundry and earns a good deal more than this, but in the winter he earns less, as the laundry work is very light, and he clerks in a store in town. They own their home here. Mrs. Peters has a paid-up life insurance policy. Mr. Peters is insured and he belongs to \_\_\_\_\_ Lodge, with which he has life insurance. The house and furniture are also insured. The people are evidently very thrifty and industrious.

**Child Desired.**— They want a girl twenty months to two years old. They are willing to take a foundling, but would rather know the parents of the child. Agent thinks a rather ordinary child would fit into this family very well, but she would not be likely to get many advantages. . . .

**Agent's Opinion.**— Agent thinks this home will probably prove a satisfactory place for a rather ordinary child.

Source: Sophie van Senden Theis and Constance Goodrich, *The Child in the Foster Home, Part I, The Placement and Supervision of Children in Free Foster Homes, A Study Based on the Work of the Child-Placing Agency of the New York State Charities Aid Association* (New York: School of Social Work, 1921), 31, 40, 41, 42, 44, 50, 51.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



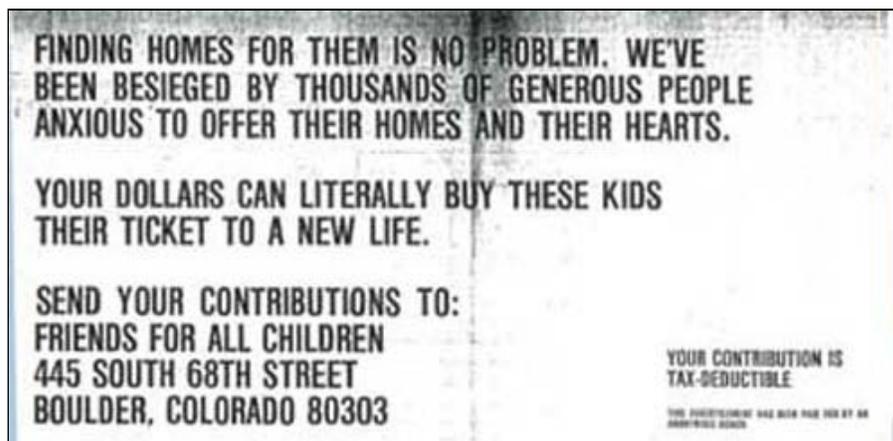
## [New York Times ad about "Operation Babylift," 1975](#)

*This ad appeared in the New York Times just a few days after a military transport plane carrying around 300 passengers crashed on April 4, 1975, shortly after take-off from Saigon. More than 100 children were killed, along with at least 25 of their adult escorts. For a contrasting view of Operation Babylift," see [Gloria Emerson's, "Operation Babylift," the Statement on the Immorality of Bringing South Vietnamese Orphans to the United States](#), and [Agency for International Development, Operation Babylift Report, 1975](#).*

**YES, THERE IS SOMETHING  
YOU CAN DO FOR THE  
CHILDREN OF VIETNAM.**

LAST FRIDAY MORNING AN AIR FORCE TRANSPORT  
CRASHED, STRANDING HUNDREDS OF ORPHANS  
FLEEING VIETNAM.

BY FRIDAY AFTERNOON WE'D CHARTERED A PAN AM 747.



Source: *New York Times*, April 7, 1975.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## North American Center on Adoption, Position Papers—Search (Opening Sealed Records), 1975

*The North American Center on Adoption was founded in 1975. It was a special project of the [Child Welfare League of America](#). Its purpose was to address the problems faced by “waiting children” in the [foster care](#) system.*

We recognize that a growing number of adults who were adopted as children are engaged actively, today, in a search for their biologic parents. We are also keenly aware that, years ago when the vast majority of these men and women were adopted, social agencies legally contracted not to reveal the identities of birth parents. Without this assurance of confidentiality, many mothers—and fathers—might not have arranged for the placement of their babies via legal channels. Hence, social agencies remain reluctant to participate in efforts toward identifying either biologic parents or adoptees. Contracts should not be lightly breached, nor should the past be revered without question.

Present practice must be reviewed in the light of current awareness and intelligence. We are sensitive to those adoptees who have deep feelings about their identity (both psychologic and biologic), who feel they have a “right to know” their past, but we recognize as well the complex nature of the issues involved, not the least of which is an invasion of privacy. We favor agency practice that makes available all information on the adoptees to the adoptive parents, short of naming the biologic parents, at the time of placement. Further, we support the enactment of laws that will henceforth require written disclosure of such information, copies to be filed with the courts so that the adoptee, on attaining adulthood, may have access to this available information, whether or not it has been offered to him before that time.

Source: North American Center on Adoption, Position Papers—SEARCH (OPENING SEALED RECORDS), n.d., Child Welfare League of America Papers, Box 16, Folder 5, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Phan Ngoc-Quoi to Miriam Lewis, International Social Service Case Consultant, April 27, 1966

*This letter was sent by a worker in the Saigon office of the International Social Service to that organization's New York office. It details the requirements for an **international adoption** from Vietnam during the early stages of the U.S. war there, long before most Americans were aware of the needs of Vietnamese children. The names of the child and her American adopters have been changed.*

---

Saigon, April 27th, 1966

Dear Mrs. Lewis,

Thank you for your letter dated April 21st, 1966 regarding the above child and 2 carbon copies of your letter to Michigan agency and 2 carbon copies home study of the Richardsons, which I received this morning. This really lifted our morale as we begin to see that the ISS work in Vietnam is moving. . . . The Richardsons seem to be a wonderful couple and ideal PAPs, and I feel that any child adopted by this family is fortunate. In the home study, the worker mentioned several times that the child should have above intelligence or at least average intelligence so that she could live up to the family's expectation. This is really difficult for us at this end, as we have no facilities or specialist to test the child's intelligence. The child seems to be normal to those who look after her.

We however would like to mention that Mai seem to make much progress, but this is still somewhat slow in comparison with other children of her age. Since March 23, 1966, we have removed her to Caritas, a center for Malnutrition children, and of very high standard. Mai still suffers some skin disease (molluscus contagiosum), and we are going to take her to a doctor to have these warts cut off. Many children in orphanages here suffer this condition due to shortage of water and lack of care in these institutions. The doctors have assured us that once these children are properly cared for and have proper foods, this skin condition will be cleared away. Mai is still very small, but she has a happy smile. We still hope that a home will be found for her, despite of all these facts. . . .

At this end if the Richardsons agree to adopt Mai, we would need the

following:

1. Three pictures of the couple (and if possible with their children) in order to send to the orphanage at their request, and for our file.
2. Birth certificate of the adopting father.
3. Birth certificate of the adopting mother.
4. Marriage license of the PAPs.
5. Power of attorney from both requesting ISS in Saigon to act on their behalf for adoption.
6. Financial statement from employer or bank stating their income and that they are in position to take care of another child.
7. A Statement from the INS or an adopting agency stating that the PAPs have met all the preadoption requirements and that the laws of their state do not object the adoption of a foreign child. Furthermore, since the PAPs have been married less than ten years, and they have already children of their own,
8. they should file a petition for a waiver. This waiver might be obtained quite easily by the U.S. Citizens. The petition should be addressed to the Chief of State. If the Von Kalers are willing to go along, I will draft the petition and send it to you, and you will forward it to the PAPs and the local adopting agency for approval and signature.

It seems that the adoption requires a lot of work and communications. But if you can provide these documents, I will take all of them to the Minister of the Interior here (whom Mr. Sherman had met) and he will study the case. If everything is all right, he will grant the permission for the child to be emigrated to the USA for adoption, and that the ISS will have the custody of the child until she is adopted. Thus we will avoid a proxy adoption. . . .

Source: Miss Phan Ngoc-Quoi to Mrs. Miriam Lewis, April 27, 1966, International Social Service, American Branch Papers, Box 38, Folder: "Vietnam—Adoption" (1 of 3), Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Site designed by:



**Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Opportunity, National Survey of Black Children Adopted in 1972



The Boys and Girls Aid Society of Oregon launched a transracial program in the early 1960s and renamed it "Opportunity" in 1967. The surveys it conducted in the late 1960s and early 1970s were (and are) among the only sources of national and state-by-state *statistical data* on the adoptions of *African-American children* during a period of intense debate about where black children belonged. The commentary that accompanies the numbers laments the decline in *transracial adoptions* and attributes it to opposition by the *National Association of Black Social Workers*. To my knowledge, these figures, which circulated in mimeographed form, have never been previously published.

OPPORTUNITY's survey of the adoption of black children shows a substantial decrease in the number of black children placed in 1972 in both black and white homes as shown in the following table:

|                               | <u>1968</u> | <u>1969</u> | <u>1970</u> | <u>1971</u> | <u>1972</u> | <u>Decrease</u> |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Total black children placed   | 3122        | 4336        | 6474        | 7420        | 6065        | 18%             |
| Placements in black families  | 2389        | 2889        | 4190        | 4846        | 4496        | 7%              |
| Placements in white families  | 733         | 1447        | 2284        | 2574        | 1569        | 39%             |
| Number of responding agencies | 194         | 342         | 427         | 468         | 461         |                 |

To provide comparative data, the following table shows the placement activity of all agencies (252) which reported from the four consecutive years 1969 through 1972:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|

|                                     | 1969 | 1970 | 1971 | 1972 | Decrease |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|----------|
| Total black children placed         | 3514 | 4808 | 5012 | 4000 | 20%      |
| Placements in black families        | 2486 | 3063 | 3202 | 2896 | 10%      |
| Placements in white families        | 1028 | 1745 | 1810 | 1104 | 39%      |
| Percentage placed in black families | 70.7 | 63.7 | 63.9 | 72.4 |          |

#### BLACK CHILDREN NEED HOMES

The decrease in the total number of black children placed in adoption is particularly disturbing when one considers the tremendous backlog of black children who are in foster homes throughout the country solely because agencies did not have adoptive homes for them. This condition appears slated to become worse, not better. The Child Welfare League of America in their current study of participating private adoption agencies states, "At no time have sufficient non-white homes been approved to accommodate the non-white children accepted (for adoption), and in the last period (July to December 1972) the ratio was only 59 homes per 100 children." The picture for the participating public agencies was even more discouraging. The League reports, "The 20 public agencies approved 108 white (adoptive) homes for every 100 white children but only 51 non-white homes per 100 non-white children."

Because of the high backlog of black children, this first year of declining adoptions might be expected to show a percentage decrease in white placements far larger than with black placements. The reverse happens to be true. Total white placements by all responding agencies totalled 32,063 in 1972, a decline of 14% from 1971. Black placements were down 18%, a decline nearly 30% larger than for white placements.

#### INTERRACIAL ADOPTIONS\*

The militant campaign by some black social workers against interracial placements has obviously discouraged certain agencies from approving white adoptive applicants, however qualified they may be. The 39% decrease in placements of black children in white families is not offset by more placements in black homes. Comments by the responding agencies indicated that some had reverted to their earlier practices, denying adoption to black children if no black families were available. The damage to such children, like the cost of maintaining them, is monumental. We can only hope that most adoption agencies, adoptive parent organizations, public officials, and private citizens will insist that every child is entitled to loving parents, regardless of his or their color.

\*OPPORTUNITY uses interracial which suggests a "blending" in preference to transracial which connotes a bridge over a chasm.

\* \* \*

CHILDREN PLACED BY AGENCIES FOR ADOPTION IN 1972 BY STATES & REGIONS

| U.S. Census Regions & States | Number of Agencies | Total Children Placed | Black Children Placed in Black Homes | Black Children Placed in White Homes |
|------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <u>New England</u>           | <u>36</u>          | <u>1746</u>           | <u>133</u>                           | <u>121</u>                           |
| Connecticut                  | 7                  | 558                   | 87                                   | 47                                   |
| Maine                        | 4                  | 207                   | 1                                    | 8                                    |
| Massachusetts                | 17                 | 420                   | 36                                   | 38                                   |
| New Hampshire                | 2                  | 206                   | 2                                    | 9                                    |
| Rhode Island                 | 2                  | 135                   | 6                                    | 13                                   |
| <u>Mid Atlantic</u>          | <u>119</u>         | <u>4417</u>           | <u>1017</u>                          | <u>303</u>                           |
| New Jersey                   | 9                  | 911                   | 258                                  | 74                                   |
| New York                     | 38                 | 1945                  | 570                                  | 124                                  |
| Pennsylvania                 | 72                 | 1561                  | 189                                  | 105                                  |
| <u>E. N. Central</u>         | <u>116</u>         | <u>7822</u>           | <u>1003</u>                          | <u>399</u>                           |
| Illinois                     | 16                 | 1005                  | 211                                  | 56                                   |
| Indiana                      | 9                  | 1531                  | 150                                  | 36                                   |
| Michigan                     | 22                 | 2430                  | 335                                  | 130                                  |
| Ohio                         | 61                 | 1722                  | 293                                  | 116                                  |
| Wisconsin                    | 8                  | 1134                  | 14                                   | 61                                   |
| <u>W. N. Central</u>         | <u>43</u>          | <u>4598</u>           | <u>214</u>                           | <u>185</u>                           |
| Iowa                         | 10                 | 1250                  | 17                                   | 33                                   |
| Kansas                       | 3                  | 516                   | 74                                   | 20                                   |
|                              |                    |                       |                                      |                                      |

|                      |           |              |            |            |
|----------------------|-----------|--------------|------------|------------|
| Minnesota            | 8         | 922          | 14         | 64         |
| Missouri             | 10        | 1183         | 91         | 52         |
| Nebraska             | 8         | 439          | 16         | 12         |
| No. Dakota           | 3         | 259          | 2          | 4          |
| So. Dakota           | 1         | 29           | 0          | 0          |
| <u>Pacific</u>       | <u>40</u> | <u>10344</u> | <u>809</u> | <u>335</u> |
| Alaska               | 1         | 99           | 2          | 6          |
| California           | 26        | 7251         | 764        | 215        |
| Hawaii               | 1         | 20           | 0          | 0          |
| Oregon               | 7         | 2444         | 18         | 71         |
| Washington           | 5         | 530          | 25         | 43         |
| <u>S. Atlantic</u>   | <u>48</u> | <u>3485</u>  | <u>695</u> | <u>99</u>  |
| Delaware             | 2         | 89           | 16         | 3          |
| Florida              | 7         | 1264         | 172        | 20         |
| Georgia              | 2         | 620          | 118        | 4          |
| Maryland             | 19        | 311          | 69         | 16         |
| No. Carolina         | 2         | 227          | 61         | 2          |
| So. Carolina         | 2         | 166          | 43         | 1          |
| Virginia             | 7         | 235          | 49         | 4          |
| Wn. D.C.             | 6         | 349          | 145        | 27         |
| West Virginia        | 1         | 224          | 22         | 22         |
| <u>E. S. Central</u> | <u>15</u> | <u>1301</u>  | <u>164</u> | <u>26</u>  |
| Alabama              | 1         | 61           | 10         | 0          |
| Kentucky             | 5         | 619          | 45         | 23         |
| Mississippi          | 2         | 52           | 17         | 0          |
| Tennessee            | 7         | 569          | 92         | 3          |
| <u>W. S. Central</u> | <u>21</u> | <u>2273</u>  | <u>392</u> | <u>40</u>  |

|                         |            |              |             |             |
|-------------------------|------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| Arkansas                | 1          | 201          | 28          | 3           |
| Louisiana               | 2          | 155          | 55          | 0           |
| Oklahoma                | 3          | 423          | 46          | 5           |
| Texas                   | 15         | 1494         | 263         | 32          |
| <u>Mountain</u>         | <u>23</u>  | <u>2142</u>  | <u>69</u>   | <u>61</u>   |
| Arizona                 | 4          | 261          | 17          | 14          |
| Colorado                | 6          | 758          | 31          | 32          |
| Idaho                   | 1          | 128          | 0           | 1           |
| Montana                 | 3          | 236          | 3           | 3           |
| Nevada                  | 1          | 155          | 11          | 7           |
| New Mexico              | 1          | 8            | 0           | 0           |
| Utah                    | 4          | 469          | 5           | 3           |
| Wyoming                 | 3          | 127          | 2           | 1           |
| <u>GRAND<br/>TOTALS</u> | <u>461</u> | <u>38128</u> | <u>4496</u> | <u>1569</u> |

Source: Opportunity: National Survey of Black Children Adopted in 1972, September 18, 1973, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 162, Folder 7, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Excerpt from Ida Parker, *Fit and Proper?*, 1927

Twenty-five cases selected from those whose social history is known are given here in some detail in order to furnish an idea of the quality of much of the stock which was transplanted from its natural to its artificial environment by adoption. While one would hesitate to call them typical, it can be said that they are not unusual. Several of these cases show also something of the kind of home into which the children were permanently received. Opinions will differ as to the propriety of some of these adoptions.

(1) A little girl of fourteen months was the first illegitimate child of a mother who had had at least three. This mother herself was probably the illegitimate daughter of a woman of bad reputation and of a man said to have had colored blood. She had already made arrangements to allow the adoption of the child of the study by a woman with whom she was boarding her, when an agency was asked to put through the legal papers. An investigation showed that the middle-aged foster parents, although respectable, were financially unable to assume the permanent support of this child. The foster mother, in need of a surgical operation, could get about only with difficulty. The foster father was earning but \$16 a week at the same job he had held for many years. The agency, therefore, considered it unwise to put through the adoption. A private attorney, however, transacted this piece of legal business. Not long after, another organization was asked to assist the adoptive parents who were giving the child good care but could not carry the burden of its support.

(2) Three illegitimate children were found by a court to be neglected and removed from their parents. This family had been known to several agencies for years because of conditions of neglect in the home due to the mother's mental condition. She was finally committed to a hospital as epileptic and insane and continued to deteriorate mentally. The boy of the study, who in spite of his heredity seemed normal, was adopted at nine years of age by a family with whom he had lived some time.

(3) An agency put through the adoption of a two months old illegitimate baby whose mother was also illegitimate and had been in care of an

organization during the first two years of her life. Then she had been returned to the maternal grandmother, who at once placed her with a fine woman who gave her an excellent bringing up. In spite of this opportunity the girl had a child just after she had begun to work.

(4) A little boy of two years was admitted to the care of an agency on application of his mother who was fatally ill with tuberculosis. She had struggled in vain to support him and his older sister and had been obliged to accept assistance from more than one agency. Her husband was a chronic non-supporter and finally found his way to a correctional institution. After the mother's death the little boy was discharged by the agency to the maternal relatives who adopted him when four year years old. The older child was taken by relatives on the father's side. . . .

The adoption law in Massachusetts is on the whole good. It was framed to protect all the parties at interest but in its intent exists primarily for the welfare of the child. The judges of the probate courts are men of integrity and worthy of the pride that the citizens of Massachusetts have always felt in its judiciary. Yet the children of Massachusetts are not adequately protected under the present adoption practice. Adoptions which for the welfare of the child, of the adoptive parents, and of society, should never be permitted, are being decreed almost daily.

It has been shown that at the present time it is possible in Massachusetts' court procedure for inaccuracies or even untruths concerning social facts bearing upon adoptions to pass undetected. No oath is required as to the truth of any of the facts contained in the petition. No penalty is prescribed for misstatements. There is no requirement for going behind any plausible statements, nor any as to what parties to the process shall be seen by the judge.

The difficulty seems to lie in lack of appreciation of the fact that adoption is a most complicated child-welfare problem and not merely a small part of the business of crowded courts whose primary concern is far removed from this problem. Once it is recognized that there is a social problem behind each adoption petition and that therefore it is not the occasional, but every case, concerning which the court needs full information, the number of unsuitable adoptions will decrease. A way will be found to secure the facts for the courts.

The outstanding conclusion from this study is the great need of thorough investigation of the social facts which bear upon every adoption petition filed.

Source: Ida R. Parker, *Fit and Proper?: A Study of Legal Adoption in Massachusetts* (Boston: Church Home Society, 1927), 19-20, 69.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Excerpt from Helen Lucile Pearson, "Child Adoption in Indiana," 1925

### CHILDREN PLACED BY NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENTS

To show what is happening in Indiana through the placing of children by newspaper advertisements, which is prohibited by law in some states, the writer watched the two principal daily papers in Indianapolis for a period of six months and followed up a few of these cases. These papers both have a wide circulation throughout the state, so the facts found are not ones which affect Indianapolis solely. The State Charities Aid Association of New York has recently made a study of this problem in New York City and this report entitled "A Baby a Day Given Away" says a "study of Promiscuous Placing through Newspaper Advertisements Shows A Astonishing Abuses".

In Indianapolis, it was found that in the six months from Jan. 1st to June 30, 1924, there appeared in these two papers 59 "want ads" and two editorials concerning placement of children. (The same advertisement in many cases appeared more than once but has been counted only once). 20 of these were for children to adopt; 21 were for homes for children, 5 of these indicating that the children concerned might be adopted, and 15 were for children to board. The majority of these advertisements appeared in the evening paper, no doubt because it is considered more of a "home" paper, and were found usually in the "Personals". Only one of the advertisements offered a reward for a baby. This same advertisement appeared in papers at several different times. The writer answered this appeal at the P.O. box number given and had an interview with the woman doing the advertising. She have a name and address in another city which the writer found afterwards was fictitious and the supposition is that she was "buying" babies for other people.

Another of these advertisements for children to adopt indicated that the family not only wished to adopt a baby but wished to provide a "little mother" for the baby by the same method. It read: "Wanted, —girl 10 to 14 years to raise; also a baby girl to adopt; blonde preferred". Another advertisement for a girl between 10 and 14 years of age to adopt, it was found, was placed by a single man who lived with a woman not his wife whom he wished to provide with a young girl for company and to help with

the housework. Most of these advertisements for children to adopt, however, were for babies and some of the homes were very good. In the advertisements for homes for children, one which was followed was found to have been inserted by a very nice type of woman for an adoptive home for the baby of her maid. She received thirty-seven responses to this advertisement but none of them appeared to her to be very desirable. She was very glad to have the writer put her in touch with an organization where a better plan could be worked out for the mother and baby.

Source: Helen Lucile Pearson, "Child Adoption in Indiana" (M.A. thesis, Indiana University, 1925), 44-46.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Susan Pettiss to Rosalind Giles, February 8, 1957



This was the photo Susan Pettiss described in her letter, of an older woman who had adopted by proxy.

*The names of the adoptive mother and child described in this document have been changed.*

February 8, 1957

Miss Rosalind Giles, Director  
State Department of Public Welfare  
Austin, Texas

Re: Mrs. Calder, Proxy Adoptive Mother

Dear Roz:

We wonder if we could ask your help in following up a situation which came to our attention and about which we have considerable concern. On January 15, 1957, the last group of children processed by International Social Service under the Refugee Relief Act came to New York by plane from Greece. All the children on this flight were for approved families for whom we had suggested the child, except one. The one was a proxy adoption carried out by an adoptive mother from Texas. She was most demanding and irritated that our consultants were not giving her attention and special help. She insisted that she did not have to follow procedure (i.e. immigration) that the other parents did because she had already adopted her child! The consultants who talked with her said she appeared to be drunk, and she appeared to be over 50 years of age. She made the comment at one point that she must be rushed through because she had another baby at home. She also commented that she wished she had adopted all of the babies. Although we realize this child has already been legally adopted, we think that this child may be in need of protection. In fact, it was the feeling of the consultants that this woman was not the type to keep the baby herself and that she may have in mind to give it to someone else.

On Mrs. Calder's insistence, our photographer took her picture

with the baby. As we have these pictures and also a copy of the parole notice, which is supposed to go to Mrs. Calder, we thought that you might take the opportunity to follow up the situation by giving these to her. We thought that it might be possible that your agency would already know of this woman. Unfortunately, we do not have her full name, but we do have the last name and address. The child's adoptive name is Samantha Calder.

Sincerely yours,

(Mrs.) Susan T. Pettiss  
Assistant Director

Source: Susan T. Pettiss to Rosalind Giles, February 8, 1957, International Social Service, American Branch Papers, Box 10, Folder: "ISS Adoption, 1955-1958," Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Placing Children of Unknown Background and the Problem of Matching, 1951

*These minutes document a seminar given by Dr. [Viola Bernard](#) for workers at Louise Wise Services in New York on the subject of mixed-race children. (The agency's practice of hiring scientific consultants to help them make racial determinations and predictions in such cases is documented in [Discussion of the Role of Anthropology in Transracial Adoptions, 1956](#).) Delays and difficulties in placement prompted a reconsideration of rigid [matching](#) practices (especially with regard to skin color) and the articulation of a new placement philosophy that opened the door for the acceptance of difference and anticipated the debate about [transracial adoptions](#). At the same time, this discussion makes perfectly clear how worried agency workers were that children of unknown background might develop "Negroid" features later in life, a possibility that categorized them as "[Negro](#)" children and limited their placement options.*

David W was discussed specifically as a child who has been held for a long period in foster care, not yet placed, now more than a year and a half old. Because of unknown paternal background and his dark skin coloring, he was seen earlier by Dr. Shapiro who felt that he might be of Puerto Rican paternity, advised our holding him for a time because of the possibility of his becoming darker. Yet it has been over a year and a half since Dr. Shapiro advised that we go ahead with placement.

Various workers have seen David. All have agreed that he is not Negroid appearing but he is described in varying ways as to color. People have been seeing him differently. His features were described from finely chiseled to full. The question was raised as to his lithe, small build and how that might relate to the possibility of a Puerto Rican background. Dr. Bernard felt that this is in itself an economic factor. She pointed out the differences in appearance of some Puerto Rican people who are out of stereotype because of the better nutrition and economic factor, not because of a different heredity factor.

In looking at the difficulties in placing David part of this seemed to be the tendency to draw conclusions as to how a family might see him. We started with sorting out confusion and differences on what the reality factors were about David as problems in placing him, how each worker

subjectively saw him and then separated the latter from how a family might see him. To evaluate what were reality factors, Dr. Bernard felt we should have to first use as criteria skin color and the question of Negroid features which on further discussion did not seem like problems pointing to his being a Negro child, and we had no facts to say he is. His appearance, for example, could as well fit with Mediterranean coloring, depending on who happened to be seeing David and how they saw him.

Dr. Bernard developed the importance of weeding out our own subjective feelings in presenting a child and staying with the reality factors. In David's instance, the family is able themselves to see David's appearance and to react then in their own subjective way. If in advance we may feel a child of darker coloring would be acceptable to a family and if they were accepting generally of unknown paternity, then why not present him in that sense to a family rather than adding our assumptions (subjective) as to why he may be dark. . . .

We may feel at times that resemblance to possible adoptive parents, extremely positive and lengthy background, often seen positively by the worker will be by the parents. It is also possible to "over-sell" on basis of giving too much. One instance was mentioned where an impressive background was given in detail and was too much for the adoptive parents to be able to assimilate. Matching in physical characteristics, which we may feel would only bring a positive reaction, can sometimes be threatening and may involve a parent's deeper feeling around such factors as their own security and conflicts with these characteristics. Some instances of real struggle were mentioned in how adoptive parents have worked this out, depending on their own feelings and adjustments re themselves and the counter forces operating.

The drama and shock of seeing the baby itself was discussed, how the baby may fit or not fit with the picture the adoptive parents may have of a child ahead of time. We should give enough history, in a selective way, to responsibly transfer to the family a basis on which, coupled with their seeing of the child, can free them to make their own decision about the child.

Source: Minutes of Dr. Bernard seminar, March 6, 1951, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 161, Folder 5, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Justine Wise Polier, "Attitudes and Contradictions in Our Culture," 1960

While there is a growing appreciation of the culture, art and history of remote peoples in far distant lands, and other ages, there is still great resistance to appreciation of "strangeness" or "difference" in values, culture and the way of life of newcomers in our midst. There seems to be a prevailing assumption that the "newcomer" should automatically accept our values. There is little evidence that we are as concerned that we should adapt that which we find good in the culture of the newcomer as that he should adapt our culture in toto. . . .

This contradiction is also responsible for a far too narrow concept in many fields of service to children, where it is assumed that, either in foster care or adoptive placements, a child must "match" a family if the placement is to succeed. Here the contradiction is rationalized into a theory that proclaims that adults can only like children who look like themselves and have backgrounds similar to their own, a veritable ode to Narcissus. By accepting this theory, we even justify the denial of loving family care to children who look different, speak differently, or have cultural backgrounds different from the stereotype of the American majority. This bulldozer approach to the newcomer or the "different" child, which seeks to level the peaks of cultural differences in American life, has contributed to the tragic shortcomings of our services.

The American Indian child provides one startling example. Oldest and most truly American according to all snobbish attitudes, the Indian child, when found to be without family, is often left in a hospital for years and then shipped off to a remote Federal school without ties to his family, tribe, or any other family. The assumption is that looking different, being different, he will not be wanted by an "American" family. It is only recently that the Child Welfare League of America has begun to pierce this wall of prejudice that separates the American Indian child from the American community.

Again in adoption work throughout the country, too much emphasis has been placed on the need to match child and adoptive family. The attitude prevails that only those who are alike can really like or care for one another in terms of family life. As a result, we overlook and underestimate

the ability of adults to accept and like a child for what he is, and to enjoy helping a child become what he can become.

Source: Justine Wise Polier, "Attitudes and Contradictions in Our Culture," *Child Welfare* 39 (November 1960): 1-2.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Justine Wise Polier, "A Memorandum Concerning Child Adoption Across Religions Lines," 1955

A Memorandum Concerning Child Adoption Across Religions Lines,  
Background for Discussion of a Policy for Jewish Religious Bodies and  
Jewish Community Relations Agencies

### Introduction

At a regular meeting of the National Community Relations Advisory Council on October 17, 1955, discussion was held looking toward the formulation of a policy for Jewish community relations agencies on the issue of child adoption across religions lines. There had been some preliminary discussion of the same question at a meeting of the Executive Committee held some two years previously. In the interim, a number of controversies and litigations had arisen out of adoptions or applications for adoption of children of non-Jewish parentage by Jewish couples. Several of these cases had assumed the dimensions of major interreligious conflict, thus dramatically raising community relations implications. . . .

### Cases and Implications

In one noteworthy case, in New York, two children who had been placed with Jewish adoptive parents in the belief that they were the natural children of a Jewish mother, years later were returned by court order to Catholic case and placed with a Catholic institution, where they still remained after a passage of several years. This case posed clearly the issue of public policy involved: Must the child be placed for adoption only in accordance with the religion of its natural mother? May the mother, according to her desires, place the child for adoption with adoptive parents of a faith other than her own? Or must the state heed the demand of the religious bodies that the child be given only into the custody of persons who will rear a child in the religion of the natural mother? If the last of these questions is answered affirmatively, is the state placed in the position of a policeman to protect the interests of religious bodies, groups and institutions?

Application of the principle of the supremacy of the religious consideration

go beyond the realm of child adoption. The New York law stipulates that, wherever practicable, probation officers in juvenile cases shall be of the same religion as the children to whose cases they are assigned. Since approximately 50% of the children on probation in New York City are Catholic, approximately 45% Protestant, and only some 5% Jewish, the presiding justice has interpreted the law as permitting the appointment of Jewish probation officers only the extent of 5% of the total probationary staff. There has likewise been pressure to secure legislation that would require that the psychiatrist assigned to the case of a child should be of the same religion as the child.

The Welfare Department of the City of New York, feeling itself bound by the state law requiring that children be given in adoption only to adoptive parents of the same religion as the natural parents, sometimes maintains children in public hospitals, where they are born, or in shelters for years because no institutions of the proper religion are available to which the child can be referred. After much agitation over this situation, a public foster home division of the Department of Welfare for the care of such children has been created. But, an unwritten agreement provides that no Catholic children are to be referred to this public agency, but only to Catholic institutions. (This is in deference to the position of the Catholic Church, Judge Polier said, that the retention of a child within the religion of his parents must take precedence over any merely temporal considerations of health, welfare, adjustment, etc.; and that even if the church is not in a position to afford the child those conditions for his well being that might be available under other auspices, the child must be placed in the custody of the church or a church institution.)

Source: "A Memorandum Concerning Child Adoption Across Religious Lines, Background for Discussion of a Policy for Jewish Religious Bodies and Jewish Community Relations Agencies, Based on a Presentation by Judge Justine Wise Polier and Florence Brown to a meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Community Relations Advisory Council," pp. 1, 4-6, Justine Wise Polier Papers, Box 18, Folder 207, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman





## Justine Wise Polier to Riki Kosut, October 13, 1978



A couple leaving the New York offices of the Free Synagogue Child Adoption Committee, one of the first specialized adoption agencies in the United States. The agency was renamed Louise Wise Services in 1949 in honor of its founder.

Dear Riki,

In answer to your request for some material about early memories, I have written the following for you to use or throw away, as you see fit.

Judge Polier succeeded her mother, who had founded the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue Child Adoption Committee when adoption was unknown in Jewish life. Judge Polier recalled the other day going as a child with her mother to visit the large congregated Hebrew Orphan Asylum. There she was surrounded by small children who ran up to her saying, "Will you be my Mummy," and clinging to her. Then there was a conference with the angry Director who said to her mother, "I am glad my children are not here or you would try to kidnap them too." There were many nights, she recalled, when a homeless child was brought home by her mother, and her father happily yielded his bed and slept on a sofa.

As ever,

Hon. Justine Wise Polier

Source: Justine Wise Polier to Riki Kosut, October 13, 1978, Justine Wise Polier Papers, Box 33, Folder 417, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Paul Popenoe, "The Foster Child," 1929

*In this excerpt, eugenicist Paul Popenoe presented his skeptical view of adoption by taking issue with [How Foster Children Turn Out](#), the first major *outcome study*. According to Popenoe, its author, [Sophie van Senden Theis](#), greatly exaggerated the influence of home environments and misrepresented the power of heredity.*

---

Most of the children available for adoption fall into three groups: (1) illegitimate children; (2) those abandoned by their parents; and (3) those who have been taken away from their parents because the latter were found unfit by the courts to retain the custody of their own offspring.

It is scarcely necessary to point out that in none of these cases is the ancestry likely to be up to par. . . .

So far as I am aware, only one agency which places children has made any determined effort to find out how its children turn out. This is the State Charities Aid Association of New York, which published in 1924 a report on the history of 910 of its children. Briefly, it found that six out of every eight have "made good" in the sense that they have at least been able to manage their own affairs with ordinary prudence and live in accordance with the standards of their own communities. The seventh has turned out to be incapable but "harmless"; the eighth, definitely bad.

Although three fourths of the children are thus alleged to have become reasonably good citizens, this fact is not quite so encouraging as it appears at first sight to the family which contemplates taking in or adopting a child (only 269 of the children in this group were legally adopted), for the fact is that some of them had to go through two, three or more homes before they found one in which they could live satisfactorily. There were 1,621 homes used for the 910 children. In only 60 per cent of the homes did the child turn out satisfactorily. It thus appears that the family contemplating taking a foundling has a little better than an even chance not to regret the act. . . .

The important points seem to be:

(a) To pick out a child with as good ancestry as possible. . . .

- (b) The child should be taken young. . . .
- (c) The child should be taken only on trial.

Source: Paul Popenoe, "The Foster Child," *Scientific Monthly* 29 (September 1929): 243-245, 247.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Carol S. Prentice, *An Adopted Child Looks at Adoption*, 1940

*This excerpt is drawn from two chapters titled "The Case for a Father" and "Spinsters as Parents" in a book-length narrative. By 1940, when Carol Prentice published *An Adopted Child Looks at Adoption*, women adopting children, either together or alone, were suspected of abnormalities ranging from destructive neuroses to explicit lesbianism, and the definition of an acceptable family consequently narrowed and became more exclusive. "Old maids" and "spinsters" no longer qualified for motherhood, even when they offered material and educational privileges, as they did in this case. For a more positive perspective on the experience of adoption by a [single woman](#) written twenty years earlier, see [Anonymous, "How It Feels to Have Been an Adopted Child."](#)*

---

Finally, to complete the unusual picture, I was adopted by two maiden ladies. . . .

Shyness and frustration and a defensive superiority were typical old-maid attributes of Mama. She was aristocratic in manner and appearance in spite of her diminutive size and, when abroad, to her delight was always referred to as "La Duchesse." She was a mass of inconsistencies—hating European aristocrats and titled people and loving American democracy in principle, yet being one of the most undemocratic people I've ever met. Despising and fearing men, she was secretly fascinated by them as a strange species of another race. With the exception of her father, whom she loved and honored and placed on a pedestal far above her invalid mother, she declared and believed men to be greatly inferior to women in every way. . . . Her life was full of sadness and one pitied but did not cross her. A real old maid—stubborn and gentle by turns, generous and warm-hearted but impregnable in her convictions, widely traveled but fundamentally untouched, emotionally loyal and passionate—and defeated.

The other "mama" was nearer the modern spinster type. I always referred to her as my guardian. It seemed more appropriate to her personality and her position as head of a girls' school. She took charge of my education and was the dominant influence in my life. . . .

These two women lived in charming apartments in the school. So I knew

neither a normal family life nor a real home for years. . . .

To-day the general practice is to place children in homes where there will be a father as well as a mother to create a normal family background. There's a lot to be said for the spinsters, and individual instances furnish splendid examples of successful adoptions, where the child has had a wholesome, well-rounded, and happy development. It would be absurd to say that married couples have the monopoly on the virtues, or that only marriage develops the qualities that are desirable for parenthood. Everybody knows women, and men too, who have remained old maids through many years of matrimony! I personally am so much indebted to so many single women that I hate to say a word opposed to them. All the care I received in childhood and girlhood was from them. And what would any family do without its maiden aunts? I'd like to write a book about spinsters I have known—maiden aunts, teachers, social workers, a whole galaxy of women who carry on the work of all sorts that family people haven't time for. . . .

But the very thing that recommends the spinster in such a [temporary foster care] situation—her pent-up mother feeling—is a danger in legal adoption. The latter is a permanent arrangement, an irrevocable step by which the child become's the woman's very own. It is a relationship entered into usually not so much for the benefit of the child, no matter what the conscious convictions may be, as for an outlet of maternal and other emotions. It seems to accentuate and give free rein to the possessiveness that curses women generally. Possessiveness is one of the natural dangers every mother has to fight against. If, however, she is married, her emotions are divided and have more than one object and perhaps also have a check-rein. . . .

I know from my own experience that a child can long passionately for a father. And being frustrated, she may develop an ideal image that is almost fantastic. . . . Without a human being to check against my fantasy, or a reality to substitute for it, I hadn't the vaguest notion what a father in real life was. . . .

Many spinsters live in pairs, which relieves some of the disadvantages of the lone woman. But even where there is no trace of homosexuality the child in the ménage forms part of a triangle. Jealousy is probably too strong a word for the subtle interplay of emotions that the child feels, consciously or unconsciously. I knew, for instance, that I often came between my two mamas in a variety of ways. . . . Many an only child finds himself in the same dilemma. . . . Where there are two women involved it is somehow worse. It is more subtle and tense and affords no relief in the distinctions and differences of sex. And there is a surfeit of femininity. My reaction to this was to get away from women as much as possible. . . .

Physically I was looked after solicitously. Mentally I was trained superbly. Spiritually I was offered whatever church or creed suited my needs. In the summer I always had the benefit of the most intelligent and delightful

teachers to travel and live with me. But my life at all times was unnatural and abnormal; it had no spontaneity or freedom. I was an overcultivated field. And I was emotionally starved.

Source: Carol S. Prentice, *An Adopted Child Looks at Adoption* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1940), 31-33, 35-37, 41-42, 44.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman

[Timeline](#)[People & Organizations](#)[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)[Topics in Adoption History](#)[Further Reading](#)[Document Archives](#)[Site Index](#)

## Purinton v. Jamrock, 1907

*This excerpt from a 1907 Massachusetts case suggests that controversies associated with transreligious adoptions anticipated the debates about **transracial** and **international adoptions** in the post-1945 period. Clara and Jesse Purinton, a Protestant couple, were the **foster parents** of Kate Jamrock, the abandoned nine-year-old daughter of an unmarried Catholic mother who had been in state care for a total of six years. The Purintons petitioned to adopt Kate even though Massachusetts law specified that children were to be placed in families that shared the religious faith of their **birth parents** whenever "practicable." In this case, the court upheld Kate's adoption over the objections of her birth mother, Mary Jamrock, and the Catholic Church, ever-vigilant against the child-stealing that had characterized the era of **Charles Loring Brace** and the **orphan trains**. Arguments for religious protection and matching had real merit, according to the court, but they could not trump all other considerations related to child welfare. "The first and paramount duty is to consult the welfare of the child."*

PETITION, filed in the Probate Court for the county of Franklin on April 25, 1905, by Jesse M. Purinton and Clara F. Purinton, his wife, both of Colrain, for the adoption of Kate Jamrock, a child of nine years of age at the time of the filing of the petition.

In the Probate Court *Thompson, J.* made a decree granting the petition. The respondent, Mary Jamrock, the mother of Kate Jamrock, appealed, assigning the following objections to the decree:

"First. That the respondent is the only parent of said child, and has never consented in writing or otherwise to said petition or decree. . . .

"Second. That the petition should be dismissed because it is alleged upon the record that said child is illegitimate, in that the petition alleges that said child is the child of a single woman, and such allegation is contrary to the provisions of law.

"Third. That the petitioner Jesse M. Purinton is not a fit person to be the adopted parent of said child, and that it will not be for the welfare of said child that said petition should be granted.

"Fourth. That the mother and sole legal parent of said child has always been a member of the Roman Catholic church, and that when said child was but a few days old she procured the child's baptism duly, and its reception into membership of the said church, and [said child] was brought up by her in the said church, and said mother has never consented to the child being educated or trained in any other form or doctrine of any other religious belief.

"Fifth. That the said mother has a natural, inherent and constitutional right to be protected by the State in her prerogatives as the sole parent of said child, and cannot be deprived of them by reason of poverty or misfortune, nor can the State usurp, deprive, or declare forfeit the appellant's rights in and to said child, or transfer the possession of her perpetually to any other person without her consent.

"Sixth. That the petitioners are of a different religious faith from that of the mother of said child, and intend, if their petition is granted, to educate said child in their own religious belief, and that it is the right of the appellant that said child, while of such tender years as to be herself incapable of exercising a rational choice in this respect, shall not be educated in a religion other than that of her mother, the appellant. . . .

The Chief Justice refused to rule as requested; and made the following findings of fact and order for a decree:

"The petitioners are about forty years of age, childless, and without expectation of having children of their blood. They live in a small town, in a comfortable home, in a good and healthful neighborhood. They are not possessed of a large property, but from their savings and earnings, with or without a possible inheritance, they reasonably expect to be able to give the child a suitable support and education. The petitioner, Clara F. Purinton, is a woman of exceptional fitness and unusual qualifications to become a parent of such a child by adoption. She was a teacher before her marriage, and by disposition and temperament as well as education, she seems a proper person to perform the duties of a mother to this girl. . . .

"It was proved that during the years that the child had lived in the family of the petitioners they came to have a very strong affection for her, and that she showed much fondness for them. . . .

The evidence satisfies me that the interests of the child will be greatly promoted by granting the petition for adoption. . . . The petition should be granted unless some good reason is shown to the contrary.

"It appeared that the petitioners are accustomed to attend the Baptist church, and that, during her stay in Colrain, the child had been a member of the Sunday school connected with that church. She was baptized in the Roman Catholic church. Her mother is a Roman Catholic, and she objects to having her child reared in a Protestant family. This objection is entitled to consideration, although it does not appear to be of great weight. . . . Certainly her [the birth mother's] seeming indifference and her lack of any

personal relations with her child for nearly six years, makes her wishes on such a subject not so important as they otherwise would be. . . .

It is undoubtedly the general policy of the Commonwealth to secure to those of its wards who are children of tender years the right to be brought up, where this is reasonably practicable, in the religion of their parents. But it is the right of the children that is protected by this statute. . . . In such a case as this it is not the rights of the parent that are chiefly to be considered. The first and paramount duty is to consult the welfare of the child. The wishes of the parent as to the religious education and surroundings of the child are entitled to weight; if there is nothing to put in the balance against them, ordinarily they will be decisive. If, however, those wishes cannot be carried into effect without sacrificing what the courts sees to be for the welfare of the child, they must so far be disregarded. The court will not itself prefer one church to another, but will act without bias for the welfare of the child under the circumstances of each case. . . .

The right of the parents is not an absolute right of property, but is in the nature of a trust reposed in them, and is subject to their correlative duty to care for and protect their child; and the law secures their right only so long as they shall discharge their obligation. . . .

Source: 195 Massachusetts Reports 189-190, 194-196, 199-201.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## The "R" Family Case (Catholic Charities), 1941

*In the following extract from an adoption [home study](#), there appear a number of abbreviations that were common in [social work](#) narratives. FM stands for foster mother, FF stands for foster father, and HF stands for home finder.*

---

Present situation: Couple said they have been married for twelve years. Both have received complete physical examinations and have been informed by Dr. D. that there is no apparent physical reasons why they cannot have a child. Their estimated monthly income is a little over \$300. Last Spring they built a new home in B----- and have been successful in completely furnishing it. The couple said they were anxious to adopt a boy in the neighborhood of one year of age. Both listened very carefully to explanation given them of our investigation, and both emphasized that they would like a child as soon as possible. HF made it clear to them that we could give them no assurance of an early placement. Couple explained that they wished to adopt a child for a long time, but had not taken the necessary steps in the past because of Mr. R's employment, which necessitated them moving about the country and living in apartments. His employment in Pittsburgh now has an aspect of permanency. Advised that investigation would start upon receipt of completed application form. . . .

Marriage: FM and FF were married at St. J---- Church, W-----, on April 13, 1929 with Monsignor S----- W----- performing the ceremony.

According to the couple, both wanted children from the beginning of their married life and FM consulted doctors during her travels with her husband to ascertain the reason for her inability to conceive. Probably the physician who gave her the most attention and is most familiar with her case is Dr. J---- D---- of C----- A-----. Dr. D----- confirmed to HF foster parents' statement that they had both been examined by him and pronounced physically fit and capable of having children.

References bore out the fact that the couple appeared to their friends to be well-adjusted and happy with one another. All of the references emphasized FF's unusual character and personality, at the same time, speaking of FM in positive terms. . . .

It was Dr. D----- who first revealed, under promise of absolute

confidence, that at one time FF had consulted a psychiatrist about his wife. Dr. D----- did not state directly the reason why FF had felt it necessary to see a psychiatrist and indicated the fact that he had given any information on this subject must be kept from FPs. It was decided in view of this to call FF into the office to try to lead him to discuss frankly the sexual maladjustment which it was felt existed between the couple. When approached on the subject, FF was unusually frank and honest in his discussion and expressed a great deal of understanding. He said after he married FM he learned that she had absorbed through religion and through her mother's attitude a rather distorted conception of the role of sex in the life of a married couple and consented to endure intercourse at very rare intervals. FF said he had done nothing about this for approximately two years' time other than hope that her attitude would slowly change as time went on. However, when it became evident that his wife's attitude did not spring merely from innocence and inexperience but appeared to be something which he could not change, he consulted a physician who agreed to talk with FM about the matter. FF said although two physicians had talked with FM about the matter in the meantime, he felt he should consult Dr. M-----, local psychiatrist, and the latter had seen his wife on two occasions. Dr. M----- advised FF directly to simply dominate the situation and not permit his wife to refuse him intercourse. FF said he felt there has been a marked change in her since the psychiatrist talked with her and added quite frankly that he felt she had adjusted to the entire situation to the best of her ability. FF explained that his wife would never receive any satisfaction or pleasure out of intercourse, but he, himself, was willing to accept it as such since he was convinced that she was handling her own unnatural attitude to the best of her ability and making a sincere effort to provide him with some satisfaction. FF's discussion of the entire situation was very honest and direct and it was possible to conduct the interview without revealing to him the fact that Dr. D----- had first indicated that there was some emotional maladjustment between the couple. He admitted that during the first few years of their married life the problem of their sexual maladjustment had been a constant source of friction between them, but he said now that FM was meeting the situation to the best of her ability. . . .

8/23/42 At a meeting of the foster care committee, the question of the advisability of approving the R's home was under discussion for a great length of time. A number of the supervisors felt that FM's inability to accept and adjust to the idea of a physical relationship with her husband after twelve years of married life was a definite indication of a type of frigidity which was not only deep-rooted, but which would have its influence on the child. One or two of the members present felt, however, that her poor adjustment in the sex realm was not necessarily indicative of any inherent short-comings as a mother. The former group out-weighed the latter, however, and at this time the home was not approved as an adoption home. . . .

Source: "R" family case, Dorothy Hutchinson Papers, Box 2, Folder 27, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

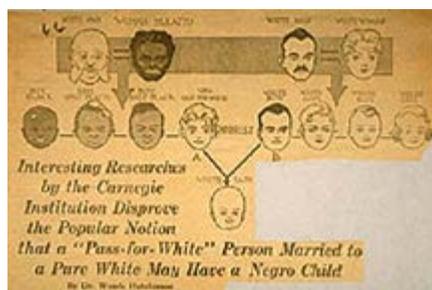
Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Sheldon Reed, Dight Institute for Human Genetics to R.T. Wilbur, Des Moines, Iowa Division of Child Welfare, November 26, 1957



This undated newspaper clipping reports on a Carnegie Institution study disproving "the popular notion that a 'pass-for-white' person married to a pure white may have a negro child." Concerns about whether traits like dark skin might reappear in future generations were prominent in the adoptions of mixed-race children.

Dear Mr. Wilbur:

Thank you very much for your letter of inquiry about the Dight Institute and the relationship of genetics to adoption practices. . . .

The question of adoptability of children with some Negro heredity is one which results in my seeing babies practically every week to determine whether there is actually an appreciable amount of Negro blood present and if there is, what type of placement would be likely to be satisfactory.

The general principle which you inquire about is concerned with the mechanism of heredity of Negroid traits. They behave in a very straight-forward fashion and are not concealed in the recessive condition as are such traits as albinism and blue eyes. Thus, if a Negro marries a white person his African ancestry will show in some or all of his children and the degree to which the African traits show will depend upon the proportion of their father's Negro heredity which each child received. No child can received more Negro heredity than the Negro parent possessed. Therefore the child cannot be any more Negroid than his Negro parent. Generally he will only receive a part of the Negro heredity and will therefore be less Negroid than the Negro parent.

If two Negroes marry the children can get some Negro heredity from both parents which may add together to give a more Negroid child than either parents as well as less Negroid children who got a large proportion of the white heredity from their Negro parents. . . .

If you would like to collect some of the babies with alleged colored blood together on some one day in January or

February, I would be glad to give a short talk and examine them, pointing out the diagnostic characteristics which are useful. I am willing to give my time but under the circumstances would expect Iowa to pay my traveling expenses. I have given an Institute on Genetics and Adoption to the Pacific Child Welfare Groups in Los Angeles and have been asked to repeat it for them in March.

If I can be of further help to you in any way, please let me know.

Very sincerely yours,

Sheldon Reed  
Director, Dight Institute on Human Genetics  
University of Minnesota

Source: Sheldon Reed to R.T. Wilbur, November 26, 1957, International Social Service, American Branch Papers, Box 10, Folder: "Adoption Plans of Racially Mixed Children 1954-1965," Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Sheldon C. Reed, "Skin Color," 1955

*Sheldon Reed, of the Dight Institute for Human Genetics at the University of Minnesota, consulted frequently with adoption agencies in cases where **matching** was elusive and problematic rather than easy and natural. His career suggests that deep anxieties about ambiguous racial status persisted in adoption long after the **eugenics** movement of the early twentieth century had disappeared, along with its frank advocacy of sterilization and race betterment. After 1945, the horror of race-mixing was expressed in the politer form of genetic counseling.*

It is most remarkable that the largest single group of requests for information and counseling at the Dight Institute concerns the heredity of skin color. Most of the requests come from adoption agencies and concern the feasibility of placing for adoption children of mixed racial ancestry. The children are usually brought to the Dight Institute for an opinion as to their ability to "pass for white." The inevitable question is what the skin color and general features will be of the *offspring* of the children being considered. These children will marry into the white community if their placement is there. The potential foster parents are always perturbed about the old myth that a "black baby" is likely to appear from such a marriage. Such tales have been scientifically investigated a number of times and never have been found to have any basis in fact.

In all cases investigated where a person of mixed ancestry marries a white person, no child is ever darker than the mixed-ancestry parent, and the usual condition is that the offspring are usually intermediate between the parents in general appearance. . . .

The problem of trying to decide whether a baby will be able to pass for white as an adult is not quite so simple as that of disposing of the "black baby" myth. Not enough research on the heredity of racial differences has been done to provide us with unequivocal answers. However, we must do the best we can with what we have. Problems affecting people today have to be solved today, and by following up our best guesses we can get some idea as to which of them were correct. Some diagnostic criteria for estimating whether a child can "pass for white" and thus enjoy the better socio-economic conditions of the white community are given below.

- (A) The Sacral Spot. . .
- (B) Finger Smudges. . .
- (C) Skin Color. . .
- (D) Nose Width. . .
- (E) Thickness of Lips. . .
- (F) Eye Fold. . .
- (G) Hair Shape and Texture. . .

The conclusion from these considerations is that the children from racial crosses are probably the most vigorous and healthy stock generally available for adoption. As there is little demand for them, the supply is good. If potential foster parents are found to be free of racial prejudices and also match the children to some extent in appearance, the placement can be expected to be highly successful. That has been the experience with the follow-ups of children seen at the Dight Institute. It should be emphasized that the parents must be informed of the presence of a dash of "colored blood," and it must be clear that they are capable of accepting the fact without emotion before the child is placed with them.

#### ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES

. . . *Request*

"Sixteen years ago I adopted a little girl from an orphanage. The mother was unmarried and she told the Sister in charge of the orphanage that the father was white. The girl has now grown up to be a nice young lady and we love her very much. The only thing that puzzled us was her hair because it is always real dry and kinky like Negroes' hair. It got to a point where the children in school would call her "nigger" and it made her very sad. You see, she does not know she is adopted as yet. My curiosity got the best of me and I went back to the orphanage and had the Sister check on the girl's father. It turned out that he was a mulatto.

"Now my worry is, will she be able to marry and have white children or is there a possibility of her children being colored? We love our daughter very much and would hate to see her hurt later on. This has upset me very much and I don't know what to do.

*Reply*

. . . Your daughter will marry a white man, no doubt, and we can assure you that her children won't look any more Negroid than she does, as her Negro heredity will be reduced by one-half in her children.

Source: Sheldon C. Reed, "Skin Color," in *Counseling in Medical Genetics* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company, 1955), 153-160.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Sheldon Reed and Esther B. Nordlie, "Genetic Counseling: For Children of Mixed Racial Ancestry," 1961



An exhibit comparing white and Negro fetuses from the Eugenics Record Office at Cold Spring Harbor, 1921. The Eugenics Record Office was the hub of [eugenics](#) research before 1940.

We have had considerable experience at the Dight Institute in working with adoption agencies in the placement of children of mixed racial ancestry. Mrs. Esther Nordlie and I have just completed a follow-up of the results of the placement of such children and will summarize the results here, as this is the first study of its kind. It is probable that genetic counselors will be increasingly occupied with this topic as interracial unions are likely to continue in the United States. The casual unions often result in children who become available for adoption. . . .

The problem of placing "pure" Negro, Indian or Mexican children is difficult only because few families of these minority groups request children for adoption. Ordinarily, no attempt would be made to place these babies in Caucasian families as the child or the adoptive parents would probably find social adjustment too difficult. However, children of mixed racial origin may "pass for white" or resemble the Caucasian adoptive parents sufficiently so that placement in a white family is feasible. Such placement is desirable for the child as the socioeconomic environment is assumed to be more favorable there. This would be true only if the racial appearance of the child would permit acceptance in the white community. Many white couples are desperately anxious to adopt children. Some are sufficiently free from racial prejudices to be able to adopt children of mixed racial ancestry, if a reasonable "match" between child and adoptive parents can be made. The critical prediction rests with the geneticist (or anthropologist) who must project the appearance of a small baby ahead to the child of five or six when entering school. . . .

One would suppose that predicting the chances for a child

to "pass for white" would be quite simple. Such, however, is not the case. The main difficulty is that these traits, when present in the racial hybrid, may not be apparent in an infant but develop over the years. Hair texture and skin color are the most important traits and at the same time the most difficult to predict. The baby may have no hair; it is well known that babies with considerable Negro ancestry may look quite light at birth and darken considerably during childhood. The geneticist is thus vulnerable to mistakes in his predictions as to the future appearance of the baby. One could take the attitude that unless the geneticist can make his prediction with certainty he should not enter the picture at all. Such reasoning is absurd. The baby is in the custody of the adoption agency and the agency must make some provision for this child.

Source: Sheldon C. Reed and Esther B. Nordlie, "Genetic Counseling: For Children of Mixed Racial Ancestry," *Eugenics Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (September 1961): 157-158.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Joseph Reid to Paul Smith, September 15, 1955

*Joseph Reid, the Executive Director of the [Child Welfare League of America](#), wrote the following letter of protest to the editor of the *Woman's Home Companion* after Pearl Buck's "[The Children Waiting: The Shocking Scandal of Adoption](#)" appeared in the September 1955 issue of that magazine.*

---

Dear Mr. Smith:

Miss Buck's article contains many statements which are inaccurate and grossly misleading. We request, therefore, that this letter be printed in a forthcoming issue [of the *Woman's Home Companion*] to correct certain misstatements which, if accepted by your readers, would result in harm to the welfare of children. . . .

The article as at best not factual and at worst verges on the slanderous. The general impression is that child welfare agencies for a variety of unsupported reasons are refusing to make available children who are clamoring for adoption. This is not true.

The following are paraphrases of some of the assertions made by Miss Buck which we believe to be in serious error, together with our presentation of the facts as we know them.

1) "Most children in institutions could be made available for adoption. Their parents have abandoned them."

REPLY: There are about 100,000 children in institutions. Less than 3 per cent are full orphans. Others have at least one living parent. Over half of all children in institutions are returned to their own homes after an average stay of 1.7 years away. . . . Research studies have indicated that from 12 to 18 per cent of older children in foster care can be made available for adoption if adoption agencies were able to untangle the legal barriers which now hold them and could find homes for them. These children constitute a real and tragic problem, but the article seriously distorts the facts by leading readers to believe that all of the children could be placed and that institutions are not needed. . . .

2) "Orphanages are maintained to supply jobs for staff. Institutions keep

children for selfish motives.”

REPLY: . . . A nation-wide study reveals 15 jobs for every trained social worker in the country. It is nonsense to state that children are being retained in institutions merely to supply jobs for staff. Social workers can have their pick of a variety of positions in their field.

3) “Religion is the strongest force in keeping children from being adopted.”

REPLY: Many states have legislation requiring that children be placed in homes of their own religious faith. Regardless of the merit of such laws, they do not prevent children from being adopted. Our estimates show that at least six Catholic families apply for each Catholic child available for adoption; ten Protestant families seek each Protestant child; and there are even more Jewish families for every adoptable Jewish child. . . . The only exception to this statement applies to non-white children. There is an extreme shortages of adoptive homes for non-white children of all faiths. . . .

The basic problem in present child welfare practices is not venality or selfishness. It is public apathy, lack of funds, and lack of public understanding. . . . The nation’s child care programs reflect what the public is willing to pay for. It is misleading to talk about this problem without discussing costs. Good child care is not cheap. Those who know the nature of the problem must be determined and outspoken about it. . . . Name calling is not the answer.

Sincerely yours,

Joseph H. Reid  
Executive Director, Child Welfare League of America

Source: Joseph Reid to Paul Smith, September 15, 1955, Child Welfare League of America Papers, Box 15, Folder 7, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman





## Loretta Renn, "The Single Woman as a Foster Mother," 1948

*This study was based on the records of fifty-five children placed with single women by the New York Foundling Hospital, a private child-placing agency. Renn interviewed three foster mothers and their respective case workers at the Catholic agency. Miss Gertrude R. was one of them.*

---

This is a study of three single women, each in the employ of a child placing agency, who have, in spite of their unmarried state, made successful foster mothers.

With the present shortage of foster homes, the whole philosophy of home finding has broadened, and many formerly untried resources have been tapped. Yet, in spite of this, we find that the employment of single women as foster mothers is an area which has had comparatively little exploration. In attempting to discuss this possibility with other workers in the child placing field, I have usually been met with a startled elevation of eyebrows and the patient query, "Well, are they ever used?" or, "Of course they don't work out!" From here on, it is anybody's discussion while I expertly dodge such phrases as, "a child's right to a balanced family". . . "abnormal women compensating for frustration". . . "retardation of child's emotional growth" which are hurled with feeling from all directions. Occasionally, an unusually perceptive soul will conclude that perhaps single women do have a place in the child-care set-up, but she wonders where it is, or how we can know until they are tried. . . .

Does the unmarried foster mother work equally well with both sexes and all ages of children? Is it possible for her to let the child go? What about over-possession, which is a commonly accepted tendency on the part of the single woman? Is it possible to generalize on the types of service the unmarried foster mother is able to give to a child placing agency? Finally, does the fact that a woman is unmarried necessarily mean that she will not be able to give a child that which is necessary for his emotional development?. . . .

Miss Gertrude R.

Miss Gertrude R. has boarded five children in the past three years, continuing the work of her sister, Miss Elizabeth R., who died suddenly in

1942. From 1931 until the time of her death, Miss Elizabeth boarded nine girls, three of whom remained in the home when Miss Gertrude R. was formally accepted as a foster mother. Of that group, two were under two when placed in the home, and one was four. The two children who have been placed since Miss Gertrude R. has become the foster mother, were two years of age at the time of placement. Of this group, one child was discharged to her mother and one was transferred to an adoptive home. Three children remain with Miss R. at the present time: two little girls of two and a half, and one child of eight.

Miss R., who is thirty-eight years old, is thin, slight of build, and rather drab in appearance. Not particularly responsive to adults, she is, nevertheless, courteous and sincere. Her sincere manner is at times surprisingly off-set by a casual gesture and a quick spurt of humor, which seems to transform her for a moment from a very plain type of woman to a rather vital person. In spite of the fact that her vocabulary is limited, and her conversation rather colorless, she gives the impression of being very interested in activities about the home. She is somewhat prim in demeanor; but there is no evidence of the compulsive neatness which is usually associated with this type of person. Her home has a definitely "lived-in" appearance, and one would feel that it is almost exclusively utilized for the children. Doll carriages and roller skates present the greatest hazards to visitors, and it is very possible that, on a rainy afternoon, one would have to step rather high through the clutter of blocks, paint boxes, sewing sets, and musical toys in the living-room.

Although not particularly interested in men, Miss R. has no apparent aversion to them. It is probable that she has not felt any particular desire for male companionship. Her social contacts are limited, and she may have had little opportunity, or created little opportunity, to meet men who would be interested in her. It is quite possible, however, that should she "meet the right man" she might, like her sister, marry late in life. . . .

When applying, Miss R. expressed the motive to be the desire to carry on the care for the children left in her home by the death of her sister. She said that she loved the children dearly, and inasmuch as that was really their home she was fearful of what transfer might do to them. The house, she said, would be empty without them, and she herself would be quite lonely. She had a deep feeling of responsibility toward the girls who had been there for years, and she wished to continue caring for them, at least until permanent plans could be made. It was her original plan to take care of only the girls who were already in the home. Although this was, perhaps, her conscious motive, we see a deeper meaning in the fact that she took other children when two of the original group left her home. It is easily seen that although she sincerely meant to prevent the necessity of moving the children to another home, at the time of her sister's death, she still had personal needs which would be satisfied only by the possession of the children. . . .

Dolores, another girl of the original group, was placed in an adoptive

home. Dolores, born in 1936, was placed with Miss Elizabeth R. at the age of one and a half. A happy, active, well-balanced child, she was greatly loved by the R. sisters. When she entered school, however, she began to see the difference between herself and the other little girls who had father and mother. Miss Gertrude R. smilingly recalls the day Dolores came home and told her she wanted a Daddy. Taking this as a very natural request and not as a personal challenge, Miss R. handled the situation with admirable poise. She told Dolores that she would see what she could do about getting a Daddy for her, emphasizing the fact that this is quite the usual thing for little girls to have Mommies and Daddies, thereby not being on the defensive, but easy and natural. The next time they went to the agency together, Miss R. gravely told the supervisor of Dolores's wish. As the child's mother had recently died, Dolores was released for adoption, and a few months later, she went to meet her prospective adoptive parents. "Aunt Gertie" explained that being adopted meant becoming someone's very own child, and going to live with two people who would become her very own Mommy and Daddy. Dolores thought she would like that, and was especially delighted with the Daddy idea. . . .

Helen, age eight, has been in this home since infancy, and is still there. Her adjustment has been good and she, too, is very fond of Miss R. Helen, however, shares this affection with her mother, who is a frequent visitor to the home. "The children all know that I am not their mother," Miss R. explained, "and if they have mothers of their own they are encouraged to visit." This we know as a fact, for both Misses R. were adept at handling the parent problem. . . .

Miss R. shows no undue concern over the fact that most of her children are illegitimate. Having learned this time and time again from the individual mothers themselves, Miss R. is able to discuss the situation quite openly and factually, neither excusing nor blaming them, and certainly not even considering that it could make any difference in her feelings toward the children. . . .

Miss R. prefers to take children about eighteen months of age because, "You can train them into your own ways," She likes them to remain in her home until they are about nine, unless their parents take them before then. She showed considerable conflict about the handling of older children chiefly because they become interested in sex. Miss R. cited the example of one of the girls who had boarded with her sister, and who at the age of nine was "crazy about the boys." In a confidential tone Miss R. explained, "She used to ride down the hill on her bicycle with a group of boys and you can't tell what might happen. We couldn't stand for that!" One gets the impression that her own inability to handle every-day normal boy and girl relationships would make it impossible for her to take the responsibility which the care of an adolescent child would involve. . . .

That these three women were, in spite of their unmarried state, good foster mothers, there is no doubt. There can be others just as successful in almost any foster home agency which will consider the applications of

single women. They should be selected with their assets and liabilities well considered, and with the same general philosophy which we use in choosing any foster parent. I feel that with this in mind they open up to us a new field for the placement of children with certain needs, if used with discrimination.

Source: "The Single Woman as a Foster Mother," in *Studies of Children*, Gladys Meyer, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), 59, 60, 69-70, 71, 72-74, 75, 95.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Report on the First International Conference on Transracial Adoption, 1969



*This anonymous report was written by a staff member at Louise Wise Services, a prominent New York adoption agency. The final comments comparing Canada to the United States suggest that many American adoption professionals refused to place African-American children with white parents long before the famous [statement by the National Association of Black Social Workers](#) condemned [transracial adoptions](#) in 1972.*

The first International Conference on Transracial Adoption met in Montreal, Canada at McGill University from May 30 - June 1, 1969. This conference was sponsored by the Open Door Society, Inc., a voluntary organization composed of parents who have adopted children of minority groups. The aim of this organization is to encourage the general acceptance of children of interracial and minority group origin. There are 24 parent groups of which 19 are in the U.S.A.

There were 400 delegates to the conference, 18 states were represented. There was one delegate from Seoul, Korea. The delegates included parents and social workers with the latter being the largest in attendance. From some states there were more parents represented than professionals. From New York there were 32 social workers and 6 parents. Many expressed the feeling that this conference could have been interesting to Board members of the agencies.

This conference focussed on the experiences of Caucasian families who have adopted racially mixed children. Although the admixtures are of a wide variety, the majority of children adopted by the members of the Open Door Society are part Black.

The guest speaker at a dinner on Friday evening was Dr. Howard McCurdy, a Black Canadian. He emphasized that there is discrimination against Blacks in Canada just as there is in the U.S.A. Although the Caucasian parent adopting a part Black child may not see his child as that different, society does. However, because the

Caucasian parent has not been as "wounded" by society as the Black parent, he can better transmit positive values to the child than the Black parent. The Black child in a Caucasian family can be less suspicious of Caucasians, can trust more and, therefore, love more. The Black child from a Caucasian home is able to handle the vicissitudes of life if he understands the worth of both heritages. Because of his heritage the Black child is able to share in something that the Caucasian parents cannot and this Dr. McCurdy called "Soul." (This is no different from what we hear from other minority groups.) However, there are many things which they can share together. Dr. McCurdy felt that Caucasian parents who adopt Black children must help to eliminate prejudice in society as a whole. I might add that this statement was made many times throughout the conference.

On Saturday there were 8 sessions which ran concurrently so that each delegate was able to attend two seminars.

I attended one on "A Question of Identity" and another on "Public Relations and Interracial Adoption."

In the seminar on "A Question of Identity" Dr. Leighton Hutson (a Black psychologist who does vocational counselling at the Jewish Vocation Service in Montreal and who is also a psycho-therapist) spoke. The points which he emphasized were:

1. Man's basic concern is a definition of himself. Each person is engaged in this pursuit.
2. The Black man in this country as well as in Canada has gone through different stages with an identity which was assigned to him by Caucasian society. In other words he was told what he was. He is now struggling to find an identity of his own. Dr. Hutson then traced the development of racism in this country and how it is based on the image which Caucasian society has of Blacks. Dr. Hutson emphasized that identity is based on feelings and facts. The fact of the child's blackness must be dealt with as it is dealt with in society. It was his contention, and the experience of the members of the Open Door Society that a child who is recognizably Black has less difficulty in a Caucasian family than a mixed child. The question of how the teenage Black child reared in a Caucasian home feels about himself in today's society was not answered. There does not seem to have been, as yet, a pulling together of facts on this subject. . . .

The following is a summary of points recurring in all sessions:

1. Adoption and not race is the issue in transracial placements.
2. Identity is of particular concern to an adopted child.
3. Community attitudes attribute a process of "judgment" to agencies, preventing an honest exchange of knowledge and feelings between social workers and adopting parents. The question of

motivation in transracial adoption, with the possibility of having parents who are more interested in a "cause" than in their individual child is of concern to both workers and parents. In evaluating these, the social worker's own prejudices come under question. . . .

Observations made:

1. There were no Indians in attendance at this conference. There were few Blacks.
2. There was no discussion of overseas children.

Because this initial effort was so successful, a second International Conference is planned for Boston, Mass., in the fall of 1970 or the spring of 1971.

The Canadians seem less ambivalent than Americans about transracial placements. Their emphasis is on finding more homes for these children. Here in New York City there are agencies that are no longer considering Black or interracial children for white families. This may be indicative of the amount of conflict about these placements, whether they are right or wrong and whether they are in the best interest of the children.

This issue, as is the larger racial issue in this country, is far from being resolved.

Source: Report on the first International Conference on Transracial Adoption, 1969, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 162, Folder 7, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Chauncey Richardson to Washington City Orphan Asylum, March 12, 1912

Matrons

Washington City Orphan Asylum

Dear Madam:

If your institution dismisses girls at a certain age, and finds for them homes where they can earn a living under favorable conditions, I wish I might give such a one employment at my home in Chevy Chase.

I have a wife and one child—no servants—a small house, an acre of ground, and many conveniences for the facilitating of the work, such as electric lights, pumping engine, water-heater, gas range, etc.

Mrs. Richardson is well fitted to instruct a girl in the valuable points of cooking, sewing and other housework, and the experience would be worth as much as the money.

In writing this I have tried to anticipate some of the questions that will arise, but I will cheerfully answer more. Or, I can call at the Asylum if so desired.

Yours respectfully,

C.E. Richardson

March 12, 1912

Source: E.E. Richardson to Matrons, Washington Orphan Asylum, March 12, 1912, Hillcrest Children's Center Papers, Box 3, Folder: "Indentures, Adoptions, Court Orders 1870-1923, 1941," Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Virginia Robinson, "Analysis of Processes in the Records of Family Case Working Agencies," 1921

*Virginia Robinson was a faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work for many years, an advocate of **therapeutic** approaches to child placement, and an adoptive parent. She raised two children with her partner, **Jessie Taft**.*

---

Like any profession which is founded on scientific method, social casework must move through three stages: (1) observation and assembling of its facts, (2) hypothetical interpretation of these facts, and (3) control of the facts for new ends. . . .

To differentiate social case treatment in the technical sense from the more or less haphazard, unscientific, but kindly and often very helpful "influencing," "guiding," "helping out" process which goes on wherever human beings associate is a task in which case workers must make some headway if case work is to take rank with the professions which are firmly founded in scientific method. . . .

In the field of medicine, with a longer tradition and a wider experience than social work, there are certain commonly taught and accepted treatment processes for certain disease conditions. . . . Case workers have as yet no common basis of knowledge or technique so that they can merely indicate a line of treatment in symbolic terms and expect all case workers will understand what the worker was doing. . . .

The worker's point of view, her philosophy of life, her own adjustment to life, are an essential part of her equipment and constitute part of her method in every piece of case work. But we are still in the stage of regarding these as personal factors in equipment and of wishing to exclude any recognition of them from our case records. A hang over of self-consciousness restrains us from mentioning ourselves in the case record. Is not our refusal to recognize and analyze these personal factors an indication of the subjectivity and not the objectivity of our present level of case work and of record writing? We will never succeed in objectifying these personal factors by ignoring them but rather by trying to record and analyze them as impartially as we do all the other factors that enter into

treatment. Only when we have objectified and analyzed them to the same extent that we have the methods by which we manipulate the environment and when by so doing some of these processes have become standardized, can we afford to eliminate them from our records.

Source: Virginia P. Robinson, "Analysis of Processes in the Records of Family Case Working Agencies," *Family* 2 (July 1921): 101, 103, 105-106.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Sample Letter to Families Applying for Infants Where the Woman is Over 40 Years of Age, early 1940s

*Age limits for adoption applicants have been typical features of agency adoptions. Although this excerpt makes it clear that age limits served the important practical purpose of limiting the applicant pool for healthy infants, the official rationale had to do with **matching**. Placing children with parents of normal reproductive age was preferable in order to give all parties the feeling that nature could, at least in theory, have brought them together.*

We have given your recent letter telling us of your wish to adopt a baby very thoughtful consideration. I realize that it must be very disappointing to you that we cannot consider your application at this time. However, we know from experience how much wiser and more considerate it is to be realistic about our limitations.

We have only a very limited number of children coming to our care and about 500 families who have applied to us. Although we are constantly striving to increase the number of children referred to us so that we may consider a larger number of families, there has been as yet no substantial increase. For this reason it is necessary for us to choose families not only on the basis of their merits as families, but primarily on the individual needs of the particular children we happen to have coming to us.

Since most of our children are the very tiny infants, we feel that for the present we must limit our applications to those families where the mother is under forty year of age. If we are able to increase the number of toddlers or older children coming to us, we will be happy to consider an application like yours. We do not want to raise your hopes falsely and therefore want to explain what the situation is and the reasons why we must limit the number of applications.

We will, however, be glad to note your interest in adoption and should we get a substantial number of older children, we will be glad to get in touch with you and discuss your interest further.

W. Bernard Papers, Box 157, Folder 2, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library,  
Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:

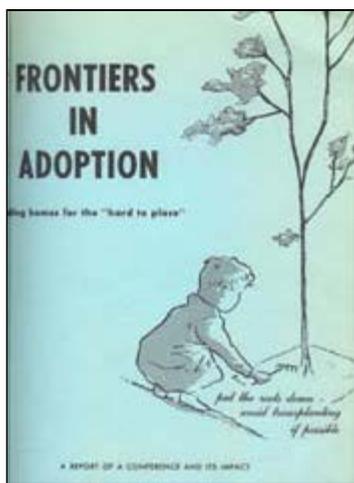


**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact  
Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Michael Schapiro, *A Study of Adoption Practice, Adoption of Children With Special Needs*, 1956



Parent-led organizations like the Council on Adoptable Children, became critical to the progress of [special needs adoptions](#) during the 1960s. The illustration above is from a report on a conference, "Frontiers in Adoption," organized by adoptive parents Peter and Joyce Forsythe in Ann Arbor, Michigan in October 1967. The text at the bottom reads: "Put the roots down—avoid transplanting if possible."

Whatever the number of children with special needs who currently need adoptive homes may be, enough experience and information are at hand to make clearly discernible certain factors limiting the ability of agencies to find as many homes as are required. These factors are interrelated and often cannot be separated out without distorting their total configuration. An attempt will be made here to arrange them in order of importance, beginning with those of a broad, pervasive nature that cut across the entire social fabric and ending with those that are fairly specific to agency adoption practice.

The first factor is the relatively low status of the nonwhite and other minority group people in our population from the economic, occupational and educational point of view. This raises serious question as to the extent to which couples in minority groups can meet the standards that agencies are following in selecting adoptive parents, whether expressly or by chance. There seems little doubt that a more appropriate application of standards in specific instances if their attempts to place minority group children are to be genuinely realistic. Agencies will have to reach some occupational groups in their communities that have either not been reached at all or have been drawn upon in very limited numbers. Employment of minority-group adoptive mothers may have to be accepted, for example, if there is adequate supervision. . . .

The second limiting factor that needs to be reckoned with is that the Negro, the Latin American, the Puerto Rican and other minority group children are distributed over the country unevenly, just as their natural parents are. . . .

The kind of distribution of the minority groups from which most children with special needs come is an important demographic factor that affects adversely their chances of finding permanent

homes. This is true because most of the states enumerated are regions of lesser economic resources as compared with other states in our country, a fact which usually means that they are characterized by inadequate educational and social opportunities and a paucity of welfare and medical services. The incidence of illegitimacy and family disorganization—phenomena which usually contribute heavily to the need for adoptive services—is likely to be high in them, which the availability of suitable adoptive homes may be relatively low. . . .

The task of interpretation to the community is therefore of primordial importance to which constant, consistent, and conscious attention must be devoted. Explaining adoption to the community is complicated by largely negative community attitudes toward dependency, certain types of behavior and social breakdown in general, especially when they appear in minority groups.

One of the first prerequisites for changing these community attitudes into positive and supportive ones is a firm conviction on the part of the agencies themselves that negative attitudes are not justified and that the pressure of applicants for normal and healthy Caucasian infants ought not to relegate to a secondary place the development of services for children with special needs. In efforts to counteract negative or apathetic community attitudes, the attitudes of social workers themselves are important. Social workers, like other people, are the products of their inherited endowments and their experiences in family and community living. The disciplines of their professional training often bring them into conflict with prejudiced or uninformed ways of thinking and acting, but should furnish conviction that leads to action on the basis of sound information and increased understanding. . . .

Clearly, efforts in all directions must be multiplied and expanded if children now waiting are to be served, to say nothing of others who may also need but are not reaching agencies for many reasons, including the nonexistence of services for them. In order to be effective, however, these efforts must face squarely the limiting factors discussed above and their influence on the possibilities of adoption for these children.

In practical terms this means that many minority group, older and handicapped children who need adoptive homes may not find them in the near future, even if agency efforts are improved and multiplied. This, in turn, leads to the inescapable conclusion that other resources must be made available to them. The better part of wisdom in this connection would seem to be to couple a determined effort at recruitment of adoptive homes with an equally vigorous effort at developing a sufficient number of

adequate foster and boarding homes for these children in all communities in which they are found. This double-pronged attack is certainly justified by the well-established fact that there is a close connection between what adoption can and should do and the availability of other services for children in a given community—services to unmarried mothers, to children in their own and relatives' homes, to children needing foster homes and institutional care, financial assistance to those responsible for the rearing of children, and others.

Many reasons point to the conclusion that the outer limits of what can be done even now to find homes for children with special needs have by no means been reached: the number of such children who need adoption remains to be determined; scientific knowledge pertinent to their situations that is already at hand is still to be fully exploited, to say nothing of new knowledge that can be brought to bear from ongoing research; methods for securing more positive and ample community support have hardly been explored. Many children are "hard-to-place" only because sufficient publicity has not been given to their needs. The current scene does not seem to justify defeatism; on the contrary, a great deal has already been realized, and possibilities for future achievement appear unlimited. And while the road ahead is long and beset with pitfalls, it is well worth the struggle to traverse, since it leads to happy home life for countless children now deprived of it.

Source: Michael Schapiro, *A Study of Adoption Practice, Volume III: Adoption of Children With Special Needs* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1956), 44-46, 49, 54.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman





## Excerpt from Marshall D. Schechter, "Observations on Adopted Children," 1960

During the years 1948 through 1953, some 120 children were seen in private practice. Of this number, 16 were adopted. In checking how this number compared with the numbers of adopted children in the general population, we find that approximately 0.134% of children under 21 years of age have petitions filed for adoption. This number includes not only those placed by public agencies or through independent adoptions but also petitions filed by relatives in whose home the children have lived or by stepparents coming into the home through the marriage of the child's natural parent. In my series of cases the percentage of adoptive children seen equals 13.3, as compared with the national average of 0.134 (statistics compiled for 29 states). This indicates a hundredfold increase of patients in this category as seen in my practice, compared with what could be expected in the general population. . . .

It was not only the tremendously greater number that was of interest but the symptom pictures of the adopted children, their object relations, parental observations, and the question whether children who are adopted should be told of their adoption as early as has generally been recommended. These points will be discussed in what follows, as is highlighted in the clinical material presented by these cases. . . .

Case 8, a girl of 10 years, was presented for persistent enuresis. She spent most of her time in treatment telling of her fantasies regarding her real parents and her attempts to find her hidden birth certificate that contained the information she sought.

Case 15, a 12-year-old boy, was referred because of lying, stealing, and a lack of integration into the children's institution into which he had been placed. His activities suggested his desire for affection and a desperate feeling that he would never get sufficient amounts of it. He had constant fantasies of his real mother having red hair and of having the last name of Smith (which was not his adopted family name). . . .

In the foregoing case reports we could see how the idea of adoption had woven itself into the framework of the child's personality configuration. It played a role in symptom formation and object relationships. It certainly

also had an effect in later development, giving the stamp of an antisocial character in one of the cases and in another that of a paranoid delusional system. . . .

It would appear that children who have been adopted have potentially a more fertile soil for development of neurotic and psychotic states.

The knowledge of their adoptive status, so often coming in at the time of the Oedipal conflict, can seem to prolong and actually prevent the resolution of this particular area of personality development. There is a lack of boundaries constituting a self; rather, what can be seen is a diffuseness in poorly integrated identifications.

The anxiety these children manifest often refers to the possibility of returning to their original parents or, having been given up once for undetermined reasons, they may be given up again at some future time—also for undetermined, fantasied reasons. These concepts enhance the feeling of lack of closeness, and we again raise the question as to the timing of the knowledge of adoption prior to the resolving of the Oedipal phase.

The material presented suggests that the immature ego cannot cope with the knowledge of the rejection by its original parents, representing a severe narcissistic injury. The child tends to react to this information by character change or symptom formation. It is, therefore, recommended that the thorough investigation of the child and his environment should be accomplished to determine the method and timing of giving the information of his adopted status.

Source: Marshall D. Schechter, "Observations on Adopted Children," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 3 (July 1960):21, 29, 31.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)

[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman





## Joan F. Shireman and Penny R. Johnson, "Single Persons as Adoptive Parents," 1976

*From the outset, **single parent adoptions** were seen as beneficial chiefly for children who might otherwise have great difficulty finding permanent homes because of **special needs** related to race, age, and disability. Would-be single parents knew this, and expressed flexibility about the kinds of children they were willing to adopt. It is therefore surprising that this **outcome study** by two Illinois agencies shows that "low risk" infants were deliberately placed and efforts were made to **match** children with the stated preferences of single adopters. The authors suggest that this illustrated doubts about the ability of single parents as well as the desire to make these pioneering adoptions successful by making them as "safe" as possible.*

In an attempt to find permanent homes for as many children as possible, adoptive agencies have considered a variety of alternatives to the traditional placement of a child with a mother and father of his own race. The newest of these is placement of children with single parents, begun as recently as 1965 by the Los Angeles County Bureau of Adoptions. Placement with single persons has in general met with community acceptance; it seems that everyone knows of some child raised by a single person. Adoption workers have wondered, however, about whether a home with this "different" composition really offered a child a sufficient chance for normal growth and development.

Over the years the characteristics of the "hard-to-place" child have changed. As recently as five years ago there were few applicants for black infants; currently it is the older children and handicapped children for whom it is difficult to find homes. Thus at present the central question about the usefulness of single-parent homes is whether such homes can provide the environment needed by an older and/or handicapped child. Perhaps the answer to this can be determined, at least in part, by looking at the characteristics of these parents and the children they have already adopted.

### **The Research Design**

This report is a description of the experience of single parents who adopted

black infants from Chicago Child Care Society (CCCS) and Illinois Children's Home and Aid Society (ICH&A) (private, multiservice child welfare agencies) between June 1970 and June 1972. . . . At approximately four-year intervals, research interviewers assess the overall development of the child and the problems and rewards for the family which appear to stem from the adoption. . . .

This paper. . . contains descriptive information about the thirty-one single parents in our sample, the children placed with them, and some information about the initial adjustment of these families. Eighteen of them now have children four or five years old and have again been interviewed. Thus there is information about the development of these eighteen children and about the stresses these families have faced. . . .

It is evident that our knowledge of the growth and development of children in single-parent homes is sketchy, and we have no knowledge of what happens in such adoptive homes. . . .

### **Characteristics of the Single Applicants Who Adopted Children**

*General.*—Our sample of single parents contains twenty-eight women and three men. Three women are white, all the others black. These are all of the single persons with whom children were placed for adoption by CCCS and ICH&A between June 1970 and June 1972. The thirty-one applicants in our sample ranged in age from twenty-nine to fifty years, with a median age of thirty-four. Many of the single applicants had been married; fifteen were divorced, and three were widowed. None of the three men had ever married.

This was a varied group in terms of education, occupation, and income. Three of the applicants had not graduated from high school, while seven women had college degrees and an additional four had graduate degrees. About half of the applicants were engaged in professional occupations, including eight teachers, four nurses, two ministers, and one mental health worker. Another six were in clerical or sales work. Two additional persons were factory workers. Most of the remaining were in service-related occupations, for example, two beauticians, a nurses' aide, and a welfare attendant. Incomes were low from a high proportion of single applicants. Thirteen earned less than \$8,000 annually, and the median income was only \$9,000. . . .

### ***Capacity to handle life experiences***

Ratings were made of self-image, expectations of self, health, energy level, and use of defenses. These judgments, although difficult to make, focused on traits considered to be of major importance. On the whole, these applicants appeared to possess a positive self-image and to have high expectations of themselves. All but two showed constructive use of defenses, seemingly able to adapt to the problems and stresses of life in a way that indicated successful coping. But notable was the incomplete emancipation of many of these applicants from their parents. . . .

### ***Capacity to be a parent***

In a final set of assessments, most applicants were judged to possess a high capacity for nurturing a child, an important ingredient in providing a home. Most were also judged to manifest a high degree of sensitivity to the needs of children. They were considered empathetic persons with apparent ability to observe situations as the child sees them and interested in learning about children and their needs.

As a group, then, these applicants seemed well educated, stably employed, planful, and competent. They were characterized as having a strong desire for children and family life and were judged to be well endowed with those characteristics thought important for successful parenting. Problems mentioned frequently concerned the applicants' limited interest in friendships, particularly with adults of the opposite sex, the strong dependence of several upon their families, and their seeming inability to emancipate themselves from their parents. The most evident risk seemed to be the low income combined with family reliance on the employment of a single person. This danger may have been offset by the closeness and interdependence of these extended families. . . .

### **Characteristics of Children Placed**

The children placed in these adoptive homes may be considered a relatively low risk group. Most were very young and healthy, with good family histories and good care in one foster home prior to adoption.

Single parents usually received a child of their own sex. Boys were placed with all three men. Two of the five women with whom a boy was placed had previously adopted a girl. About 30 percent received infants under two months of age, and 40 percent received infants from four to eight months of age. Despite the apparent flexibility in stated preferences, the characteristics of the children placed tended to match closely the characteristics initially requested (or described as preferred) by the applicants. That is, the applicant who requested a girl under three months with no health problems was very likely to get a child identical or nearly identical to this request. Only two single parents received a child quite different from their preference. One requested a girl of toddler age and received an eight-month-old boy with a minor medical problem. The other requested a toddler boy, and the child placed was a three-month-old girl. This extremely high degree of congruence between type of child preferred and child placed may indicate uncertainty about the capacity of single-parent homes; a young, healthy child exactly like that preferred by the applicant may have seemed, as it doubtless was, the "safest" placement for a new type of adoption. . . .

### **Early Adjustment of the Children**

At the time of this report, eighteen single parent families had been revisited when the children were about four years old. . . .

*The families.*—There had been changes and crises between placement and

follow-up for many of these families. Only three families have remained completely stable. In three other families another child was adopted when the study child was three years old—in two of these an infant, in one a six-year-old girl. One mother (still unmarried) had a son born to her when her adopted child was three. . . . Three families reported moves, and two job changes; these seem to have caused little disruption.

Eight of the eighteen families have experienced serious illness during the four years. . . .

All of the parents were employed at follow-up with the exception of one who was temporarily laid off. . . .

Ten children have not been told of their adoption. One parent plans to conceal it; the others say the child is not interested now, and they will tell him "later." Five children have received minimal information, and their parents report that the children "are not interested." Only three children know they had another mother, that there was an agency or foster home involved, and that they were "chosen." There is no association between originally stated plans and what has occurred. Clearly, telling of adoption is more difficult for these single parents than they or the agency anticipated.

After three to four years of adoptive parenting, three types of families can be identified. Most numerous are the real "single-parent" families—twelve families where the adopting mother maintains a separate residence and assumes responsibility for the child's care. In three families the adopting mother and her mother live in the same household and together are the child's parents. In the other three families a whole family group resides together, and the child seems to have multiple parents. . . .

*The children.*—At this follow-up, we have seen only two children whose behavior raises questions about their emotional adjustment. . . .

It should be noted that the investment and concern of almost all these parents is reflected in the good intellectual functioning of most of these children, in their ability to form relationships and use the new experiences, and in their capacity to function independently. At the age of four, the children in these homes seem, for the most part, to be thriving.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

While single applicants were fairly flexible in describing the type of child they wanted to care for, adoption workers were cautious in evaluating these homes and generally placed young, problem-free children. The question whether more demanding children could have been successfully placed in these homes is unanswered. . . .

Source: Joan F. Shireman and Penny R. Johnson, "Single Persons as Adoptive Parents," *Social Service Review* 50 (March 1976): 103-104, 105, 106, 107-109, 111, 112-113, 114, 115.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## W.H. Slingerland, *Child-Placing in Families*, 1919

Mental Defectives. One of the greatest social problems in America is the large and constant increase in feeble-mindedness. Less than a decade ago the world woke up to this fact—for the problem is not confined to America but is world-wide—and realized something of its portent. We now know that almost every orphanage contains some feeble-minded children; that every child-placing agency unavoidably handles some every year; that from 15 to 50 per cent of the delinquents in the reform and industrial schools are of subnormal mentality; and that the special institutions for the feeble-minded are crowded and have long waiting lists. The situation demands immediate, definite, scientific, and systematic action.

Diagnosis is one practical essential, long neglected but now generally demanded and increasingly applied. It is not too much to ask that all child-placing agencies and child-caring institutions arrange for the psychological examination of wards, in order to determine their relative mental ages and possibilities. Any that show possible signs of mental disease should be treated by skilled psychiatrists. The merely backward should be identified, and efforts made to assure their speedy advance to normality. The constitutionally defective should be definitely determined, and should be placed in proper institutions. To put a low grade mental defective in a family home where a normal child was expected is a social crime, once to be condoned because of ignorance, but now inexcusable in a well-ordered and progressive child-placing agency. . . .

The following classification scheme was prepared for a previous volume, *Child Welfare Work in Pennsylvania*, and is again offered as comprehensible to the average layman and probably not objectionable to the expert psychologist:

1. Idiots. Those of the lowest class of mental defectives are termed idiots. These require asylum care, are very slightly improvable, and none ever exceeds the mental capacity of the average child of two years.
2. Idio-Imbeciles. Those of the next grade are called idio-imbeciles. They also require asylum care, are more improvable, in a limited way can be trained to assist others, and in mental capacity are equal to the average

child of from three to five years.

3. Imbeciles. Those of the third grade are generally called imbeciles. They require custodial life and perpetual guardianship, are morally deficient, can be trained in some manual and industrial occupations, are often plotters of mischief with a genius for evil, and in mental capacity are equal to the average child of from six to nine years.

4. Morons. Those of the highest class of constitutionally mentally defective recently have been called morons. They require long apprenticeship and colony life under protection, are trainable in the manual arts and many mental acquirements, lack mainly in will, balance, and judgment, and in mental capacity grade with the average child of from ten to twelve years old.

5. Dullards. Another class, not distinctly defined, is that of the backward or mentally feeble. These are sometimes wrongly included with the morons, from whom it is often difficult to distinguish them. But morons are constitutionally defective, and can never become normal in mentality. Dullards are normal in their mental powers and processes, which have been enfeebled by disease or retarded by lack of opportunity. They require special training to develop their latent powers, and usually medical attention, a prescribed diet, and improved environment. The special schools for backward children are established partly to meet their needs, and partly to define and give adequate attention to imbeciles and morons. . . .

While institutional care is essential to all the lower classes, there are many of the moron class who will be far better off in family homes than in institutions. The families in which they are placed must be selected with especial reference to the humane and honorable care of such wards, and of course must have full information as to the children's mental limitations; and proper public or private agencies must keep such homes and children under special and permanent supervision. Dullards, not being constitutionally deficient, may often be most quickly renewed in physical and mental vigor and greatly improved, if not wholly brought up to normal conditions, by placement in first-class family homes.

Source: W.H. Slingerland, *Child-Placing in Families: A Manual for Students and Social Workers* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1919), 69, 74-76.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## W.H. Slingerland, *Child-Placing in Families*, 1919

**Personal and Racial Selection.** It is also desirable in fitting children to applications, to select such as resemble one or both of the foster parents, or at least not specially different from them in appearance. A strong contrast between parents and children causes endless remarks and calls for continued explanations, which are often irritating and sometimes embarrassing to the foster parents, and frequently a source of trouble to the children. This is especially to be considered when infants or very small children are taken with a view to subsequent adoption.

The laws of most states properly require that so far as is practicable placements of children be made in families of the same religious faith as that held by the children or their parents. It is also worth while to avoid mixing too diverse types or nationalities, as, for instance, the very swarthy with the decidedly blond. There need be no question of superiority or inferiority raised in a rule to limit placements generally to similar personal, racial, or national types, or to approximations of them in their American descendants. No good can come from, and much harm may be done by, wilful violations of customs and comity in the placement of children, even when the child welfare worker in so doing violates neither state laws nor his own conscience.

Source: W.H. Slingerland, *Child-Placing in Families: A Manual for Students and Social Workers* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1919), 125.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact**

**Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Smith v. OFFER (Organization of Foster Families for Equality and Reform), 1977

*It is interesting to contrast this opinion, which limited the constitutional protections available to foster parents, with [New York Coalition for Families, "Beyond the Best Interests of the Child Is Being Used to Legitimize the Destruction of Poor Black and Hispanic Families," mid-1970s](#). In that document, an advocacy organization argued that [birth parents](#) were disadvantaged in comparison with foster parents and charged that [foster care](#) was a system that destroyed poor and minority families while claiming to help them.*

---

MR. JUSTICE BRENNAN delivered the opinion of the Court.

Appellees, individual foster parents and an organization of foster parents, brought this civil rights class action. . . in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York, on their own behalf and on behalf of children for whom they have provided homes for a year or more. They sought declaratory and injunctive relief against New York State and New York City officials, alleging that the procedures governing the removal of foster children from foster homes. . . violated the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment. . . .

A divided three-judge District Court concluded that "the pre-removal procedures presently employed by the State are constitutionally defective," holding that "before a foster child can be peremptorily transferred from the foster home in which he has been living, be it to another foster home or to the natural parents who initially placed him in foster care, he is entitled to a hearing at which all concerned parties may present any relevant information to the administrative decisionmaker charged with determining the future placement of the child." . . . . We reverse.

The expressed central policy of the New York system is that "it is generally desirable for the child to remain with or be returned to the natural parent because the child's need for a normal family life will usually best be met in the natural home, and. . . parents are entitled to bring up. . . their own children unless the best interests of the child would be thereby endangered." But the State has opted for foster care as one response to those situations where the natural parents are unable to provide the

“positive, nurturing family relationships” and “normal family life in a permanent home” that offer “the best opportunity for children to develop and thrive.”

Foster care has been defined as “[a] child welfare service which provides substitute family care for a planned period for a child when his own family cannot care for him for a temporary or extended period, and when adoption is neither desirable nor possible.” Thus, the distinctive features of foster care are, first, “that it is care in a family, it is noninstitutional substitute care,” and, second, “that it is for a planned period—either temporary or extended. This is unlike adoptive placement, which implies a permanent substitution of one home for another.”

Under the New York scheme children may be placed in foster care either by voluntary placement or by court order. Most foster-care placements are voluntary. . . . Voluntary placement requires the signing of a written agreement by the natural parent or guardian, transferring the care and custody of the child to an authorized child welfare agency. . . . The agency may maintain the child in an institutional setting, but more commonly acts under its authority to “place out and board out” children in foster homes. Foster parents, who are licensed by the State or an authorized foster-care agency, provide care under a contractual arrangement with the agency, and are compensated for their services. The typical contract expressly reserves the right of the agency to remove the child on request. Conversely, the foster parent may cancel the agreement at will. . . .

The appellees’ basic contention is that when a child has lived in a foster home for a year or more, a psychological tie is created between the child and the foster parents which constitutes the foster family the true “psychological family.” of the child. That family, they argue, has a “liberty interest” in its survival as a family protected by the Fourteenth Amendment. . . .

It is, of course, true that “freedom of personal choice in matters of . . . family life is one of the liberties protected by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.” There does exist a “private realm of family life which the state cannot enter,” that has been afforded both substantive and procedural protection. But is the relation of foster parent to foster child sufficiently akin to the concept of “family” recognized in our precedents to merit similar protection? Although considerable difficulty has attended the task of defining “family” for purposes of the Due Process Clause, we are not without guides to some of the elements that define the concept of “family” and contribute to its place in our society.

First, the usual understanding of “family” implies biological relationships, and most decisions treating the relation between parent and child have stressed this element. . . . A biological relationship is not present in the case of the usual foster family. But biological relationships are not exclusive determination of the existence of a family. . . .

No one would seriously dispute that a deeply loving and interdependent

relationship between an adult and a child in his or her care may exist even in the absence of blood relationship. At least where a child has been placed in foster care as an infant, has never known his natural parents, and has remained continuously for several years in the care of the same foster parents, it is natural that the foster family should hold the same place in the emotional life of the foster child, and fulfill the same socializing functions, as a natural family. For this reason, we cannot dismiss the foster family as a mere collection of unrelated individuals.

But there are also important distinctions between the foster family and the natural family. First, unlike the earlier cases recognizing a right to family privacy, the State here seeks to interfere, not with a relationship having its origins entirely apart from the power of the State, but rather with a foster family which has its source in state law and contractual arrangements. . . . [W]hatever emotional ties may develop between foster parent and foster child have their origins in an arrangement in which the State has been a partner from the outset. . . . In this case, the limited recognition accorded to the foster family by the New York statutes and the contracts executed by the foster parents argue against any but the most limited constitutional "liberty" in the foster family.

It is one thing to say that individuals may acquire a liberty interest against arbitrary governmental interference in the family-like associations into which they have freely entered, even in the absence of biological connection or state-law recognition of the relationship. It is quite another to say that one may acquire such an interest in the face of another's constitutionally recognized liberty interest that derives from blood relationship, state-law sanction, and basic human right—an interest the foster parent has recognized by contract from the outset. Whatever liberty interest might otherwise exist in the foster family as an institution, that interest must be substantially attenuated where the proposed removal from the foster family is to return the child to his natural parents. . . .

We are persuaded that, even on the assumption that appellees have a protected "liberty interest," the District Court erred in holding that the preremoval procedures presently employed by the State are constitutionally defective. . . . Since we hold that the procedures provided by New York State in §392 and by New York City's SSC [Social Services for Children] Procedure No. 5 are adequate to protect whatever liberty interests appellees may have, the judgment of the District Court is Reversed.

Source: 431 U.S. 816 (1977).

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Excerpt from the Archives of Spence-Chapin Adoption Service, 1916

### Spence Alumni Society – Annual Report 1916

Here it might be well to point out the difference between our child placing work and that of the Department of Charities; the State Charities Aid Association and other public and quasi-public agencies with which we cooperate. In general terms, it is their object to place the largest possible number of the reasonably promising children in respectable homes. Our primary purpose is to place children of unusual promise in homes of uncommon opportunities. . . .

Out of 101 children referred to us for adoption 25 have been accepted and placed; 7 are awaiting placement; 5 have been sent to Miss Barter and Miss Spence for placement, 2 proved unfit for adoption, and 2 died. . . . Of the remaining 60, some were rejected because of their family history. In the majority of these cases the remaining parent and relatives of the children decided to help them and to make other arrangements. Most of this investigating has been done by the Child Finding Committee. For those situations, however, which we felt were too complicated we employed the services of Miss Ellen Bablett a special investigator in work for babies. . . .

Applications have come from far and near, and represent States as widely separated as Georgia and Maine, Virginia and Minnesota and far away, Hawaii. Omitting those who applied and later withdrew their application, we now have on file 61 applications, of which six are for boys, 14 for either sex and 41 for girls. Why do so many people prefer girls! The majority seem to feel that a girl is easier to understand and to rear, and they are afraid of a boy. But. . . there are now more boy babies available than girls.

Source: "Excerpts from the Archives of Spence-Chapin Adoption Service (Formerly Spence Alumni Society; Alice Chapin Nursery; Miss Spence School Society," Child Welfare League of America, Box 7, Folder: "Adoption 1925-1966," Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

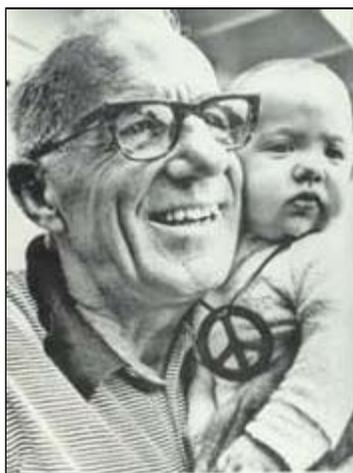
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Benjamin Spock, "Adopting A Child," 1946



Dr. Spock in 1990. Benjamin Spock authored the most widely read child-rearing manual in U.S. history and was the nation's most popular and trusted expert on childhood after World War II.

Should an adopted child be told he is adopted? All the experienced people in this field agree that the child should know. He's sure to find out sooner or later from someone or other, no matter how carefully the parents think they are keeping the secret. It is practically always a very disturbing experience for a child of any age, or even for an adult, to discover suddenly that he is adopted. It may shatter his sense of security for years.

Supposing a baby has been adopted during his first year, when should he be told? The news shouldn't be saved for any definite age. The parents should, from the beginning, let the fact that he's adopted come openly, but casually, into their conversations with each other, with the child, and with their acquaintances. This creates an atmosphere in which the child can ask questions whenever he is at a stage of development where the subject interests him. He finds out what adoption means bit by bit, as he gains understanding.

Some adopting parents make the mistake of trying to keep the adoption secret, others make the opposite mistake of stressing too much. If parents are inwardly uneasy about the fact that the child is adopted, and feel that, to be honest, they must always stress the point, the child will begin to wonder, "What's wrong with being adopted, anyway?" But if they accept the adoption as naturally as they accept the color of the child's hair, they won't have to make a secret of it, or keep throwing it in his face, either.

Let's say that a child around 3 hears his mother explaining to a new acquaintance that he is adopted, and asks, "What's adopted, Mommy?" She might answer, "A long time ago I wanted to have a little baby boy very much to love and take care of. So I went to a place where there were a lot of babies, and I told the lady, 'I want a little boy with brown hair and brown eyes.' So she brought me a baby and it was you. And I said, 'Oh, this is just exactly the baby that I want. I want to adopt him and take him

home to keep forever.' And that's how I adopted you." This makes a good beginning, because it emphasizes the positive side of the adoption, the fact that the mother received just what she wanted. The story will delight him and he'll want to hear it many times.

But somewhere between the ages of 3 and 4, if he is like most children, he will want to know where babies come from in the beginning. . . . It is best to answer truthfully, but simply enough so that the 3-year-old can understand easily. But when his adopted mother explains that babies grow inside the mother's abdomen, it will make him wonder how this fits in with the story of picking him out from all the other babies at the institution. Maybe then, or months later he'll ask, "Did I grow inside you?" Then the adopting mother can explain, simply and casually, that he grew inside another mother before he was adopted. This is apt to confuse him for a while but he will get it clear later.

Eventually he will raise the more difficult question of why his own mother gave him up. To tell him that his mother didn't want him would shake his confidence in all mothers. Any sort of made-up reason may bother him later in some unexpected way. Perhaps the best answer and nearest to the truth might be, "I don't know why she couldn't take care of you, but I'm sure she wanted to." During the period when the child is digesting this idea, he needs to be reminded, along with a hug, that he's always going to be yours now.

He must belong completely. The secret fear that the adopted child may have is that his adopting parents will some day give him up as his true parents did, if they should change their minds, or if he were bad. Adopting parents should always remember this and vow that they would never under any circumstances say or hint that the idea has ever crossed their minds of giving him up. One threat uttered in a thoughtless or angry moment might be enough to destroy the child's confidence in them forever. They should be ready to let him know that he is theirs forever at any time the question seems to enter his mind, for instance, when he is talking about his adoption. I'd like to add, though, that it's a mistake for the adopting parents to worry so about the child's security that they overemphasize their talk of loving him. Basically, the thing that gives the adopted child the greatest security is being loved, wholeheartedly and naturally.

Source: Benjamin Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946), 505-507.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Statement on the Immorality of Bringing South Vietnamese Orphans to the United States, April 4, 1975



*This immediate response to the tragic crash of an "Operation Babylift" transport plane on April 4, 1975 can be understood as part of the controversial debate about that particular "rescue" effort. The crash, which occurred shortly after take-off from Saigon, killed more than 100 children, along with at least 25 of their adult escorts. The statement also suggests that opinions about Vietnamese children were inextricable from views of the Vietnam war. It made a number of points that have been repeated by critics of both [international adoptions](#) and U.S. foreign policy throughout the post-Vietnam era. For additional views, see [Gloria Emerson, "Operation Babylift," the New York Times ad about Operation Babylift](#), and [Agency for International Development, Operation Babylift Report, 1975](#).*

We, the undersigned professors of ethics and religion, strongly denounce the actions of President Ford and the private organizations, such as World Airways, for their planned airlifting of 2000 displaced Vietnamese children to the United States. Even though they may be motivated by good intentions, the airlift, we believe, is immoral, for the following reasons:

1. Many of the children are not orphans; their parents or relatives may still be alive, although displaced, in Vietnam.
2. The children will be well taken care of, even if the Thieu regime collapses, as they are already in North Vietnam and in NLF held areas of South Vietnam.
3. The children would be happier growing up in Vietnam with Vietnamese, rather than in America with Caucasians.
4. The only reason for bringing the children here is to salve our conscience, and children should not be used that way.

The war in Vietnam is a moral issue, and the ending of the war is a moral issue. The attitude that "we know best how to help them," is the same attitude that sustained our immoral involvement in Vietnam

for so many years. The Vietnamese children should be allowed to stay in Vietnam where they belong.

Professor Mark Juergensmeyer, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley  
Professor Robert McAfee Brown, Stanford University, Stanford  
Professor Charles McCoy, Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley  
Professor John Coleman, S.J. Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley  
Professor John Bennett, Pacific School of Religion, former President,  
Union Theological Seminary, New York  
Professor Davie Napier, President of Pacific School of Religion,  
Berkeley

Source: Statement on the Immorality of Bringing South Vietnamese Orphans to the United States, April 4, 1975, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 62, Folder 8, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Albert H. Stoneman, "Adoption of Illegitimate Children: The Peril of Ignorance," 1926

*In this excerpt, the General Secretary of the Michigan Children's Aid Society expressed views that predominated among early twentieth-century child welfare professionals and reformers. Adoption was extremely risky and should therefore be safeguarded and held to a set of **minimum standards** in law and social practice. The assertion that **illegitimacy** and **feeble-mindedness**—or mental defect—were closely related was also a common theme among **eugenicists**. In contrast to commercial **baby farmers**, sentimental child-placers, and other amateurs who "disposed" of babies on the basis of personal whim or religious bias, Stoneman suggested that science offered the only safe approach to adoption. He envisioned family-making as an operation characterized by thorough fact-gathering, keen observation, close supervision, and careful attention to the individual factors at play in each and every case.*

By far the greatest problems and dangers connected with adoptions center around illegitimacy. The large proportion of adopted children always has been and still is of illegitimate birth. Ignorance of essential facts is the great peril in most adoptions of illegitimate children. The children are born in mystery and disposed of permanently while still too young to show signs of future capacity. . . .

The placers of these babies are optimists, do you say? But their optimism is based on wishes rather than facts, and therefore is counterfeit. . . . Heretofore too much of the policy for dealing with such social cases has been based on sentiment, prejudice, and convention. Too often the plan for the child grows out of the personal opinion of the social or religious worker as to what ought to be done with "such" children. There is usually a favorite and customary method of solving this type of human problem, peculiar to the particular person or institution.

Social workers must adopt a saner policy. Call it a more scientific method. It means greater reliance on the facts and knowledge of circumstances in each particular case as the only dependable basis for making a plan for the child.

It means learning the truth about the mother and the father and their families; the physical and mental calibre of each; the attitude of each toward the child and its future; the material and personal resources available for the child's care; and all the information possible in regard to the personal condition and capacities of the child. . . . No two cases are quite alike. How unwise and unethical then it is for social workers to allow themselves to be predetermined in their policies. How dare one decide on a plan to dispose of a child when the case is still undeveloped and the truth of the situation yet undiscovered?

With our present knowledge of biology and heredity we seem justified in general not to offer for adoption the child of feebleminded parentage. . . .

The one thing we must do is to ban ignorance as disgraceful; and to exalt accuracy and integrity.

Source: Albert H. Stoneman, "Adoption of Illegitimate Children: The Peril of Ignorance," *Child Welfare League of America Bulletin* 5 (February 15, 1926):8.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Jessie Taft, Children's Aid Society of Pennsylvania, Annual Report, 1921

The object of the routine examination is to determine by the giving of a variety of psychometric tests, something about the child's general level of intelligence and something about his particular abilities or disabilities. It is a great saving both to the child and to the foster home as well as to the agency, if one can get beforehand some estimate of what may be expected from a given child in the way of progress and achievement. It is as great a mistake to place a very superior child in a home which cannot provide the suitable opportunities, as to place the mediocre child in the superior home which has set its heart on sending the child to high school and college. The child will be happy only if it lies within its ability to come up to what is expected of it by the foster parents.

Even the routine examination, however, does more than just measure intelligence. It enables the examiner to spend an hour and a half with the child watching his responses to external situations and often gives a clue to emotional disturbance which will cause trouble later if not understood.

When the social history indicates that the child's behavior has been unusual in some way, peculiar, delinquent, troublesome or what not, then this department makes a much more intensive study of the problem. In the light of the history, the medical examination, the psychometric tests, and interviews with the child in which his confidence is gained if possible, a psychological interpretation of his behavior is worked out and placement recommended on this basis. . . .

The justification for the time and effort which one such child may require before a successful adjustment is made lies in the fact that without it, the child is lost and furthermore becomes increasingly a burden and expense to the agency and to society. For such children, society pays, either in early preventive care and education or later in the futile attempts to check the anti-social or unwholesome behavior.

Source: Children's Aid Society of Pennsylvania, Annual Report, 1921, Jessie Taft Papers, Box 2, Folder: "Department of Child Study—Annual Reports, 1918-1926 (Philadelphia)," Rare Book and Manuscript

Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Jessie Taft, "Early Conditioning of Personality in the Pre-School Child," 1925

Ten years, or even five years ago, there was no such person as the preschool child. Ten years ago we were just beginning to discover ordinary children and their importance for social life and progress. . . .

In social work, my own ten years of experience have seen a revolution. Ten years ago mental hygiene and psychiatric social work were just beginning with adults. Family case work dealt with parents as individuals and with the children as a group. You can read through the earlier records of the family agencies without finding any recognition of children as persons. They are apt to be differentiated only by name, age and sex, except for some special problem of health, education or delinquency.

In the field of child placing, although we have to deal with individual children whom we take from a broken home to place in a foster family, we are only just learning to recognize the obligation to individualize every child. Well do I remember when we used to comfort ourselves with the thought that a baby needed only good physical care, that unwholesome surroundings had less effect on a younger than on an older child. It was only two years ago that the child-placing agency with which I am associated determined to make a study of each infant before placing for adoption. Any good healthy attractive baby used to be considered a good adoption risk. Now we know that babies as well as older children may be rated as to native ability and we give psychological tests to every child received by us, no matter what his age. These tests are very tentative as yet, but when combined with careful physical examinations and social histories and safeguarded by retests at proper intervals, they offer at least one valuable tool for beginning to treat babies as persons.

In concentrating upon the young child, therefore, we are not ignoring later developments but are on the contrary for the first time recognizing their origin and trying in a rational and scientific fashion to seek control at the source. Both psychiatrist and psychologist are demonstrating that the personality trends in children which later make problems for educators and social workers as well as parents have a history which can be traced. Modern psychology is pretty well agreed that the reform of an individual is

not accomplished by will power, force, punishment or fear. Bad as well as good behavior is not something which is established over night. It is a product of years, the outgrowth of a particular experience. To change it is a scientific rather than a moral problem. . . .

No one would blame a child of ten for lack of physical health produced in the course of living under the care of his parents but would explain his condition in terms not only of his inheritance but of the health habits of his family, his feeding, exercise, rest, play, clothing, etc. Yet we do tend to treat as a moral issue deserving of praise or blame, the good or bad behavior of children as if they were in some way responsible or could control the conditions under which their ways of reacting to life have been formed.

If we are to be intelligent about social as well as physical problems we have to abandon our emotional reactions to the things children do in our homes, our streets and our school rooms and use the best minds we have in trying to find out why and how behavior is built up. If our interest lies in assigning responsibility, praise, blame or punishment for any particular bit of conduct, we shall never be able to take toward that behavior the scientific attitude which treats it as a problem to be controlled only by complete understanding. . . .

The fundamental need for all human beings is a sense of at-homeness in one's environment, a feeling of being adequate to life as one finds it. This sounds simple, but it depends upon a good many factors which are in their ramifications infinitely complex. This feeling of security and adequacy in life depends upon at least three things in childhood: a stable background, ability to win approval from others, and power to do, to carry out successfully some of the activities which are characteristic of other children of the same age. A little later in the child's development we can see that there must be included as part of his sense of security a positive fearless attitude towards sex and a belief that he will be able to achieve sex happiness, to find a satisfactory love object outside of his own family.

How does a child get his sense of stability, of firm ground under his feet? Where else but through his parents and the family circle? We who work with dependent children understand only too well the shock to confidence which comes with the discovery that one's own home is not necessarily a safe refuge, a permanent foundation. The child who is moved from place to place is a prey to undercurrents of fear and insecurity, which inevitably find expression in blind attempts to compensate. Such attempts since they are unconscious are seldom well chosen or socially acceptable. . . .

The facts which psychiatry and psychology are discovering about the importance of parents and family life to the mental health of the next generation, far from relieving the schools of responsibility, only increase their obligation and enlarge infinitely the vision of what it means to educate a child.

Source: Jessie Taft, "Early Conditioning of Personality in the Pre-School Child," 1925, typescript in Ethel Sturges Dummer Papers, Box 36, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. Also published in *School and Society* 21 (546) (June 13, 1925):695-701.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Jessie Taft, "The Re-Education of a Psychoneurotic Girl," 1925

*Jessie Taft was the most articulate early advocate of therapeutic adoption. The outlines of that approach appear in this excerpt. Temporary and permanent placements, Taft believed, should reflect careful investigation and individualized diagnosis of children's emotional problems and needs. In Rebecca's story, Taft's sensitivity to **Freudian** themes, such as childhood sexuality and unconscious fears, was evident. So too was her commitment to a vision of **social work** deeply influenced by psychiatry. Foster placements mattered not only because they were opportunities to interpret and shape individual lives, but because they symbolized an even more ambitious goal: to direct the social future on the basis of a systematic, even "scientific," understanding of human development and behavior.*

There is very little opportunity in this world for radical experimentation with human beings. The necessity for taking children of all ages who are thrown out of their homes by some unfortunate circumstance and attempting to place them suitably in foster homes, not only permits, but forces such experimentation. It remains to make this process conscious, scientific and a matter of accurate record. It is obvious that theoretically, every child who is thus torn loose from his natural setting and robbed temporarily or possibly permanently of his fundamental sense of security, to be placed in a substitute family environment with the prospect of yet another change always an ever present possibility, constitutes a psychiatric problem. . . .

Already the best child placing agencies have recognized the implications of their work in their attempt to make the diagnostic study of each child accepted for care as thorough as possible.

Like psychiatry, social work has found adequate diagnosis more easy of accomplishment than treatment. Theoretically, it may be possible to describe the kind of home a given child should have. Practically it is very difficult to be sure just what will be the result of the interaction between the child and the home actually chosen. The subtleties of unconscious attitudes and inter-relationships among the members of a foster family are difficult of detection and interpretation. . . . Much of the combining of homes and children at present must be done more or less intuitively but a

few of the best child placing agencies are struggling through careful study of the foster home, a detailed record of the child's experience there and the assistance of psychologist or psychiatrist, to analyze and interpret the effect of a given environment upon the behavior and personality of the child and to exercise some degree of conscious control over the process.

The case history which is here presented illustrates the attempt of a Jewish child placing agency to cooperate with a psychologist over a period of four and a half years in the attempt to restore to a reasonable degree of social adjustment a very difficult girl of fourteen. It would have been better, of course, had she been reached in early childhood before her behavior patterns had become so well established, but even so she has repaid the time and effort spent upon her through a steady growth in poise, insight and ability to adjust to reality.

Rebecca H. aged fourteen years, the daughter of foreign born Roumanian Jewish parents, the third child in a family of five, was brought to the Juvenile Court by her mother in August 1919 because she would not go to school, would not get up in the morning, would not help at home, was given to outbursts of temper and was sullen, unhappy and disobedient. She was very much retarded in school having repeated the fifth grade three times and her attempts to work for money had been brief and futile. Her family were convinced that there must be something wrong with her mind and asked the court to assist them. The children's agencies had at that time a small laboratory school under the direction of a psychologist and to this school Rebecca was sent for observation.

The picture she presented was far from lovely, nor was it of a kind to call out a friendly sympathetic response. She was a large girl at the awkward selfconscious age. All of the muscles of her body drooped. . . .

The physical examination revealed undernourishment, eye and ear conditions which were corrected and an enlarged thyroid. The psychiatric examination attached the label, psychoneurotic.

The girl was in the laboratory school a full month before a psychometric test was given. . . . Her intelligence quotient placed her in the lower limit of the normal group according to Terman's classification. . . . The girl was given over to a child placing agency in April.

The observation period brought out the fact of Rebecca's belief or fear that she might be feeble-minded. . . . These first months also brought out two other important factors in her behavior, first conflicting attitudes of hatred and loyalty with regard to her family and second extreme shame and fear and avowed ignorance regarding everything even remotely connected with sex. The efforts of the psychologist to reach the roots of these two factors have extended over the entire period the girl has been in care, and the attempt has been made to free her sufficiently to enable her to express her real feelings. . . .

Her first longtime placement was in the country in a non-Jewish home with

two elderly sisters, women of some education, refinement and understanding. It was not until July 1920, after three months in this setting, that Rebecca, whose social poise, voice and manners had taken on the general coloring of her environment and who was revelling in the absence of dirt, noise and confusion, held her first comparatively free and spontaneous interview with the psychologist. She spoke of her belief that her mother was not really her own mother but a stepmother because this would account for the fact that she was treated differently from the rest of the family. She had always, she felt, been disliked and discriminated against. Yet, she argued, surely no stepmother would take you around to clinics as my mother did, to try to get you well. She knew, intellectually, that there was no basis in fact for this belief, yet it had emotional weight. . . .

It was not until December 1920, a year after the first contact with her that Rebecca revealed one of her greatest sources of shame. When she was seven, her oldest sister, then about fourteen had begun to give the mother trouble, and would not work or go to school but ran the streets with boys and finally had an illegitimate child whose father she later married. The mother had taken this girl to court as she afterward took Rebecca, and always Rebecca had had her sister's example held up before her as a warning and her likeness to her sister pointed out with dire prophecies as to her future. No threat or reproach was so overwhelming as this.

Rebecca remained with the maiden ladies, who were genuinely fond of her in spite of her trying ways over a year with much profit and was finally removed because of sickness in the home.

All through this period the psychologist had endeavored to give her a more open wholesome attitude toward sex. . . . In September 1921, when in a temporary city home she. . . confessed to the habit of masturbation, this, after two years of intimate friendly contact, apparent confidence and many opportunities for talking over any disturbing experience.

Her emotional reaction to this revelation was quite overwhelming and seemed to reduce her to her original state of depression and inferiority, but after several intervals she was able to talk about it with some calmness and objectivity. In the fall of 1921 she was again placed in a non-Jewish home in the country, where the woman, a practical nurse, made a business of boarding difficult children. . . .

The contribution of this placement to Rebecca's reeducation is unquestioned. It put through a habit training program whose success had a distinct effect upon the girl's self-respect and belief in her own normality, it restored self-confidence through school success, the completion of the seventh grade, it introduced a new emotional stimulus to achievement through the attachment to the foster mother and brought about the first successful adjustment to other children. . . .

In August 1922, an attempt was made to prepare her for the working world, by giving her training for child's nurse in a babies hospital. She

responded well in interest and effort but proved to be too slow for sick babies and a day nursery was recommended. In November 1922 she began to work in a day nursery under most favorable conditions, as far as work was concerned but with poor adjustment to her home placements which had to be changed frequently. . . .

That Rebecca is now a well adjusted person, cannot be maintained nor can one be sure that her present adjustment will continue to be equal to the strain of living, but one can surely say that she has at the present time, a good fighting chance and that she has improved steadily in self-confidence, control and insight. What were the causes of her maladjustment from the psychoanalytic viewpoint it is impossible to say as the intimate history of her earliest childhood and the family interrelationships has never been obtained either from her or her foreign speaking parents. . . .

The factors in treatment have been first, the relationship to the psychologist which has supplied for four years a steady background of belief in her ability and worth. . . . Second, the removal from the nagging, critical, hateful family atmosphere to homes which satisfied some of her longings for a better standard of living and gave her actual contact with happy, satisfying, human relationships. . . .

This give a bare outline of what has happened in the life of one girl over a period of four years but conveys no idea of the painstaking work of supervision, of the patience and skill which the workers in the child placing agency have supplied in their effort to reestablish an individual whose self-confidence had been thoroughly undermined.

Our knowledge of the homes through which we worked is inadequate, our records are but feeble attempts to put on paper the vital processes of which we have been a part, our knowledge of what has taken place and our ability to interpret and direct it consciously are all too limited, but the history of Rebecca will serve its purpose if it conveys in some measure the complexity and subtlety of the material in which the child placing agency works, the contribution it may make to our knowledge of human behavior and its need for all of the understanding which psychiatry can bring to bear.

Source: Jessie Taft, "The Re-Education of a Psychoneurotic Girl" (paper presented at the American Psychiatric Association, Atlantic City, June 1924), typescript in Ethel Sturges Dummer Papers, Box 36, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. Also published in *American Journal of Psychiatry* 4 (January 1925):477-487.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Jessie Taft, "The Woman Movement from the Point of View of Social Consciousness," 1916



Jessie Taft (left) and Virginia Robinson in front of their home in Flourtown, Pennsylvania in 1954. The two women met at the University of Chicago in 1908, where they established an intellectual and emotional bond that lasted for the rest of their lives.

*This brief excerpt from Jessie Taft's dissertation suggests her enduring theoretical interest in the social foundations of selfhood and other social psychological themes that underpinned practical therapeutic approaches to child adoption, family life, and social problems in general. Taft earned a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1913, where she worked under the direction of George Herbert Mead. The dissertation showcased her proficiency in bringing abstract social theory to bear on a subject with practical and contemporary import, women's collective identity and action. Her basic argument was that movements of women and industrial workers gave social expression to personal conflicts rooted in spheres understood (mistakenly) to be private, natural, and therefore immune from social influence. Her work in child and family welfare later on was based on very similar thinking about the family.*

---

### PERSONALITY AND THE PRESENT SOCIAL ORDER

Such a survey as we have just made leaves little doubt as to the reality and seriousness of the chaotic conditions of which the "uneasy woman" complains. The bare fact that there exists in society at the present moment a large class of idle women; a still larger class of women working in homes at enormous waste of time, energy, and efficiency; a third and comparatively small class whose work, though satisfactory, is of such a character as to interfere with marriage if they desire it; and a fourth class whose work is rendering them unfit for anything else, is sufficient evidence in itself that women are not realizing themselves through their social relations in any complete or harmonious way; but rather are buffeted about at the mercy of these same social relations. The selves which women bring to bear upon the struggle seem to be overwhelmed by a situation that is too large for them. They are controlled by these external conditions instead of realizing themselves through them.

The case is not different with the modern man. The woman has no monopoly on conflict and disharmony. He, too, is swamped by the system in: which he finds himself. He, too, is being made, willy-nilly, by the relations in which modern business and industry are involving him; yet he is not expressing himself consciously through these relations. One has only to recall the struggle between capital and labor, the way in which life with its ideal interests is being crowded out by the pressure of the economic machinery not only on the laborer but on the man who is chained down to money-making, the frequent incompatibility of home and family with the work for which the man is fitted by nature, the alienation of the father from his home responsibilities through lack of leisure, to realize that the unsatisfactory character of the woman's life is but a conspicuous part of a wider and more basic situation which involves men as well.

This thesis is based on the contention that the incompatibilities and oppositions sketched above are genuine and are the particular expressions of a more basic conflict existing between the self, the personality, of the modern man and woman, and the present social situation through which this self has not yet succeeded in expressing itself because it is not yet sufficiently conscious of the social character of that situation or of the method through which control can be secured. The realization, that we have as yet no social control and few personalities, either masculine or feminine, sufficiently socialized to cope with the modern world, is being forced upon us most conspicuously in the terrific conflicts arising from the indifference of the form taken on by business and industry to the actual content involved. . . .

The woman can never become a full-fledged, rational human being, nor can she be held responsible for any of the conditions in modern life until society ceases to consider it essential to womanliness that she receive passively the impact of all the currents of present-day organized existence. As long as woman has no part in directing the forces which determine the family, herself, the least detail of her domestic life, society is retaining the lady of chivalry at the expense of conscious motherhood and is encouraging the immediate impulsive reactions of the simple situation at the price of deliberate reflection and social consciousness which alone are effective under the complex conditions of today. Just as the great labor movement is trying to bring the laborer to consciousness of his needs and possibilities, and society to awareness of the advantage of conscious labor, so the woman movement has before it a twofold task: first, to make women conscious of their relations to a social order, second, to show society its need of conscious womanhood. . . .

#### **A SOCIAL THEORY OF THE SELF AS THE GROUND OF THE WOMAN MOVEMENT**

The clash of home and outer world which so disturbs the feminine mind today, as well as the struggle of labor and capital, might be avoided to a large extent by mere change in the external working conditions, by a lessening of the hours of labor, by a minimum wage, by improved housing and sanitation, by a scientific cooperative housekeeping. But in the last analysis, the basic conflict on whose solution even the improvement of external conditions depends, the conflict between the narrow self and the wide social environment, can be adjusted only on the supposition that personality or selfhood is made, not born, and that a less conscious form of personality may evolve into a more conscious form under conditions which are neither mysterious nor absolute but can be understood and made use of. The criticisms and analyses of the modern woman which we have examined all point to a personality inadequate to the life into which social and economic changes have plunged her. If the crux of the matter lies here, the fundamental purpose of the woman movement must be to correct this state of affairs by helping to bring into being a more conscious womanhood and by arousing society to an awareness of its need for such a womanhood. To believe that this is possible is to imply certain things about the nature of selves, personality, or self-consciousness (the terms are used interchangeably in this discussion). If we conceive of the self as something which is given, static, present from the beginning both in the individual and the race, or, what is practically the same thing, as something which develops absolutely, reaching its full growth regardless of any known conditions, then we have put the self outside of our own world, have made it mysterious and unknowable, and by so doing have given up the hope of social reconstruction, for there is no reconstruction of society without a reconstruction of selves. We can get no hold on a self that is static nor on one that develops absolutely. If social problems are ever to be solved like other problems in our world, selves must be thought of as existing in grades and degrees, evolving gradually in the individual and in the race, with certain definite conditions of growth which can be discovered and used. When we understand how consciousness develops into more and more adequate forms, then we have turned our once mysterious and unknown phenomenon into yielding, pliable material for a genuine social science. Control of physical objects was impossible as long as physical facts were accepted as fixed, mysterious, or absolute. Just so, social control is impossible as long as the self remains an unknown quantity. . . .

The discovery of the social character of even the intellectual processes and the relation of these processes to the building up of a self gives a breadth and comprehensiveness to personality that it has never before attained in history. At a very early period

it is possible for consciousness to take on the form of a self through building up the selves around it and playing various parts without having reached the point where it is capable of subjecting to analysis the self thus attained. It is also possible for consciousness to advance to the stage where it can turn in upon itself and dissect the self in a highly sophisticated way without even then realizing that it is part of a social process and that its intellectual activities, however expressed, are just as much a part of the personality and just as social as the feelings or the will. The final step of seeing the self as a process whose law can be stated and of finding in the self and in all social relations material that admits of reconstruction and scientific handling, just as in the case of supposedly nonsocial objects and relations, marks the highest point of growth in self-consciousness as yet developed in our experience. . . .

Our age is witnessing the disappearance of the isolated individual and the growth of an internal control based on the recognition of the dependence of the individual on social relations and his actual interest in social goods and in the discovery that thought is social in origin and can be used to advantage in the social as well as in the physical world. The freedom that was supposed to reside in the individual is seen to be realized only through society. The individual is not economically or morally free except when he is able to express himself, to realize his ends through the common life. As an individual, he is powerless to determine his own actions beyond a certain point. He must think with society and make his thought effective through social media or he has no control. Moreover, the hypotheses which he offers as solutions to social problems must include as part of the data to be considered the impulses and interests, the point of view, of all classes of people, if they are to be successful. In other words, not only is thought social in origin, but it keeps a social content and character. The individual must think as a social being, must take over the points of view of all his social "others" if his thinking is to be true in a social order, that is, the value of his thought in handling social questions is tested just as it is in handling physical problems, by the adequacy with which it covers all the data involved. Hypotheses which ignore the interests of entire classes of people, which fail to recognize existing social relations, will not work in the long run.

The hard and unyielding individual with his boundless, empty freedom is compensated for the loss of his abstract rights by the discovery that concrete freedom, an actual realizing of his own powers, is possible through a social order and through a selfhood that grows in an intelligible way and is, therefore, subject to reconstruction by the same methods that are continually changing the physical world in accordance with human desires.

Source: Jessie Taft, "The Woman Movement from the Point of View of Social Consciousness" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1916), 24-25, 30, 36-37, 40-41, 51-52.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Excerpt from Sophie van Senden Theis, *How Foster Children Turn Out, 1924*

### SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

#### Distribution of Subjects Whose Capability Was Known

| Social Adjustment | Number of Subjects | Per Cent Distribution |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Capable           | 615                | 77.2                  |
| Incapable         | 182                | 22.8                  |
| Harmless          | 89                 | 11.1                  |
| Harmful           | 47                 | 6.0                   |
| "On Trial"        | 26                 | 3.2                   |
| In institutions   | 20                 | 2.5                   |
| Total Known       | 797                | 100.0                 |

Six hundred and fifteen or 77.2% of the 797 subjects whose general ability was known are "capable" persons. They have proved themselves able to manage their own affairs with average common sense, to keep pace economically with their neighbors, and to earn the respect and good will of their communities. In other words, these subjects have "made good." . . .

One hundred and eighty-two or 22.8%, are rated "incapable". For one reason or another they did not get on. Some of them have mental or physical handicaps which interfered with their ability to get along without help and protection. Others have qualities of resourcefulness, energy and foresight to so slight a degree that they could not keep their footing if thrown on their own. Still others have demonstrated their inability or their unwillingness to conform to accepted standards of morality or order. . . .

Source: Sophie van Senden Theis, *How Foster Children Turn Out*, (New York: State Charities Aid Association, 1924), 25-26.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Sophie van Senden Theis and Constance Goodrich, *The Child in the Foster Home*, 1921



For adoption reformers, careful investigations—including mental tests, physical measurements, and complete personal and health histories—were essential to reducing the many risks of child placement and establishing **minimum standards** in adoption.

### *Pre-placement inquiry*

**Purpose of Inquiry.**—There are several reasons why the investigation of the child's history must be thorough. We need complete knowledge of the child's circumstances and personality to place him successfully. Moreover, we need it to inform foster parents, who more and more frequently are demanding full and detailed histories for the children whom they think of adopting. For the child himself, when he is grown, we must have the facts about his own family. If he knows that he is an adopted child, as most adopted children do nowadays, he will have a natural curiosity, which he has a right to satisfy, about his parentage. Last of all, but of increasing importance, is the interest of science, both social and psychological, in these records, so rich in human significance and in facts which need only to be assembled to have genuine scientific value. Scientific research may seem a remote affair to the harassed case worker, but her records may some day contribute invaluable material to the scientific student, and it is to research that we owe many of the methods which we daily use—the intelligence test, the Wassermann test, and the complete physical examination. . . .

**Legal status.**—How did the agency secure the custody of the child? By poor law commitment, by court commitment, by abandonment by the parents?

**Family History.**—This involves gathering every scrap of significant information about his family, including his grandparents, aunts and uncles; their health, intelligence, schooling, occupations, habits, character, religion. Where and how have they lived? Why did they move? What did the neighbors think of them? Were they "queer"? What was their reputation in the community? What did they look like? Could they hold jobs? What kind? Did they keep a clean house? Were they

quarrelsome? How did they treat the children? Have they records in a police office or in a social service office?

**Personal History.**—How old was the child when conditions in his home became bad? How old when he was removed? Where has he lived since—in boarding homes or institutions or in visiting homes? How long in each? How long has he been in school? His grade? His school record? His personal appearance, coloring, etc.?

**Health.**—Was he breast fed? When did he begin to walk and talk? What illnesses has he had? What kind of feeding, cleanliness, hygiene has he had? A thorough examination of his present condition will usually include a Wasserman test, and in the case of girls smears are made, whenever possible, for determination of possible venereal infection.

**Intelligence.**—The child's intelligence is usually tested by a psychologist, using one of the standard tests. Children whose parents or relatives show a marked degree of mental inferiority should always be tested, and also children who show serious retardation. The results of the test, taken with the observation of people who see the child constantly, give some indication of the child's mental capacity and help to determine whether he should be placed with a family who will be ambitious for his progress in an educational way, or with a family whose work and interests are of a simpler sort.

**Personality.**—Information about the child's personality is as important as any of the more tangible facts which we need. It is possible to have on record a full statement of the child's background, his physique, and the circumstances of his removal from his own home, and yet to know nothing of the child himself. When it comes to the test, that of setting a frightened, neglected child in the midst of strangers, such knowledge may prove futile. What we really need to know is what the child feels about his own father and mother, about his separation from them, what memories he has brought with him, and what he hopes and fears from a new home. If a little girl has been brutally treated by her drunken father, will she be terrified by her new father? Often such memories lie buried in the child's mind, unknown to the foster parent or to the visitor, causing him worry and fear and making it nearly impossible to trust the strangers with whom he is living. Such a child can be hardly anything but unresponsive, disobedient, or dishonest.

In addition to knowing the child's feeling about his situation we need to know his tastes, the things that he enjoys doing, his temper, his demonstrativeness, his honesty, his ability to get on with other children. If he is a robust, boisterous child, strong

willed and aggressive, he will never get on with the Browns, who want a sensitive, responsive child, but he may just suit the Greens, who don't on any account want a "sissy." It is vital to know these things in advance so that one may choose the right home for him.

Source: Sophie van Senden Theis and Constance Goodrich, *The Child in the Foster Home, Part I, The Placement and Supervision of Children in Free Foster Homes, A Study Based on the Work of the Child-Placing Agency of the New York State Charities Aid Association* (New York: School of Social Work, 1921), 13-16.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Kitte Turmell, "How We Told Our Adopted Children," 1950

We have had the good fortune—my husband and I—to adopt two children, each in infancy, 3 years apart. We have been able to tell our son and daughter—successfully we think—without strain or self-consciousness—that we adopted them. Our son, the first adopted, very soon heard the word “adopted” in improvised lullabies; when he was 2 he was proud to translate its meaning as “you picked me out”; at 3 he joyfully went with us to the nursery on the day when we were at last to take home his newly acquired sister.

How did we know what to say and when to say it? By asking advice of the social agency that found our son for us, as many other parents of adopted children have done. Ours was the Children’s Home Society of California, a State-licensed private organization. A staff member of the agency suggested something like this:

The story of adoption should start as soon as possible. A baby can be helped to feel that “being adopted” is something that makes him loved, even before he is old enough to learn that being adopted is being “chosen.” The story of his adoption should unfold as his understanding unfolds. When the story unfolds gradually, and is pleasantly told, he will think of it as natural and pleasing. He will look at it just as the parents do who have gone through the experience of choosing a child who is to be theirs for life.

The story starts with the way you say “adopted.” If the word is used often, affectionately, easily, with an endearing phrase or a song or a nursery rhyme, and emphasized with a hug or kiss, it will carry warm overtones. It should never be heard first as a playmate’s taunt or an adult’s whisper.

As soon as a toddler asks, “What’s ‘dopted, mommy?” he is ready for an explanation of “chosen” or “picked out.” This can be made personal, as a compliment to the child’s desirability, with the phrase, “We chose—or picked—or wanted—you.”

The age at which a child is old enough to be told more about it varies with different children, the worker told us; it is usually between 3 and 4, and certainly before school age. Whenever he does ask, or is ready to be

encouraged to ask, tell him simply as much of the story as he can then follow. If you repeat it, and amplify it a little as his interest grows with his capacity to understand, he can enjoy this true story as much as he does a favorite fairy tale. . .

When the child knows how babies are born the inevitable question will come: "Who was the mother who did carry me in her tummy and why didn't she keep me?" This is the signal for the explanation, the worker said, that a mother and father entrust a child to another mother and father only because they believe that in this way they can assure a better life for the child than they could give him. . .

Give as vivid a word picture as you can about his natural parents. Often curiosity is easily satisfied with a pleasing description. Tell what the child seems to relish, but do not build up such a fascinating picture that the child will feel robbed when he compares, in his imagination, his natural parents with his adoptive parents. He should not be given the feeling that he has been deprived of a more interesting life or a more colorful heritage than you, his parents, can offer him.

Do not let your child feel isolated by his adoption. Talk with him about other adopted people he knows or that he can be introduced to in normal social contacts. If his national background is different than yours to a marked degree, see to it that he is helped to like and respect "his own kind." He may learn about this background at school, or through his reading, or through other association with the culture of his forebears. Perhaps he will find out more about it through travel. . .

Long ago my husband and I learned that we also could ward off impertinent questions (and you'll be surprised to know how many strangers are bold enough to ask whether the adopted child's first parents were married.) We say that we want the child to be the first to tell his story to outsiders, in order that he may tell as much or as little as he chooses, without feeling, uncomfortably, that others might know more than he does about his personal history.

Perhaps the keystone of the arch through which the child enters into knowledge of his history is this principle, as stated by the children's agency:

"You must guard against projecting any emotions that might disturb the child about his adoption story. He will be influenced by your attitude; aware of any tension or uneasiness. If you are afraid that the child will not accept his true story, then you, his new parents, need to reexamine your heart, rebuild your feelings of security, refresh your mind on all the favorable factors that convinced you before the adoption that this was the very child for you. Until you have quieted any qualms of your own you are not emotionally ready to start the continued story we are here considering. If you do learn to tell the story well, your reward will be your child's acceptance of his adoption and of you."

Source: Kitte Turmell, "How We Told Our Adopted Children," *Child* 14 (January 1950):104-106.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Two Adoption Home Studies, 1949 and 1950

*These two adoption investigations were conducted close together in time but had two different outcomes. The first resulted in rejecting Mr. and Mrs. J's application, before a full **home study** was conducted, whereas the second resulted in recommending that a child be placed with Mr. and Mrs. Z.*

***Infertility** was key in both investigations but it was discussed and interpreted in strikingly different ways. The report format was quite standard, illustrating the narrative style of casework recording prevalent among **social workers** and the importance they attached to details related to **matching**. The abbreviations in the second case refer to "Foster Mother" (FM), "Foster Father" (FF), and "Foster Parents" (FP).*

---

8-23-49 Mrs. J telephoned. She was referred by the St. Cecilia Home. She is interested in applying to adopt a baby. She inquired anxiously whether it would be possible for her to make an application. She explained that the home had told her that their list is closed and they would not be in a position to accept her application. She said she feels rather hopeless about this because she also applied at St. Mary's Home. Although she has had an application for about a year there, she has heard nothing.

Mrs. J has had two babies by Caesarian section, each have died. She cannot have any more children. It seems to her that it is a matter of life and death to have a baby. . . .

8-30-49 Mr. and Mrs. J in office by appointment. They are an unpretentious looking young couple with dark hair and eyes, although they would be noticeable because Mrs. J is so tiny. She is a pert, rather sweet faced girl and has expressive eyes, is probably not over five feet in height and even with high heels, gives the impression of being a tiny person. Mr. J is of about medium height, slim and athletic. He is a little fairer than his wife in complexion and looks like a person who is used to taking care of himself. . . .

I recalled that Mrs. J had come to think about adoption after some difficult experiences in attempting to have children of her own. Mrs. J. repeated that she had to have a baby and told of crying and feeling downhearted

because she seems to meet difficulties on every hand. . . . What makes her angry is that people who put so little into raising children should be able to have them while she, who wants a child so badly, can't seem to get one. . . . She asked whether we did have children for placement and I said that we did although I could not know at this point whether we would have a child who would be suitable for them. . . .

She wonders how she is going to be able to get along without a child and seemed worried about what would happen to her if she did not have a child. She added that her husband gets quite angry when he comes home and finds she has been crying. Mr. J explained that he is concerned because his wife gets herself so upset. After all, crying doesn't do any good. He made it clear that he wasn't really angry, but that he felt helpless in the face of his wife's unhappiness. Mrs. J said she really doesn't want to feel as she does and tries not to think, but that's not always possible. When I asked Mr. J some questions about his wife's pregnancy, Mrs. J said she might as well tell me the whole story. The pregnancies were during an earlier marriage. Her husband was a paratrooper in the war and was killed while she was pregnant the second time and it was just at the end of the war. . . . It was only when she was pregnant the second time and her husband was overseas that her doctor talked very plainly to her. He told her it was a matter of her life if she became pregnant again and she agreed to be sterilized. . . . She wanted to make it clear that she and Mr. J had discussed adoption carefully before their marriage and they both agreed to this. . . .

Mr. J had taken little part in the conversation at this point, except to clarify statements made by his wife and I asked him what he thought of his wife's desire in adopting a child. He made it very clear that he wanted a child too. . . . Mr. J himself is a butcher. . . and feels very comfortable that he has a good job. He has a rather philosophical outlook on life and I got the impression of him as a dependable person who could be counted upon. . . .

Because the J's are young and because there is a warm and spontaneous [missing word] about Mrs. J which made me feel that if she could get her feelings about the very difficult experiences which she has had straightened out, there might be a possibility that they could give a child a good home. . . .

9-13-49 . . . Mrs. J said she didn't know anyone who had so many bad things happen and yet remain in their right mind. I asked whether that scared her a little sometimes and she could admit that it did, particularly when she gets upset and can't seem to stop crying. The periods when she feels worst, are when someone makes an unkind remark to her or discourages her in the faith that she has built up that in spite of all that has happened, she can still have a normal life. Sometimes she does not know how much longer she can go on. She could admit that some of this hopelessness comes back when I tell her that I do not know whether we will have a child for her and raise questions about the feelings she has.

9-30-49 Since it was quite clear that a referral to a psychiatrist was too threatening to Mrs. J, I suggested that there are social agencies who can help her with this problem of finding ways of bearing that things are as they are with her, in much the same way that she and I have been looking at this today. . . .

10-31-49 Application temporarily rejected as Mrs. J is needing help in accepting her own inability to have children before proceeding with adoption plan.

\* \* \*

1-20-50 FM: Mrs. Z is a short, dark-haired, dark-eyed girl with a vivacious face. She is 5'1" tall and weights 115#.

She was married November 26, 1936 and both she and her husband hoped they would have children at once. In the Spring of 1949 she and her husband submitted to complete examinations at the Mayo Clinic. Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ reported that her tubes are completely closed and there is no possibility of pregnancy. (He will furnish us a statement of this, as they were told he would do this on request of an adoption agency.)

FF: Mr. Z was born 9-23-14 in \_\_\_\_\_. . . . Mr. Z, also dark of hair, has blue eyes. He is 5'4" tall and weighs 140#. Worker saw him briefly at the store but did not have a long interview. Aside from his work, Mr. Z finds diversion in fishing and gardening. He has done much of the finishing on their home and contemplates doing the work to make two additional bedrooms and the bath planned for the second story of their home.

HOME: Worker saw the Z home last summer. It is a neat new bungalow located at \_\_\_\_\_ Street. At present it has 5 downstairs rooms, with plenty of provision for expansion. There is a large sunny living-room, a kitchen with an alcove dinette, bath, and 2 bedrooms—all well furnished and cared for. The house is located in a neat yard with flowers in every corner. The flowers are Mr. Z's project.

CHURCH: Mrs. Z was raised a Methodist; Mr. Z is a good Lutheran and since they prefer the Lutheran minister they attend that church. Mrs. Z thinks she will have her letter entered in the Lutheran church.

OCCUPATION AND EDUCATION: Both Mr. and Mrs. Z graduated from the \_\_\_\_\_ High School. Mr. Z operates a grocery store—the Superette—in \_\_\_\_\_. His partner is Mrs. Z's only brother. It is reported that they are very companionable and never disagree. Mrs. Z has been a bookkeeper at the \_\_\_\_\_ Grocery for over 10 years. She will resign if a child is placed in their home. . . .

3-7-50 See letter giving the following information:

Mrs. Z's parents: Her father was a big man almost 6' tall and weighing about 185#. He was of fair complexion and had dark brown hair and greenish eyes.

Her mother was 5'2" in height and weighed 140#. She was of medium complexion and had black hair and dark brown eyes.

Mr. Z's parents: His father was 5'10" in height and weighed 145 to 150 pounds. He had a fair complexion, light brown hair and light blue eyes.

His mother was 5'5" in height and weighed 185#. She had black hair, brown eyes and a medium complexion.

Mr. Z apparently resembles his father. . . .

NOTE FROM MISS \_\_\_\_\_, 3-13-50 This is the best foster home study of yours that I have had an opportunity to read. Would you please incorporate into your dictation the following: Are FPs members of the Lutheran Church and would this be the Church to which an adopted child would go; who holds the mortgage on the store and what are the annual or monthly payments; is house clear of debt; is the store and business "tied-up" in any way if FF should die; what is their annual income; any savings or insurance. . . . I can't find that you saw any references or the minister. Do FPs have any insurance? . . .

3-29-50 Mrs. Z made her first application by letter on May 15, 1949. The balance of the data has been collected over a ten month period. . . . The Zs will take either a boy or a girl, but rather lean to a girl. Mr. Z appears lighter than his wife, but both are really medium in coloring.

7/27/50 I called on Mrs. Z in her home. She was dressed in overalls and "T" shirt, for which she made no apology. She said she had worked all day and was going back to the store to help Mr. Z. . . .

I had a personally conducted tour through the beautiful little house, a good share of which they built themselves, and was allowed to peek into cupboards and drawers in a most matter-of-fact way. Through it all was an air of pride in her ability as a housekeeper and there were no excuses because her slippers were in the living room near a chair where an open book showed she had caught a few moments of relaxation. . . .

Mr. Z is slight in build. . . . It is quite clear there is perfect harmony between him and his wife, that he is proud of his business and the grocery lines he carries, equally proud of his home, and is interested in people. . . .

They had recently purchased a dozen new carts for wheeling groceries. Some had baby carriers. He wheeled one down the aisle, demonstrated its good points, put their imaginary baby in the cart and loaded up with baby food, Hoffman salad dressing, a new kind of bread mix, green vegetables, frozen foods, and dairy products, and while doing so gave me a running explanation about the stock and why some brands were better sellers. . . .

After an hour with Mr. Z I felt there was no business quite like the food business and that rationing or no rationing this man is a success, and he could start a grocery store in the middle of the Sahara desert, install freezing units and have nomadic tribes trooping to his establishment without much effort. . . .

I sincerely feel this home has much to offer a child in the way of a good home, security, and much affection.

When the Zs have the opportunity to turn some of their enthusiasm toward the care of the child, not only they but the child and the community will be gainers. Both believe in an education and would be able to give a child opportunity. Both are courteous, cultured people.

When I left they were figuring out where to put a piano and I would not be surprised to see one installed when I next call.

Both are healthy; both like and enjoy children and have much more understanding of their needs than the average childless couple.

Source: Adoption Home Investigation, Dorothy Hutchinson Papers, Box 1, Folder 7; Adoption Home Investigation, Dorothy Hutchinson Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## U.S. Children's Bureau, *Adoption Laws in the United States, 1925*

### CONCLUSIONS

The importance and complexity of the subject of adoption legislation have been indicated in the foregoing pages. The tendency of recent legislation and the standards which are being developed by those engaged in child-welfare work emphasize as the primary consideration the welfare of the child and also provide for safeguarding the rights of all the parties in interest.

The requirement of notice to the State department of public welfare and of investigation and recommendation by the department is a recognition of the State's interest in children placed for adoption and gives the State a method of fulfilling its responsibility toward the children who have been placed. If the jurisdiction is vested in a court equipped to make social investigations the law may properly direct that investigations be made either by the court or by the State department, but in any case the State department should be vested with ample supervisory powers covering all aspects of the placement of children.

The relative advantage of granting jurisdiction to juvenile courts or to those traditionally connected with matters of probate seems still an open question, but it is generally agreed that in whatever court jurisdiction may be placed, provision for social investigation is essential.

In drafting adoption acts the welfare of the child, the rights of the parents and the possibilities of their assuming the case of the child under proper conditions, and the rights of the adopting parents must be borne in mind. Provision for social investigation, for trial period in the home either before petition is filed or before a final decree is granted, and for State supervision will safeguard the interests of all parties. The investigation should include the fitness of the natural parents to care for the child with a view to determining whether he is a proper subject for adoption, and the financial ability and moral fitness of the adopting parents and general suitability of the proposed home.

Among the items in adoption procedure which are of especial importance

with reference to the child's welfare are those providing that if the petitioner is married the spouse shall join in the petition, and those safeguarding records from publicity. . . .

Other important points to be considered in connection with adoption legislation include provision for appeal, for vacation of order or annulment for good cause, and for inheritance rights. The statute should specifically provide that adoption shall establish between the child and the adopting parents the legal relationship existing between parents and their children born in lawful wedlock. Either in the adoption law or in related laws the transfer of parental rights and responsibilities without order or decree of court should be prohibited. Administration of adoption laws for the welfare of the child is to a large extent dependent upon the administration of related laws governing children's institutions and the placing of children in family homes.

Source: U.S. Children's Bureau, *Adoption Laws in the United States: A Summary of the Development of Adoption Legislation and Significant Features of Adoption Statutes, With the Text of Selected Laws*, ed. Emelyn Foster Peck, *Bureau Publication No. 148* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1925), 25-26.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:

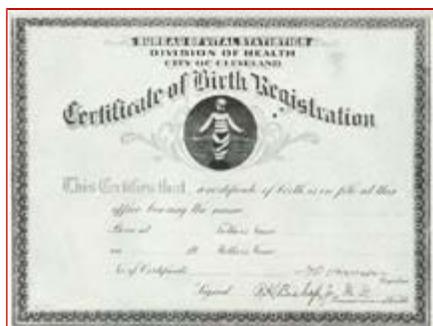


**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## U.S. Children's Bureau, "The Confidential Nature of Birth Records," 1949



a model birth certificate, 1917

*The original goal of confidential adoption records was not to prevent adoptees from obtaining the information on their original birth certificates. As this 1949 excerpt makes clear, the U.S. Children's Bureau considered it "very important that the child's original birth certificates be identified so that his complete birth record will be available to him when needed."*

**The Confidential Nature of Birth Records, including the special registration problems of children born out of wedlock, children of unknown parentage, legitimated children, and adopted children**

**Section D. Legitimated and Adopted Children**

1. State laws should stipulate that the State registrar shall accept evidence of the marriage of the parents, together with an acknowledgement in writing of paternity by the father as satisfactory evidence of legitimation.

**The purpose of such statutory provision is to relieve the registrar of the necessity of adjudicating the evidence. In most cases, legitimation recorded of the basis of this evidence will stand.**

2. Complete reports of all court decrees of adoption and legitimation and annulments thereof should be sent to the State registrar on standard forms prescribed by him. These reports should be filed within a specified time limit and should contain sufficient information to identify the original birth certificate and to enable an amendatory birth record to be prepared, showing the essential facts about the adopting parents and the new name of the child if so desired by the adopting parents.

**These reports should be made by the clerks of court to the State registrar in the State of legitimation or adoption at the end of each month. Use of a standard**

**form by the various court clerks would improve the completeness of the report and assure its adequacy for registration and statistical purposes. It is very important that the child's original birth certificates be identified so that his complete birth record will be available to him when needed.**

3. The original birth certificate of an adopted or legitimated child should be sealed and an amendatory record showing the new status of the child should be placed in the regular file. The amendatory record should be used in making certified copies.

**To protect the person, all certifications for routine purposes should be made from the amendatory record and not the original certificate. The original certificate should be sealed to prevent its use except in the cases specified in section D, paragraph 7 and 8.**

4. Each State registrar should forward reports of adoptions and legitimations, or annulments thereof, for out-of-State births to the State registrar in the State where the child was born. In the State of birth, the State registrar should seal the original certificate and file an amendatory record indicating the new status of the child.

**Routine reporting of adoptions and legitimations to the State registrar in the State of birth is essential both to complete the person's birth record and to prevent duplicate registration which is detrimental to the individual's own interests and to the efficiency of the vital registration system.**

5. Standard forms for the reporting by courts to State registrars of legitimations and adoptions should be developed and adopted by all States.

**Interstate reporting and the compilation of national statistics on legitimations and adoptions would be facilitated by the use of a standard form by all States.**

6. If certifications are issued by local officials their record should conform to the record in the State office. The local registrar should be required to maintain the confidential nature of all birth records in the same degree as is required in the State office.

**So long as it is possible to secure certifications from two or more different sources, great care must be taken to assure that the several records are identical**

**and show the latest status of the person. It is also essential that in such cases the records in the local office be fully protected from inspection by the public.**

7. The right to inspect or to secure a certified copy of the original birth certificate of a legitimated child should be restricted to the registrant, if of legal age; his parents or parent, guardian, or their legal representative; or upon court order.

**(See section A, paragraphs 2 and 3.)**

8. The right to inspect or to secure a certified copy of the original birth certificate of an adopted child should be restricted to the registrant, if of legal age; or upon court order. The right to inspect or to secure a certified copy of the amendatory birth record of an adopted child should be restricted to the registrant, if of legal age; the parents or parent by adoption or their legal representative; social and health agencies upon approval of the official custodian of vital records; or upon court order.

**The reasons for careful protection of the record of an adopted child are similar to those previously mentioned. In many cases, the original certificate will show that the child was born out of wedlock or that its parents are unknown. It is desirable, also, that the natural parents and adopting parents should remain unknown to each other.**

Source: U.S. Children's Bureau, "The Confidential Nature of Birth Records, including the special registration problems of children born out of wedlock, children of unknown parentage, legitimated children, and adopted children," 1949, Publication Number 332 (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1949), pp. 5-7.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)





## U.S. Children's Bureau Memo, "Investigation of Adoptions, etc." 1915



Julia Lathrop, for whom this memo was written, was the first Chief of the [U.S. Children's Bureau](#).

U.S. Department of Labor  
Children's Bureau  
Washington

May 22, 1915.

Memo to Miss Lathrop:  
Subject: Investigation of Adoptions, etc.

The matters mentioned in Mr. Hartt's letter are, of course, coming to our attention as we proceed in the illegitimacy study, and we had planned to gather a considerable amount of this material for future reference, even though some of it may not relate directly to our illegit. investigation. The agencies we deal with in our study are also, in general concerned with the subject of adoption and placing out. We are gathering a mass of material of this kind from the State records, as we shall need much of it in connection with our investigation. It may be that we should be doing this according to a more systematic plan than we have been, so that we could use it in this other connection as well. We were only yesterday discussing the feasibility of doing a certain amount of checking up of court adoptions, as we will undoubtedly find that illegitimacy is a considerable factor in it. We find that all changes of name, including adoptions, are reported to the Secretary of the Commonwealth, and we were considering checking this list with the list of illegit. children and following further as extensively as our opportunities would permit. The adoptions of legitimate children could of course be followed also if desirable, as the need seems to be for securing investigation in connection with court adoptions.

The subject of adoption, if taken up as a separate study in itself, using various states with different situations as fields for research, is one that should be taken up, if at all, in a very painstaking and thorough way. It would require a considerable period of time, say two years at a conservative estimate, for one

person to make a study that would be comprehensive enough to mean much. The subject is one that cannot be taken up profitably, it seems to me, as a separate problem. It should be considered particularly in relation to boarding and other placing out, and other alternatives to adoption, also state control and supervision, institutions available, etc. Our present subjects of feeblemindedness and illegitimacy would enter in as important factors. I think that adoption is a topic that should be taken up by the Ch. Bureau, but if it is undertaken, the treatment should be comprehensive and extended, and it should be closely correlated with our other work. Even in states having the best regulations at present it would, of course, be comparatively easy to find plenty of instances showing what may be called "traffic in babies". . . .

E.O. Lundberg

Source: Memo from E.O. Lundberg to Miss Lathrop, May 22, 1915, United States Children's Bureau Papers, Box 60, Folder 7346, National Archives II.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## U. S. Children's Bureau, Memo About Conditions at a Baby Farm, 1918



As Child Was Received

Before and after pictures, like the ones above and below, were common in exposés of **baby farming** by reformers who favored increased state regulation of **placing-out** and **minimum standards** in adoption.



Same Child Four Months Later

*This memo reported on an ongoing investigation by the U.S. Children's Bureau of the Sunshine Nursery in Kensington, Maryland.*

Memorandum for Miss Lathrop:

Miss Emery called yesterday morning and was here for three hours. She spoke of Miss Washington's place being quite a dreadful place and I asked her to be specific and wrote down her statements and read them back to her. They are as follows:

Screens inadequate. Many flies. Most of the babies' beds were built with screens, however.

One little child was tied in bed.

A filthy rug was noticed by Miss Emery on a bed. She lifted it and found a baby beneath it. The housekeeper said the rug had been put there because the baby would not sleep in the light.

While Miss Emery was at this nursery from one to five o'clock on Monday July 15th, she said only one pillow was changed.

The nose and mouth of one child were covered with a mass of flies.

The children had no playthings.

An uncovered slop jar on the porch afforded the only toilet facility for the children.

Miss Emery asked for water for the little girl in whom she is interested. The housekeeper said, "We do not give water because water poisons the children."

Miss Emery said she picked up the little girl, Catherine, in whom she is interested and her legs were numb. She said this little child 15 months old was chaffed and bruised as though it had been whipped.

Miss Emery told the housekeeper the little girl needed a bath and the housekeeper said she did not. Miss Emery asked for water to bathe the child and the housekeeper refused to give it to her, saying that all their water had to be heated in a kettle.

The little girl in whom Miss Emery is interested was given a cup of milk to drink. Miss Emery noticed that the milk was cold (just off the ice) and asked that it be heated. The tin cup was put upon the stove and in a few moments the housekeeper gave it to the child and burned the child's lips with it. . . .

Source: Memo on Sunshine Nursery, July 19, 1918, United States Children's Bureau Papers, Box 60, Folder 7349.1, National Archives II.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## U.S. Children's Bureau, Research on the Dangers of Illegitimacy, 1917



This 1915 photograph by Lewis Hine depicts a mother and her three children employed in flower-making. This woman received a mother's pension from New York. Between 1910 and 1935, most states acted to support dependent children by making grants to their impoverished mothers, but almost all of these programs were limited to widows and deserted wives. Unmarried mothers were denied aid because **illegitimacy** marked them as undeserving.

*Research during the early twentieth century about children's health and welfare often noted that the separation of mothers and infants was one of the gravest dangers faced by **illegitimate** children. This led to a number of state laws prohibiting infant placements for specified periods early in life and encouraging , or even mandating, breast-feeding. Combined with prevailing beliefs in family preservation, efforts to keep unmarried mothers and their babies together contributed to the anti-adoption ethos of the Progressive era.*

### CONFIDENTIAL.

#### The Study Included:

Analysis of records of illegitimate children under the care of Boston agencies and institutions during one year.

Analysis of records of illegitimate children under the care of certain State agencies and institutions during one year.

Data in regard to illegitimate infants born in Boston in one year.

Analysis of bastardy cases and cases of non-support of illegitimate children before the Boston courts in one year.

The information was obtained entirely from public records and records of agencies and institutions. . . .

#### Illegitimate Infants Born in Boston in 1914:

One out of every 23 children born in Boston during 1914 was illegitimate, the percentage of illegitimate births being 4.35.

Comparing the illegitimate births and deaths in 1914 with the legitimate, the proportion of illegitimate infants who died before they reached the age of one year was more than three times that of legitimate.

Out of every 1,000 illegitimate children born, 314 died during their first year; out of every 1,000 legitimate children, 103 died.

Among the illegitimate infants, the death rate for the principal gastric and intestinal diseases was nearly six times as great as among the legitimate infants. Comparing age at death, the greatest proportionate excess of illegitimate over legitimate deaths occurred between the ages of 1 and 6 months.

All but 90 of the 847 illegitimate infants born during the year were known to have received some hospital or agency care before they became a year old. Over half of all the babies were known to have been assumed by agencies for prolonged care during their first year.

Of the 403 infants known to have lived 6 months, only 30 per cent were with their mothers all of the time. Twenty-five per cent had been with their mothers less than one-fifth of the time.

41 per cent of the mothers were under 21 years of age; one-eighth of the entire number were under 18 years of age.

9 per cent of the mothers had been diagnosed as feeble-minded, psychopathic or sub-normal, or insane; in addition a considerable number were reported as feeble-minded, but had not been examined for mentality.

18 per cent of the mothers were known to have had previous illicit sex experiences, although only 8 per cent had had previous illegitimate children.

Source: Confidential, "Outstanding Facts Brought Out in the Children's Bureau Study of 'Illegitimacy as Problem of Child Welfare' —a study of original records in Boston, Mass., December 1, 1917, U.S. Children's Bureau Papers, Box 60, Folder 7350.2, National Archives II.

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact  
Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Excerpt from Margaret A. Valk, "Adjustment of Korean- American Children in Their American Adoptive Homes," 1957

Another very common reaction frequently mentioned in reports is the child's need for quantities of food. In Korea these children rarely had enough to eat; in order to satisfy their hunger, they had been given a starchy, bulky diet, mainly of rice. As a result many had distended stomachs. Many of these children had a fear of not having enough food.

During his first months here, Charles, 5½ years, overate hugely. (He ate as much as eight slices of bread between meals.) Now his appetite has tapered off. He eats well, but not more than any healthy youngster.

At first food was so precious to Laura, aged 3 years, that if she dropped as much as a crumb of toast, she would not take another bite until she found the crumb.

The morning we visited, William, aged 4, came down the hall toward the door with a box of cornflakes in his hand. He was on his way out to join a little friend just a few houses down the street. The parents told us that this business of carrying a box of cereal began shortly after he arrived. He is generous about sharing, but will not willingly part with the package. In fact on the first Sunday, when they took him to church, they had to provide him with something similar, so they put his cereal in a plastic bag which wouldn't rustle too much. . .

Korean friends and students, however, can be of great help in describing their country, its history and folklore, to the parents and in telling them about the customs and habits the children may be used to. ISS has provided them with a simple Korean-English word list, which is probably more useful before the arrival of the child, as a morale builder, than as a practical help. Obviously, there are advantages if parents are able to recognize and pronounce a half dozen important words.

The rapidity with which the children learn English is frequently remarked upon by parents and workers alike.

I think the rapidity with which Soonee, 2 years and 3 months, is learning English and with which she is becoming happy and secure, is amazing. It is

certainly a tribute to the adoptive parents as well as to Soonee's intelligence.

Amy, 3 years, knew three English expressions when she arrived six months ago—"gum," "ice cream," and "hello baby." Now she chatters in English in the same way any alert little girl does, and has forgotten all but a few Korean words.

Source: Margaret A. Valk, "Adjustment of Korean-American Children in Their American Adoptive Homes," *Casework Papers* (1957): 152-154.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Martha Vansant, "The Life of the Adopted Child,— 1933

*Adoption narratives written by adoptees themselves were rare during the first half of the twentieth century. In this report, the author informally surveyed nine acquaintances who had also been adopted around 1900. Her stories of success and failure reinforced the professional consensus about **telling**. The anecdotes about adoptees who never were told, and turned out badly as a result, suggested that a fair number of adoptive parents kept the fact of adoption secret for a very long time, or even forever.*

---

Roger and Mary and Jack, Alice and Harold, Hermione, Jane, the sisters Marie and Monica, and I myself were all children together—children who started out in life inauspiciously, who were gathered up by society and redistributed among those who wanted us instead of being left with those who didn't. Where are we today? . . .

One or two of us are doing credit enough to our families, notably the gay and pretty Alice, and Roger, who fitted into a family of "real" children with surprising success. Several others, particularly the sisters and Jack, are making their own way in the world, and so am I; though our parents are not particularly impressed over the means we have chosen. But Mary, through no fault of her own, is an anxious and unhappy person, Harold is almost the stock example of a failure and a drifter, Jane is a flourishing prostitute, and Hermione is dead.

What was the matter with us, anyway? . . .

Some time ago I inquired of several adoption agencies whether they had any information on the adult lives of the children they had placed; and as none had any real material on the subject I determined to find out what I could for myself, by looking up the histories of the adopted children I had known. I wanted to discover how much the fact of adoption had to do with the adult success or failure of each one. I could only conclude, from what I found out, that it had almost everything to do with it. . . .

The danger that threatens an adopted child is not his uncertain heredity, his obscure background or doubtful legitimacy, but the fact that his foster-parents take him ready-made, and then expect him to grow and evolve according to specifications which they set down as definitely as they select

his sex or the color of his hair. When in any way he disappoints them, the trouble begins. . . .

Jane. . . was five years old at the time of her adoption, and she was taken by neighbors of my family, so that I saw her many times. . . . Jane had brains, good looks, and a way with her which won over governesses and tutors, who were inclined to spoil her. Her parents on the other hand were strict, as they had determined to make her into an impossible creature, gay but sedate, lively but content to keep her liveliness exclusively for them.

Jane came to adolescence very early, and began to run around with boys in a perfectly natural fashion. . . . Adopted children, with their uncertain parentage, were notably immoral of course, so Jane was warned, scolded, and beaten for doing what other girls of her age were allowed to do.

One day, when she was tired of so much opposition, and protested more than usual about being kept from the amusements that others enjoyed, the parents' patience gave out and they told her that she was not behaving as a child of theirs, and indeed was none, but the true daughter of her mother, who had never been married. This was meant as a moral lesson, but it was such a shock to Jane that it resulted in her running away. . . . Her career as a prostitute had begun, and the family cast her off. . . .

I have never understood why people supposed that a child would not love them or be devoted to them if it knew it was not their own. I really believe this idea is caused by the latent fear on their part that they may not love the strange child. They transfer the doubt over to the child, and suppose he will not love anyone to whom he does not belong by blood.

In my own case, I never thought for a moment that I was the child of those who brought me up; and yet I loved them devotedly, as least as much as their own children love them. They had the sense to tell me about my real origin so early that I took it quite for granted, and never felt that there was anything odd about my situation. I knew that both of my real parents had been related to my foster-parents, and that the latter had disliked my father and been devoted to my mother. The qualifies of both were talked about so much in my presence that I soon learned the reasons for their feelings, and also discovered why I had been taken into the new family.

It was not from love but from a sense of duty. The more I happened to resemble my mother, the more comfortable life became for me; and the more I indulged in any of the interests of my father, the more difficult it became, so that quite naturally I fell into the habit of suppressing whatever in me was like my father, even to his hobbies and his taste in colors or in things to eat, and making the most of whatever endowments I had from my mother. . . .

I grew up among several sisters and brothers who were "real" children of the family, and who were, it is true, better treated than I was. But at least

I knew why, and with a child's lurid imagination I pictured to myself what might have happened if nobody had taken me in, and so I was grateful. My foster-parents were wise, and I really loved them, and I cannot feel at all sorry for the early responsibilities which were mine, nor think I had a hard time, as children's times go. I wanted all along to grow up and make my own way in the world. I never wanted to keep on being a child. And my foster brothers and sisters have had a harder time of it in the world than I have, for they did not discover until they were grown up that the world is a rough place.

Source: Martha Vansant, "The Life of the Adopted Child," *American Mercury*, February 1933, 214-215, 217, 219-220.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Matter of Vardinakis, 1936

*This case, which involved divided religious loyalties within one troubled family, illustrates what a socially and legally sensitive identity marker religion was in the 1930s, and how significant it was for questions related to the custody, care, and placement of children whose parents did not offer adequate care and support. Written by Judge [Justine Wise Polier](#) shortly after her appointment to the Domestic Relations Court of New York, this case solidified her reputation as a critic of [matching](#) and earned her the enmity of the Catholic church, which considered the opinion an attack on the sectarian tradition of Catholic charity. Polier argued that matching amounted to government-sponsored discrimination, violated the constitutional separation of church and state, and rejected the idea that children were the permanent possessions of either parents or faith communities. It is also clear from this excerpt that she took children's own autonomy seriously, considered their views (when they were old enough to express them confidently), and did not believe that families had to be places where a single faith prevailed. The opinion drew support from [Purinton v. Jamrock](#), among other legal precedents.*

---

Under the circumstances, on an application of two institutions [one Catholic and the other Protestant] to be relieved of the care of four neglected children because of conflict over their religious education, the oldest son of the children of a Mohammedan father and Roman Catholic mother will be paroled to the home of his parental uncle, a Mohammedan, with the understanding that his placement will be carefully watched and that arrangements will be made for weekly visitations to the mother, where it appears that this son, of the age of fifteen years, has indicated that he is eager to go into his uncle's home, that it is his father's desire that he should, and that the mother has agreed to this placement.

The three younger neglected children, who cannot be placed in any relative's home, will be placed in a Protestant foster home, a neutral meeting ground for the separated and hostile parents, under the supervision of the court, with the understanding that there will be no religious instruction given to them by the foster parents. The mother is to be permitted to take the oldest daughter of the three, who is thirteen years

of age and who has indicated clearly her preference for her mother and her mother's religion, with her to the Catholic church. The father is to be permitted to take the two younger children with him to the Mohammedan church. . . .

Happily for us the American tradition of religious freedom and freedom of conscience demands that all religious groups shall be treated with respect and as equal in standing before the law. . . . This court is, therefore, happily relieved of having children made the subject of a religious controversy in any cases except rare ones such as the one now before the court, where in the process of saving the children from parental neglect, the court must also decide rival claims as to religious education between separated and hostile parents. There are no interests entitled to consideration except those of the parents and the children.

In the case now before the court, the mother, a member of the Catholic faith, was married to the father, a member of the Mohammedan faith, by a Protestant minister in 1920. There is no evidence of any antenuptial agreement as to the religious education of the children. After the birth of the oldest boy, the mother had him baptized within the Catholic church without the knowledge of the father and against his expressed wishes, during a period of the father's desertion of the home. Subsequently, after the birth of the next two children, the father had them inducted into the Mohammedan faith in the presence of the mother but also against her wishes. . . .

The rights of the parents in regard to their minor children has long been recognized, but there is no right in any church to compel continued adherence. . . .

The children in this case were first brought before the court when the home was finally broken up through the serious illness of the mother. At that time the mother brought the children to the court alleging that the father was unfit to care for the children in her absence. The court made a finding that the children were neglected and in need of the care and supervision by the State, and temporarily placed them in a Catholic institution so that they might remain together. The court, however, directed that no religious instruction should be given to the three younger children who were not Catholics. When this placement by the court met with the violent opposition of the father, the court agreed to transfer the four children to a Protestant institution as the most neutral place available. . . .

The extent of the injury to the children which must inevitably follow from such a situation can hardly be estimated and outweighs in importance the legal rights of either parent in regard to the determination of the future placement of these children. . . .

In an effort to determine what is most likely to make for the welfare of these children, the court examined the children in the absence of both parents. The oldest boy, who is now fifteen years of age, is clearly

determined to follow his father in the Mohammedan faith. The oldest girl, who is now almost thirteen, is equally sure that she wishes to attend the Catholic church with her mother. The two younger children, who are nine and five respectively, are too young to be seriously concerned with the problem.

Some courts have held that when a child reaches "years of discretion" the leaning of the child should be considered. Other courts have been reluctant to consider the preference of children on the ground that they are unable to evaluate the comparative merits or meaning of religious faiths. It is clear that there can be no arbitrary rule by which any court can determine when a child reaches "years of discretion." It is also clear that the capacity for an intellectually correct evaluation of differing religions is not the touchstone to religious faith in either children or adults. . . .

Source: 160 Misc. Reports New York 13-17.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

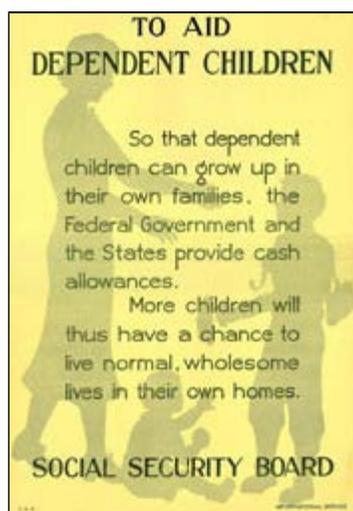
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Amey Eaton Watson, "The Illegitimate Family," 1918



Leading social workers and policy-makers argued for a scientific and non-judgmental perspective on illegitimacy in the early decades of the century, but public benefits offered by states, such as mothers' pensions, were overwhelmingly denied to unmarried mothers because they were considered undeserving. This poster advertised Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), a program established by the Social Security Act of 1935. ADC also excluded the children of many unmarried mothers, as well as those of divorced and non-white women.

In the following discussion, the phrase "the illegitimate family" is used deliberately. Hitherto our attention has been very largely confined to the illegitimate child and its mother and we have ignored the fact that there is in every case a *family* involved, father, mother and child or children, and that they must all be considered before any adequate plan can be made *with* them. True as it is that in the eyes of the state no family has been formed, yet it is equally true that biologically the child has a father as well as a mother and it is being realized more and more clearly that socially too the child has a father with definite responsibilities and privileges.

This point of view goes hand in hand with the scientific attitude toward the illegitimate mother which instead of destructively condemning or scorning any woman who has brought a child into the world without the legal sanction of her group, rather seeks to understand the underlying causes of heredity and environment which have brought her (and likewise the father of her child) to the illegal conduct in question. Illegitimacy is the result of biological, psychological and social causes following definite scientific laws and there is a responsibility of the community as well as of the individual for its occurrence. . . .

While this point of view has taken a firm hold of our thinking, it is only just being applied to our case work with the illegitimate family, which is still decidedly in the experimental stage. Case work with the illegitimate family is seeking to work out principles whereby the interests of the illegitimate child and those of both its father and mother may be harmonized with the best interests of society. This end will be secured when the responsibility for the illegitimate child is more evenly shared by the father and mother as well as by the state. . . .

Further and better standards of case work in this field must be established by studying experimentally the question of removing

the evil effects of the stigma of illegitimacy. Only injustice is done in allowing this to attach to an innocent child and we must get evidence to show us when the welfare of society is furthered by having a stigma placed on one or both parents. Above all, in line with the findings of modern criminology, emphasis must be placed upon the reeducation of the individuals involved, not upon either punishment or stigma. . . .

#### Removing the Child's Handicap

After all it is the child that is our real interest and it is his or her welfare that we are most vitally interested in securing. We have emphasized above that the illegitimate family is a unit and as social workers we consider all the members together. This does not vitiate the fact that the welfare of the child is supreme and that we work for the welfare of the father and mother largely in order that we may do our utmost for the child. This plastic little creature, full of possibilities, must have its future safeguarded; we must seek to give him or her the best possible nurture and support, as nearly as possible as if he had been born in wedlock. It is our privilege and our problem to see how we can conquer social conditions so that he will be handicapped as little as is humanly possible. How shall we accomplish this result?

We must take into account the character and potentialities of both parents, arousing them if possible to make a plan of their own. We must meet them on their own level, working with them in order that they must understand their own problems and develop their own resources and character to meet their situation. It has been pointed out that we must remember that the father as well as the mother may be in vital need of our help, that he too may be passing through a moral and spiritual crisis needing friendship and guidance. Above all we should not make a plan for our clients and seek to force it upon them regardless of their cooperation. Such work is pedagogically unsound in that it fails to arouse the individuals to self-help and independence.

Having eliminated the idea of punishment, we shall try to arouse in both parents a love for and a responsibility for the child. . . .

#### Individualization of Treatment

So far in our discussion of treatment, we have failed to stress a principle of case work which is as vital in work with the illegitimate family as it is with the legitimate. This principle is individualization of treatment. The day is past when all illegitimate mothers were sent to a rescue home as they were considered to need moral reformation to atone for the sin they had committed. . . .

We therefore question the classification Mr. Carstens made in his

discussion at the National Conference at Pittsburgh when he divided illegitimate mothers into three classes, the good, the vicious, and the defective. It is true of course that those illegitimate mothers who are diagnosed as feeble-minded by a psychologist do constitute a group by themselves. This, however, is the only group that can be scientifically measured off, and even within this group we must to a certain extent apply the principle of individualization of treatment. In the main the dangers of classification more than offset the advantages. . . .

It seems vital in the majority of cases to keep the mother and child together at least for the first six months of the child's life, when the mother should be helped to nurse the baby. . . . Should we not rather bring her to see it as a joy and a privilege in order to safeguard her baby's life? The problem of supplying work for her at this time is a difficult one. In some cases it is possible for the mother to act as wet-nurse to other children and thus to support herself and her child. Some maternity hospitals are keeping the mother in the hospital long enough to train her in some form of employment and to assist her in securing the same, allowing her to live in the hospital and to keep her child there while she begins her work. . . .

#### A Normal Life for the Mother

Above all, we should aim in treatment to reinstate the mother in normal life, that is, to place her in such a way that in addition to interesting, remunerative work, she will have normal social contacts, companionship with others of her own age, if possible of both sexes under supervision. . . .

If the above conditions can be fulfilled and the mother and child can be kept together, there must be a gain for both. The relation of parent and child when it really exists is basic and is one which should never be broken until every effort has been made to strengthen it and test out its reality. The child needs the family life and ties and the mother needs the child. Yet, as in the case of marriage, we should not force the external living together if it is only the shell of the relationship which is existing. Keep mother and child together, then, if the mother is fitted to give physical, mental, moral and at least part of the financial care to her child and to be happy in doing it. Under such conditions it would seem as if no other plan could so securely safeguard the child's future. If, however, the mother is not fitted to give such care to the child, and cannot be trained for it while the child is with her, it seems unwise to keep mother and child together. Perhaps a temporary separation may be the solution, in order that the mother be trained for more adequate parenthood in the future. If she is incapable of being trained under any circumstances, it seems clear that a plan should be made for the child away from

its mother, with her relatives if possible, with the father or the father's relatives or in some other situation where it will have as nearly as possible normal home life. In the case of a defective mother the baby should be separated from her just as soon after birth as the physician deems wise.

In cases where there is no relative who can adequately care for the child, we are faced with the question of adoption. In this volume of *The Annals* J. Prentice Murphy has outlined certain questions which must be answered before the legal adoption of any child is arranged for. We must stress the fact that this should never be encouraged until we know all the facts about the child's own parents and relatives and are reasonably sure that they can never offer it a suitable home. . . .

No child that is of diseased and no child of feeble-minded parents should be placed in any home for adoption until the foster parents know the full facts of the case and are ready to take every precaution to see that the disease is not passed on to others and that later in life the defective germ-plasm is not mated with normal stock, thereby passing on the defect and causing much preventable misery. . . .

Source: Amey Eaton Watson, "The Illegitimate Family," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 77 (May 1918):103, 104, 107-108, 109, 110-111, 112-113.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## White House Conference Subcommittee Discussion of "Adoption," 1959

Adoption should be considered for any child who has been permanently separated from his natural parents, who is or should be made legally free, who needs and can benefit by family life. No child should be denied a permanent home because of age, religion, national origin or race. The majority of children are adoptable and this applies also to children with handicaps. . . .

### Community Responsibility for Adoption

"Society in general is concerned with every adoption and has a responsibility to protect all concerned." Joseph H. Reid.

Adoption is still one of the most controversial fields in social work, though it has become an accepted part of our culture. In order to extend adoption services to every child who needs them it is essential that:

- (1) there be broader public understanding of the goals and practices of social agencies.
- (2) there be honest self-examination by every community of the adequacy of its services for unmarried mothers and children in need of adoption and the strengthening of such services. Community organization to involve both professional and lay citizens is needed for this purpose.

Supervision by the State either directly or through social agencies of every child placed for adoption is a necessary safeguard for the welfare of children too young to participate in this permanent decision as to their family life.

Regulation to check unsupervised placement of babies through the black and grey market is necessary. Such legislation to be effective must however be accompanied by meeting the need for timely services to the natural parents, the child and the adoptive parents. No legislation directed to protecting infants can be effective unless it is complemented by both adequate and timely services.

Source: White House Conference Subcommittee Discussion, "Adoption," pp. 1, 4, Justine Wise Polier Papers, Box 46, Folder 570, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**  
Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Louise Waterman Wise, "Mothers in Name," 1920



Louise Waterman Wise with her two children, James and **Justine**

It is an easy thing in theory to insist that the place for the child of an unmarried mother is with the mother, and it goes without saying that every opportunity should be offered her to keep her child. A mother's pension should be given to every mother, though unmarried, who will keep her child. The stigma too long attached to the child of the unmarried mother should be removed. We understand perfectly the healing and purifying power of a child who dwells with an unmarried mother, if that mother be able and fit to care for it. And yet the facts and the circumstances are often against the continuance of such a union. Must we not think primarily of the future of the child? The child of an unmarried mother rarely has a chance. It is whipped from pillar to post and denied that place in life to which every human being is entitled whether its parents be married or not.

Contrast two pictures: the unwelcome, unloved child, born out of wedlock, the child that the mother leaves with us and cannot be induced to keep, the child that she leaves without a sigh; and then think of that child a year later, under the care of its adoptive parents, who love it as tenderly as man and woman are capable of loving a child. It is a very serious matter for the state and society to insist that a child shall remain with its natural mother merely because of its birth and that it shall be denied a thousand opportunities which adoption under the new order of life brings.

Source: Louise Waterman Wise, "Mothers in Name," *Survey* 43 (March 20, 1920): 780.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## [Excerpt from Helen Witmer et al, \*Independent Adoptions: A Follow-Up Study\*, 1963](#)

Adoption laws assume that it is important for children to get into good adoptive homes—homes that will maximize their chance to develop their full potential. To secure such homes for children is, in fact, the purpose of adoption in the United States, as testified to by numerous judicial decisions. As one judge put it in his decision relating to a disputed adoption case: “The ultimate purpose of adoption statutes is the welfare of the child, and the wishes and wants of the natural parents and also the proposed adoptive parents can be considered only as secondary to that purpose.”

The general purpose of this study has been to discover the extent to which the purpose of the adoption law was realized in independent adoptions in which the suitability of the petitioners’ home was determined by the Court after a social investigation had been conducted by the State Welfare Department, and after the child had been in the home for some time. The inquiry was made in one state, and with respect to a time when the provisions for social investigation of the adoptive home, the natural parents, and the child—provisions designed to provide protections for all three—were carried out minimally. This very fact permitted us to find out what happens when most adoption petitions are granted, and thus suggests a basis for deciding whether more control would be needed in order to reduce the proportion of unfavorable outcomes—and if so, what kind. . . .

### THE ADOPTION OUTCOME

An estimate of the proportions of favorable and unfavorable adoption outcomes should include both the home environment and the way the child seems to be faring in it. Accordingly, the information obtained about each child through the home and through the school was pooled in order to classify the “outcome” to date as reasonably satisfactory or definitely unsatisfactory. By this rough estimate, almost two-thirds of the outcomes could be called reasonably satisfactory, and an additional 10 per cent could not be classified as definitely unsatisfactory. According to the measures used in the study, between one-fifth and one-fourth were definitely unsatisfactory. Thus, whether one views the homes alone, the children’s

adjustment alone, or a combination of the two, in this sample at least two out of three were judged fair to excellent, and at least one out of four definitely unsatisfactory, according to current ideas of what a child should have in his home environment and what evidence of adequate development he should show. These figures are, of course, approximate. Viewing the different estimates separately and together, however, we can say that a considerable majority were working out well and a substantial minority were not. . . .

#### OVERALL COMMENT ON THE FINDINGS

Shall we, then, devote our efforts to improving independent adoption placements on the assumption that they are not likely to be eliminated soon, to legislating against them, or to simultaneously improving independent placements and increasing agency resources with a view to gradually making agency placements the sole means of adopting a child? The decision will depend on the estimate of the satisfactoriness—actual and potential—of independent placements, the extent to which they can be improved, the relative merits of agency placements, and the realistic probabilities of supplanting independent placements by agency placements. Such a decision is ultimately a value judgment, but a value judgment that is worthless unless it is supported by evidence.

Source: Helen L. Witmer et al., *Independent Adoptions: A Follow-Up Study* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1963), 337, 341-342, 361-362.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## A World War II Soldier Seeks Information About His Background, 1943

*In a poignant series of letters to Ruth Brenner, Director of the adoption agency that placed him, one young man stationed abroad during World War II shared his hopes and fears and pleaded for information about his natal origins. Brenner responded sympathetically, but explained that she could not violate her agency's confidentiality policy. The two nevertheless became close enough for him to call her "Godmother" and for her to agree to serve as the executor of his will. This young soldier died in China, his desire for **reunion** frustrated. Following are three excerpts from their correspondence in late 1943.*

---

My dear Godmother:

I hate to have to bring this up in a personal letter but I recently wrote to the Board of Health in Flatbush and they sent me a curt refusal to divulge information pertaining to my origin and family. They suggested emphatically that I should get this information from the institution I was in. Very polite but coldly abusive. I believe I have a decent right to know more about and be free to call on members of my own family if I so chose. I am no animal I am a man conscious of this phase lacking in my makeup. Please respect the fact that I am an individual too and let me live with myself peacefully. I cannot and refuse to make my adjustments to conform to an institutions code while I am still capable of thinking. . . .

Again I must ask you to divulge more pertinent information as to the identity and present whereabouts of my blood relations. And that word is not singular, it is plural. I want to know also if I have any brothers or sisters. Yes if I learn I do, I certainly intend to meet them. I feel it would do me more good than harm and after all these years with the same thought in mind I'm more convinced than ever that it is a necessity and not curiosity that makes me make these requests. It is something I am no longer in doubt of. I am positive, and because I have no means of accomplishing my desire I am greatly upset and concerned.

Perhaps this time you will feel disposed to assist me in this matter. Perhaps you will not. But I shall learn some day if I live. . . .

Your godson, . . .

\* \* \*

My very dear. . .

Now in reacting to your disappointment you have again asked me for more information as to the identity and present whereabouts of your relatives. When you make this kind of request of me, it is in my more official capacity of representing the agency as its executive director. As you godmother, I am concerned for and deeply identified with you in your wishes and needs and want to do my best to be helpful to you in any way that I can. As director of the agency, I am responsible for carrying out our responsibilities and obligations, both to the children coming to our care, but also the parents who entrust their children to the agency. For the sake of the children, the agency asks parents not to expect to be told of their whereabouts, and at the same time the agency agrees that information about parents will be kept confidential. . . .

If you could only see that each time you experience a setback which happens often enough to young people. . . you are thrown back on the unknown family and imagine that they would be all that for which you long.

Love from. . . .

\* \* \*

Dear Mrs. Brenner:

I still believe you are wrong in your opinion that I try to learn of my parents only in times of stress. But we'll let it go at that: For many years I have had one thought in mind, and certainly it gets stronger not weaker and that is to learn more of my own business. This, if I ever have time to do, I shall do. That, I am determined and nothing shall deter me. I realize you feel you have your responsibilities to your organization and we'll let it go at that. But I feel and am quite convinced you know—that your organization failed in its own responsibilities. . . .

Yes there are responsibilities of an organization of your type and so when we mention such responsibilities I weigh them and find they do not balance. Am I bitter, no; but am I different, yes. Is that not enough then to prove how really silly those "rules" are? Do I know what I shall do if I should know who my real mother or father is today? The answer to this is no. But do I know how I shall be if I do not know these things? Yes, definitely. Just as I am today—living—for self escape. So far I have been fortunate—yes I can find diversion in hard work and accomplishment, but I am not pleased at being a moody person, trying hard to get along with people, afraid of society, and being overly sensitive and on edge. . . . I feel I need to know.

Your godson, . . .

Source: Letters to and from Ruth Brenner, October 5, 1943. October 25, 1943, and November 6, 1943, Viola W. Bernard Papers, Box 160, Folder 6, Archives and Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Library, Columbia University.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



## Leontine Young, "Personality Patterns in Unmarried Mothers," 1945-1947

*Leontine Young was considered one of the country's foremost authorities on unmarried mothers in the early postwar era. She contends here that non-marital pregnancy expressed deep neuroses and required sophisticated psychological interpretation and adjustment. **Illegitimacy**, Young believed, was the result of emotional conflicts rooted in predictable, negative patterns of childhood development and family life. The study on which this conclusion was based deliberately excluded "girls coming from a cultural background where illegitimacy is more or less socially acceptable." This was an indirect reference to African-Americans and other minority communities whose supposed toleration of nonmarital pregnancy frequently justified racial discrimination in the delivery of adoption services. The perception that **illegitimacy** was most problematic among white Americans was widely shared, by professionals and laypeople alike, at a time when **Freudianism**—and therapeutic culture generally—had reached its zenith in the United States.*

The psychology of the unmarried mother—what she is like and why she becomes an unmarried mother—is an infinitely complex question. Its roots are deeply embedded in those powerful emotions of early childhood which form the basic pattern and structure of the individual's total life. Far more than most, this specific problem represents a direct expression of early fantasies and emotional conflicts. Perhaps this very directly has contributed to confusion about the unmarried mother. Clearly, she is a human being who like all other human beings responds dynamically to her particular life situation, but, also clearly, she chooses one common and specific response, having an out-of-wedlock child.

Unless we are to assume that illegitimacy may spring from any haphazard combination of motives and circumstances, there must be certain defined emotional patterns that lead to the creation of this problem. Anyone who has observed a considerable number of unmarried mothers can testify to the fact that there is nothing haphazard or accidental in the causation that brought about this specific situation with these specific girls. On the contrary, there is an inevitability about the chain of emotions climaxing in this action which rivals the old Greek tragedies. . . .

This leads logically to the question of what combination of factors and

circumstances, what personality pattern underlie this problem. Are there common elements in the backgrounds of these girls? Are there common trends and tendencies in their personality structures despite the individual variations, the unique quality of any single human being? What of particular significance in their family situations or their life histories casts light upon the development and direction of these personality patterns? . . . Obviously, only a careful and detailed study of a large number of cases could give any final answer to such questions but even a limited survey can elicit the broad outlines, can highlight consistencies and inconsistencies, can define probabilities.

For this purpose a random sample of 100 cases from an unmarried mother agency has been studied. . . . It was immediately apparent that almost all the girls had come from two or three general types of family patterns and that this family pattern determined to a very large extent the pattern of her personality and the direction of her life experiences. What were the kinds of family situations in which the early lives of these 100 girls had been molded?

### **Dominating Mothers**

Thirty-six of them came from homes where the mother was definitely the dominant personality and the father either was a weaker person or was emotionally cut off from the children to a greater or lesser degree. To the girls of this group the father was all too often a stranger, the man who paid the bills but was not allowed, or did not attempt, to share intimately in the lives and feelings of his children. The mother on the other hand, dominated her daughter's life to an unhealthy degree, was usually possessive and often rejecting and sadistic. While there were 36 variations on this pattern, they were variations of degree not of kind, variations in expression not in essential quality. This family situation had left its indelible mark upon the girl. . . .

There is a striking similarity between the girl's relationship to her own father and her relationship to the father of her baby. One cannot escape the conclusion that she is in one sense seeking her own father and that the father of her baby is truly a kind of biological tool, unimportant to her as a person in his own right. . . .

What better revenge could she devise against a rejecting mother than to bear an illegitimate child and place the responsibility for him upon her mother's shoulders? And in what more complete way could she express her love for and her dependency upon her mother, and assuage her guilt toward her mother, than to give the mother the baby, a tangible evidence of her deep, unconscious tie as well as a symbol of her own desire to be again an infant cared for by the mother? . . .

When it was clear that a girl's mother would not accept the baby, she nearly always planned to place the child for adoption. Nor did she show any great conflict about this decision; the conflict did not lie primarily in this area at all. . . .

### **Dominating Fathers**

In contrast to the family background of these 36 girls, 15 others came from homes where the father was the dominating personality and the mother was the weaker or less aggressive person. . . .

When one considers the nature of their relationship to their own fathers, it is scarcely surprising to discover that their experiences with the fathers of their babies were not happy. None of them knew the man well or had known him for any considerable period of time. . . . Observing them one got the impression that they were trying unconsciously either to deny their own fathers by picking a virtual stranger or to re-experience with a lover much the same kind of masochistic relationship they had had with their fathers. . . .

These girls had a more difficult time coming to a decision about the baby than those in the first group. . . . They did not show the strong need. . . to give their babies to their mothers. . . . Of these 15 girls, 11 placed their babies for adoption. . . .

### **Broken Homes**

Not surprisingly, the largest group of girls, 43, came from broken homes. . . . Closer study of the individual situations reveals that in 22 of the cases the father was gone, either through death, separation, or divorce, and the mother had become the dominant influence and authority. Twelve of those mothers had clearly been dominating, sadistic, and openly rejecting, and all of them had been to some extent rejecting of their daughters. In 8 cases the mother was gone and the father was the parent taking responsibility for the children. Five of these fathers had been definitely rejecting, had been openly abusive or coldly indifferent, and had taken little responsibility for their daughters as they grew older. None of the 8 girls had had a close or happy relationship with their fathers. In 11 cases both parents were gone, and the girl had been brought up by relatives or in foster homes. . . .

### **Some Inferences**

Certainly there are common elements in the backgrounds of these girls. Most conspicuous is the fact that none of them had happy, healthy relationships with their parents. Whatever the particular family situation, the conflicting feelings of love and hate remained a basic and potent source of unhappiness and trouble. Almost equally noticeable was the dominance of the mother, the strength and the pervasiveness of the role she played in this complex drama. . . . The more dominating, the more sadistic, the more rejecting the mother, the sicker and more hopeless was the girl. . . .

All these girls, unhappy and driven by unconscious needs, had blindly sought a way out of their emotional dilemma by having an out-of-wedlock child. . . . None of these violent neurotic conflicts are helpful ingredients in creating a good mother. . . .

Source: Leontine Young, "Personality Patterns in Unmarried Mothers," in *Understanding the Psychology of the Unmarried Mother* (New York: Family Service Association of America, 1945-1947), 7-13.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman

[Timeline](#)[People & Organizations](#)[Adoption Studies/ Adoption Science](#)[Topics in Adoption History](#)[Further Reading](#)[Document Archives](#)[Site Index](#)

## A Young Man in Search of His Parents, 1913

*The following letter was sent to the managers of an orphanage by a member of the U.S. Navy in 1913. The young man had been searching for his parents for years without success. In the early decades of the century, professionals who worked for institutions and agencies frequently acted as agents of disclosure and helped teenagers and adults locate long-lost relatives. During this period, sloppy or non-existent records were much greater obstacles to [search and reunion](#) than policies of [confidentiality and sealed records](#). In this case, the superintendent scoured the orphanage records and went to see the letter-writer in person, but no clues about this young man's background could ever be found. Child welfare advocates in the [U.S. Children's Bureau](#) and the [Child Welfare League of America](#) insisted on [minimum standards](#), including improved record-keeping practices, so that children placed away from their families—whether temporarily or permanently—could be given the answers they wanted.*

---

Dear Madam:

Will i asked you to do me a great favor i have not asked since i left the home 10 or 11 years ago because I did not fell it like i do when traveling around the world. Will you please look in the old records and see if you can trace up my father and mother. i don't know or have never remember seeing since leaving the dear old homestead i hope to visit propley this summer in my Uniform. My father name i think is Richard \_\_\_\_\_ and mother Susan \_\_\_\_\_ i doing well i join to see the world and save some money so i could see some part of the world if i knew where my mother was i would not Join the navy. Some time i get a thinking about the \_\_\_\_\_ Orphan Asylum & mother & i sit down & hold my face & cry. As i grow up in manhood with no one to love but God i feel like a lost sheep. Im 23 years old now & Nov 7, 1916 i will be 27 years old. Miss \_\_\_\_\_, Directress, will you please investigate & find out something. Some yrs ago Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ said he thought they were up in New York State in the poor house. i been searching for the last 6 yrs. I doing find & i have not had a sick day since i left the grand old home.

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Source: Georgia G. Ralph, *Elements of Record Keeping for Child-Helping Organizations* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1915), 5.

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman



## Joseph L. Zarefsky, "Children Acquire New Parents," 1946



This picture of Nell getting acquainted with a family who wished to adopt her accompanied Zarefsky's 1946 survey of the growth in adoptions in the United States. He emphasized that agency practices and **minimum standards** were necessary protections for all parties to adoption. The original caption under the photo noted that "after a trial period has shown that she fits into the family circle, legal adoption will be requested."

*Joseph Zarefsky was Chief of the Statistics Section in the U.S. Children's Bureau when that agency began collecting national statistics on adoption. This early survey was subtitled "Recent increases in adoptions emphasize need for adequate adoption procedures," illustrating how adoption reformers used improved **statistical knowledge** about the growing numbers of adoptions to advance their goals. Zarefsky pointed out how little reliable or detailed quantitative data policy-makers and professionals actually had about adoption patterns even as he summarized what was known at the time. He noted dramatic increases in relative adoptions, but independent adoptions by nonrelatives were, characteristically, the focus of his concern. The premise of adoption reform was that too few adoptions were being safeguarded by professional oversight or the enforcement of **minimum standards**.*

For an intelligent campaign to establish and maintain adequate adoption procedures in all the States one of the basic needs is information showing the problems involved in the current procedures. However, even the number of children adopted each year in the United States is not known because most States have no provision for the central collection of such statistics. In about half the States the department of welfare can obtain statistics on adoption proceedings because it (or its authorized agencies) has the legal responsibility to investigate petitions for adoption or because it has established working relationships with the courts empowered to act on such petitions. Late in 1945 the Children's Bureau obtained from 22 of these States (including three-eighths of the estimated 1943 population under 21 years of age in the United States) information on the number of children for whom adoption petitions had been filed in 1944 and on selected identifying data relating to the children and their placements.

### **Volume of adoption petitions**

These 22 States, representing all sections of the country, reported a total of more than 16,000 children for whom adoption petitions had been filed. On the basis of these data it is estimated that such petitions were filed for approximately 50,000 children throughout the country in 1944. In proportion to the population under 21 years of age in the State, the number of children for whom petitions were filed in Oregon was more than nine times that in North Carolina, the States reporting the highest and lowest rates, respectively. The Southeastern States, with the exception of Florida, reported the lowest number of children for whom petitions had been filed in relation to their child populations. . . .

One of the most significant developments in the field of child welfare has been the great increase in adoptions during recent years. . . .

The increase in adoptions by stepparents underlies the great increase in adoptions, although adoptions by other relatives and by persons not related to the child also have increased markedly during recent years. In the six States for which comparable data are available the proportion of children being adopted by stepparents increased from 17 percent in 1934 to 41 percent in 1944. The great increase in stepparent adoptions undoubtedly represents in part war-stimulated legalization of family relationships that in many instances had existed in fact for years. The disruption of home life occasioned by service in the armed forces probably has been an incentive to the formalizing of existing family ties. It would be of interest to know how many of the situations in which stepparents or other relatives are petitioning to adopt children can be traced to war deaths and the break-up of homes due to war conditions, but data of this nature are not now available. . . .

The adoption of children by stepparents is almost always undertaken without the aid of an agency, and frequently petitions filed by stepparents are not subjected to the same study as those filed by persons not related to the child. Available data indicate the children being adopted by stepparents and other relatives are generally older than other children being adopted, and are more frequently children who were born in wedlock. Finally, courts almost routinely grant adoption decrees requested by stepparents. . . .

**Many independent adoptions are by nonrelated persons**

Slightly more than a quarter of the children for whom petitions were filed in 1944 had been placed in the adoptive home by a placement agency; another quarter had been placed without the aid of an agency by parents, friends, relatives, physicians, lawyers, or others; the remainder were being adopted without the aid of an agency by relatives or by persons with whom the child had been living. If only children being adopted by nonrelated persons are considered, the importance of independent placements is indicated by the fact that more than half of these children had been placed without the aid of a recognized child-welfare agency.

Placement of a child for adoption by a competent child-welfare agency is one assurance that adequate safeguards are being observed for the child, for his natural parents, and for his adoptive parents. Agencies provide this protection by studying the child, investigating the status of the natural parents and of the prospective adoptive home, and supervising the placement during a waiting period. This basic and elementary assurance was lacking in more than half the children (and their parents) for whom adoption proceedings were instituted by nonrelated persons in 1944 in these 15 States. Observance of other desirable adoption procedures cannot completely compensate for this shortcoming. . . .

**Most of the children are very young**

Another indication of the need for adequate safeguards in adoption placements and procedures is the fact that most of the children are very young, as shown by the following age distribution of the children (8,764) for whom this information was available in the 15 States previously mentioned:

| <b>Age at filing of petition</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Total                            | 100            |
| Under 6 years                    | 62             |
| Under 6 months                   | 17             |
| 6 months, under 2 years          | 21             |
| 2 years, under 6 years           | 24             |

|                          |    |
|--------------------------|----|
| 6 years, under 14 years  | 26 |
| 14 years, under 21 years | 12 |

#### **Children born in wedlock**

Adoption is popularly identified with illegitimacy. However, 42 percent of the children for whom petitions were filed in the 15 States in 1944 were born in wedlock; in 4 States they outnumbered the children who were born out of wedlock. More than half (55 percent) of the children born in wedlock came from homes that had been broken by divorce, desertion, or separation; 32 percent had lost one or both of their parents by death. Undoubtedly a large number of these children were being adopted by a stepparent. . . .

#### **Children born out of wedlock**

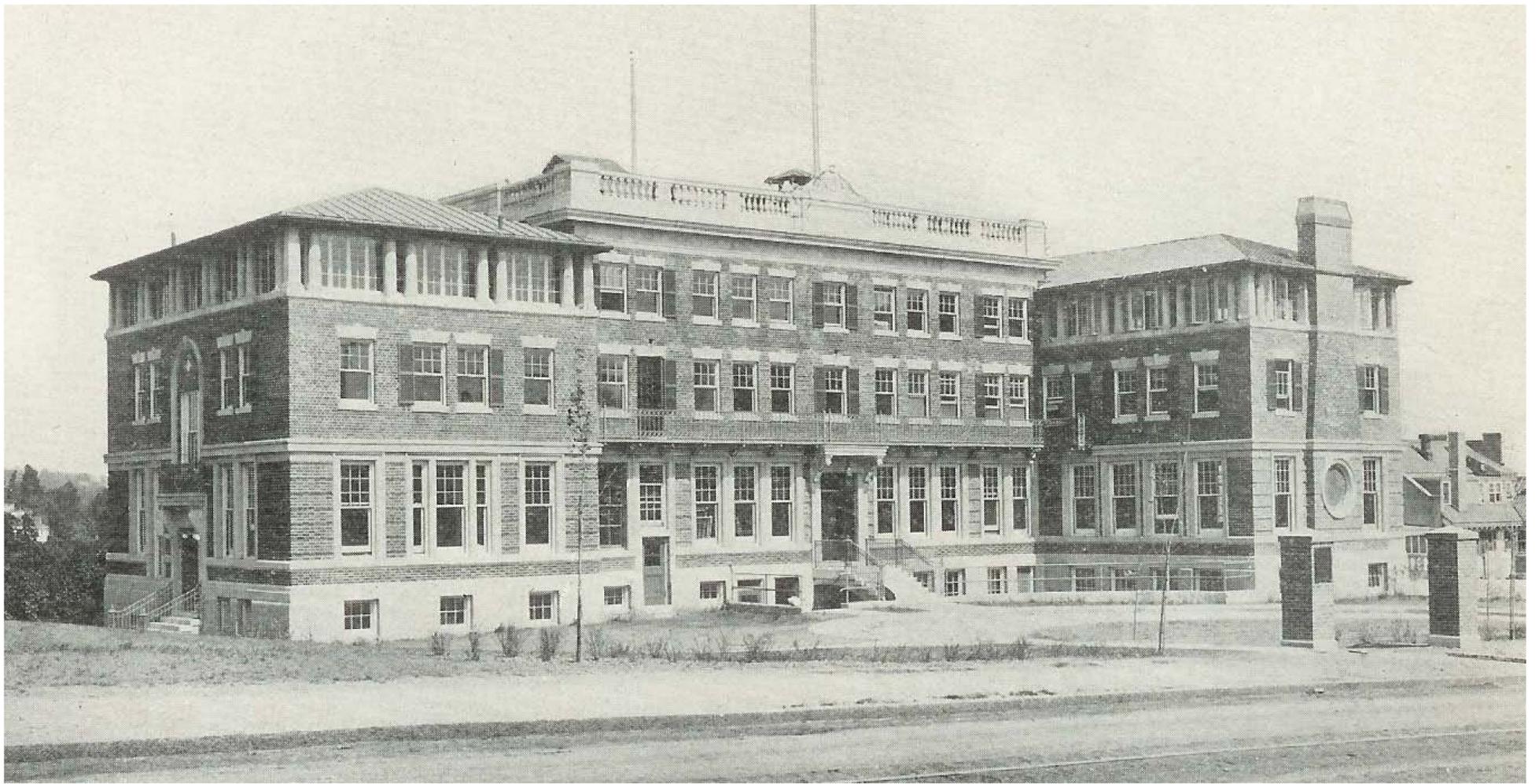
Children being adopted need to be safeguarded by adequate procedures whether born in or out of wedlock. But in the case of children born out of wedlock the need for services is most compelling. More than two-thirds of the children placed independently of an agency in the 15 States (exclusive of those being adopted by relatives independently of an agency) were born out of wedlock. . . .

It is evident that we have a long road to travel before all parties to the adoption of a child are assured of all the safeguards that should accompany the legal establishment of a new family relationship. . . .

Source: Joseph L. Zarefsky, "Children Acquire New Parents: Recent increases in adoptions emphasize need for adequate adoption procedures," *Child* 10 (March 1946):142-144.



Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman

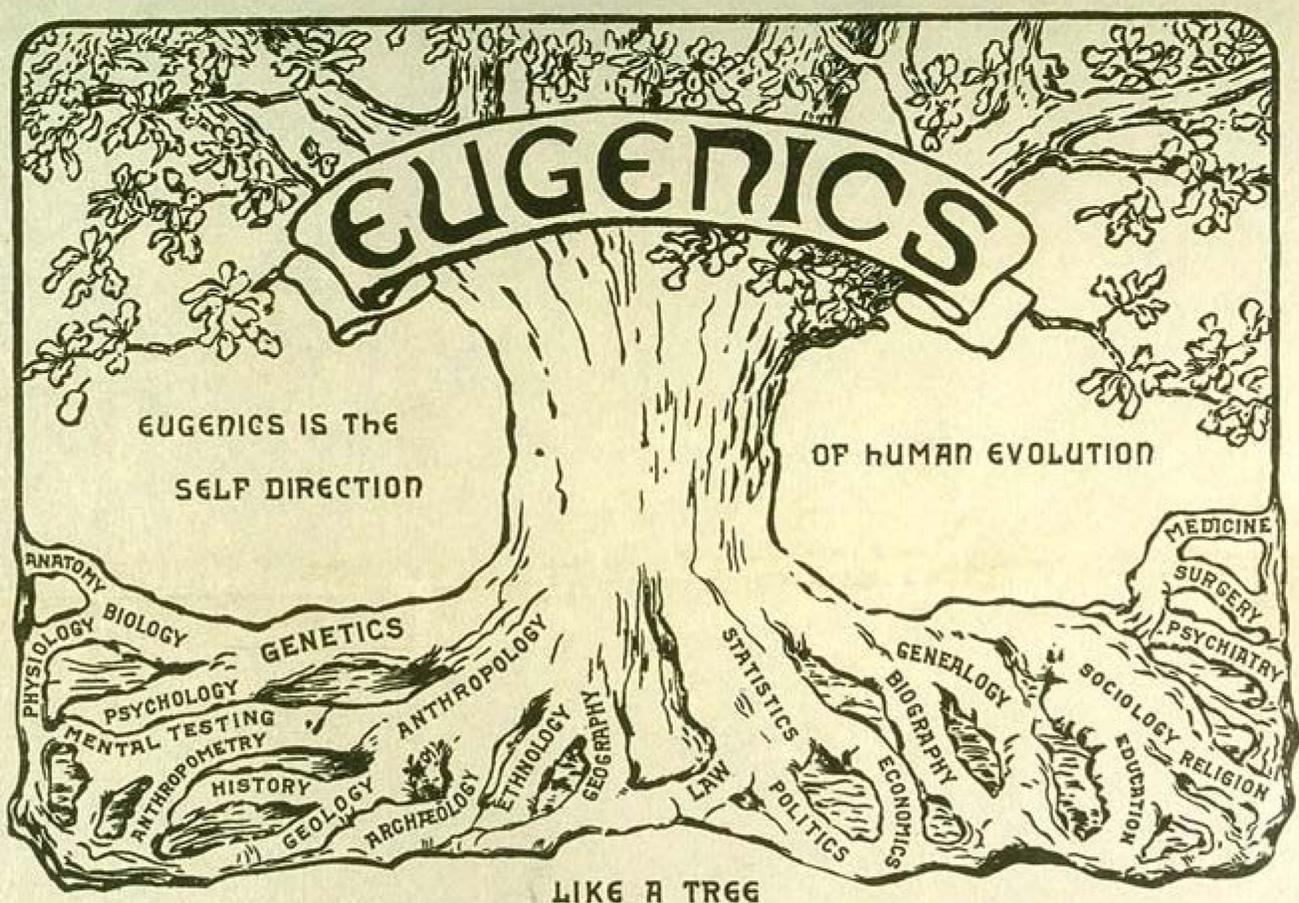


3134

# FEEBLE - MINDNESS.



American Philosophical Society. Noncommercial, educational use only.



LIKE A TREE  
EUGENICS DRAWS ITS MATERIALS FROM MANY SOURCES AND ORGANIZES  
THEM INTO AN HARMONIOUS ENTITY.

American Philosophical Society. Noncommercial, educational use only.



American Philosophical Society. Noncommercial, educational use only.



## Justine Wise Polier (1903-1987)



[Back](#)

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288  
(541) 346-3118  
E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)  
[About the Project and the Author](#)  
© Ellen Herman





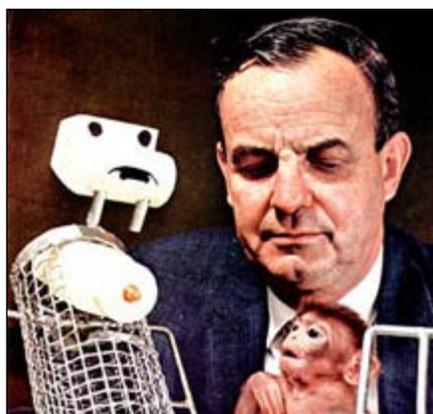




## Harry F. Harlow, Monkey Love Experiments



Harry Harlow with the mother surrogates he used to raise infant monkeys. The terrycloth mother is pictured above. The bare wire mother appears below.

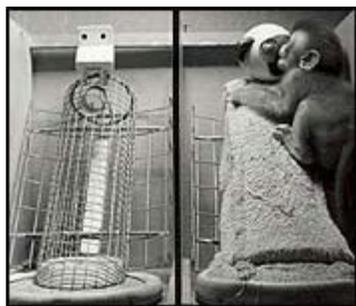


### Estonian translation by Boris Kozlow

Kuulus katseid, mis psühholoog Harry Harlow läbi 1950 aasta ema kaotusest reesusahvide olid vaatamisväärsused mitte ainult primatology, kuid areneva teaduse ja kinnitamise kaotus. Harlow ise korduvalt võrreldes tema katsealusest laste ja ajakirjanduses üldiselt kohelda oma järeldused suur avaldused armastusest ja arengu inimestena. Need ahv armastus eksperimendid oli võimas mõju kõigi ja kõik lahutamine emadele ja imikutele, sealhulgas vastu võtta, samuti laste kasvatamisega üldiselt.

Tema University of Wisconsin laboris, Harlow probed laadi armastus, mille eesmärk on valgustada oma esimese põhjused ja mehhanismid on suhete moodustatud vahel imikud ja emad. Esiteks, ta näitas, et ema armastus oli emotsionaalne, mitte füsioloogiliste, mis tõendab vastuvõtmise sõbralik teooria, et arstiabi järjepidevuse-"kasvatada"-oli palju määravaks teguriks terve psühholoogilise arengu kui "iseloomu." Teiseks, ta näitas, et võime manus tihedalt seotud kriitilisi perioode noorusaeg, mille järel oli raske või võimatu, et kompenseerida saamata jäänud esialgne emotsionaalne turvalisus. Kriitiline periood, doktoritöö kinnitas tarkust pannes lastel lapsendajate kui varsti pärast sündi kui võimalik. Harlow töö ette eksperimentaalsed tõendid prioriteetsuse psühholoogiline üle bioloogiliste lapsevanemaks, rõhutades samal ajal arendustegevusega seotud riskid vastuvõtmise lapsed kaugemale lapsekingades. See normaliseeritud ja pathologized vastu samal ajal.

Kuidas Harlow minna ehitamisel oma teadust armastust? Ta eraldatud imiku ahvid emalt paar tundi



Given a choice, infant monkeys invariably preferred surrogate mothers covered with soft terry cloth, and they spent a great deal of time cuddling with them (above), just as they would have with their real mothers (below).



pärast sündi, siis korraldatakse noortele loomadele olema "tõstetud" kaks liiki asendusemadus ahv ema masinad, mõlemad varustatud loobuda piima. Üks ema oli valmistatud paljaste traatvõrk. Teine oli traat ema kaetud pehme Terry lapiga. Harlow esimene tähelepanek oli see, et ahvid, kes tuli valida ema veetis palju aega klammerdumine Terry lapiga rahaasendajaid, isegi kui nende füüsilist toitu tuli pudelid paigaldatud tühi traat emad. See soovitas, et imiku armastus polnud lihtne vastus rahulolu füsioloogilistele vajadustele. Attachment ei olnud esmajoonel nälga või janu. Seda ei saa vähendada põetamine.

Siis Harlow muuta oma eksperimenteerida ja teha teine oluline tähelepanek. Kui ta lahutas imikute kahte gruppi ja andis neile ei ole võimalik valida kahte tüüpi emad, kõik ahvid jäi võrdsetes kogustes ja kasvas füüsiliselt samas tempos. Aga sarnasusi lõppes seal. Monkeys, kes oli pehme, puutetundlikud kontakti oma Terry lapiga emad käitus teistmoodi kui ahvid, kelle emad olid valmistatud külm, kõva traat. Harlow püstitasid hüpoteesi, et liikmed esimese rühma kasu saanud psühholoogilist ressursse emotsionaalne attachment-kättesaamatuks liikmed teine. Andes kindlustunde ja turvalisuse imikute cuddling hoida normaalse arengu tee.

Mis täpselt ei Harlow näha, et veenis teda emotsionaalsest kiindumusest teinud otsustava arengu vahe? Kui eksperimentaalne teemad olid hirmutanud kummaline, valju objekte, näiteks kaisukarud peksmise trummid, ahvid tõstatatud Terry lapiga asemikke tehtud kehaliste kontakti oma ema, hõõrutakse vastu, ja lõpuks rahunenud. Harlow theorized, et nad kasutasid oma emaga kui "psühholoogilist baasi tehingute," võimaldades neil säilitada mänguline ja uudishimulik pärast esialgset ehmatus oli möödas. Seevastu ahvid tõstatatud traatvõrk asemikke ei tagane oma emadele kui hirmul. Selle asemel nad viskas end põrandale, näppude ise, edasi-tagasi kõigutada, ja karjusin terror. Need tegevused meenutaks käitumist autistlik ja puudust kannatavatele lastele sagedamini täheldatavad institutsioonide kui ka patoloogilise käitumise täiskasvanute piirdu psühhiaatriaasutustes Harlow märkida. Võimas jõud ja

kinnitamise langusele vaimse tervise ja haiguse vaevalt läbi viidud rohkem dramaatiliselt.

Järgnevatel katsetel, Harlow on ahvid tõestanud, et "parem hilja kui mitte kunagi" ei olnud loosung kohaldatavad manusena. Kui Harlow paigutas oma teemasid täieliku isoleerimise esimest elukuudel, keelates neil kontakti teiste imikutel või kas tüüp asendusema, olid nad jäädavalt rikutud. Harlow ja tema kolleegid korrata neid eksperimente, allutades imiku ahvid vaheldusrikas perioodide motherlessness. Nad jõudsid järeldusele, et mõju varajase ema äravõtmine võiks olla vastupidine ahvidel ainult siis, kui oli kestnud alla 90 päeva, ja hinnangute kohaselt samaväärne inimestel oli kuus kuud. Pärast neid kriitilisi perioode, ei ole summa kokkupuude emad või eakaaslastega oleks võinud muuta ahvid "ebatavaline käitumine ja korvata emotsionaalne kahju juba toimunud. Kui emotsionaalne võlakirjad olid kõigepealt kindlaks võtmeks oli , kas nad võiksid olla kehtestatud üldse.

For eksperimentaato nagu Harlow, vaid arengu teooriaid kontrollitud kontrollitud laboritingimustes väärt, et sinna kutsutakse teaduslik. Harlow polnud Freudi. Ta kritiseeris psühhoanalüüsi jaoks spekuloida põhjal vigane mälestusi, eeldades, et täiskasvanud häired tingimata pärit lapsepõlvest kogemusi, ja tõlgendamiseks liiga sõna tähendus last rinnaga. Veel Harlow on andmed kinnitasid tuntud psühhoanalüütiline rõhku ema-lapse suhe koidikul elu ja tema teadustöö kajastub lahtiütlemine eugeenika ja triumf raviviisid juba käimas kogu humanitaarteaduste ja kliinilise kutsealade poolt midcentury.

Koos lapse analüütikute ja teadlaste, sh Anna Freud ja René Spitz, Harry Harlow on eksperimendid lisatud teaduslikku legitiimsuse kaks võimsat argumendid: vastu institutsionaalne lastehoid ja kasuks psühholoogiline lapsevanemaks. Nii soovitas püsivus seotud lapsendamine oli palju parem kui muud kokkulepped, kui ta tuli tuleviku kindlustamisel vaimset ja emotsionaalset heaolu lastele, kes vajavad vanemad.

## Document Excerpt

- Harry F. Harlow, "Love in Infant Monkeys," 1959



Further reading by and about Harry Harlow

[Timeline](#) | [People and Organizations](#) | [Adoption Studies/Adoption Science](#)  
[Topics in Adoption History](#) | [Further Reading](#) | [Document Archives](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Home](#) | [Search](#)

Page Updated: 2-24-2012  
Site designed by:



**To learn more about The Adoption History Project, please contact Ellen Herman**

Department of History, University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1288

(541) 346-3118

E-mail: [adoption@uoregon.edu](mailto:adoption@uoregon.edu)

[About the Project and the Author](#)

© Ellen Herman



McGILL UNIVERSITY  
MONTREAL

ADOPTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Dear Fellow Adoptive Parents:

As director of the Adoption Research Project at McGill University's School of Social Work I wish to thank you for your cooperation. You have helped us in the task of discovery concerning a unique and important institution, child adoption. I believe that in participating in our work you have also helped yourselves, knowing that in this way you are furthering something close to the heart of every adoptive parent.

The questionnaire which you have just completed can be anonymous if you wish it so. The information you have supplied will be of considerable help by itself. But the value of this work would be even greater if many of the adoptive parents would let us have their names so that we can contact them again on the basis of interest in their answers. If you decide to remain in contact with us we will be able to build on the present work. A number would be substituted for your name and only the research director would have access to the names which correspond to the numbers. At the end of the study all names and addresses will be destroyed.

In case you decide to be among those who will participate in the continuing study, please enter your name and address in the space at the left below. Let me thank you again for the help you have given us now.

With best wishes for you and your family,

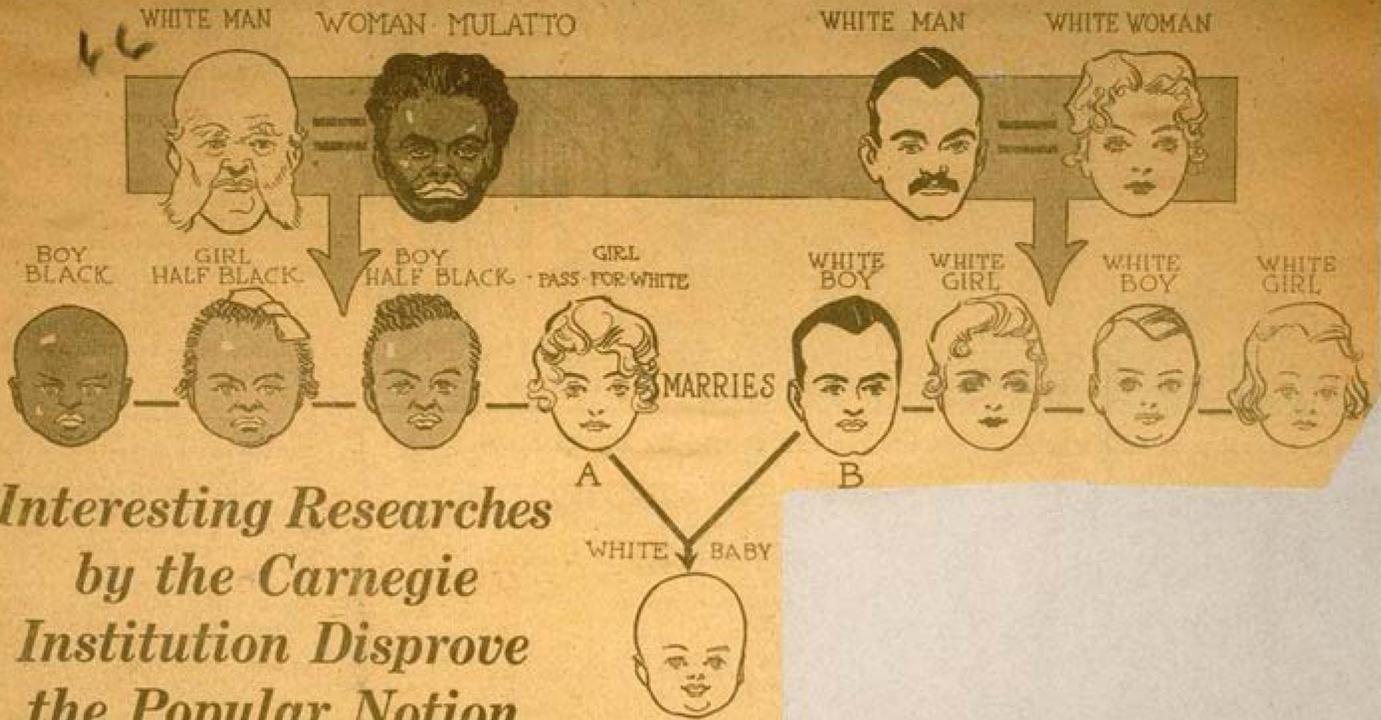
Sincerely yours ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "H. David Kirk".

H. David Kirk  
Associate Professor  
and Director,  
Adoption Research Project



A19746



*Interesting Researches  
by the Carnegie  
Institution Disprove  
the Popular Notion  
that a "Pass-for-White" Person Married to  
a Pure White May Have a Negro Child*

By Dr. Woods Hutchinson  
The World's Foremost Physician-Author.



Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory. Noncommercial, educational use only.



BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS

DIVISION OF HEALTH

CITY OF CLEVELAND

Certificate of Birth Registration



This Certifies that, a certificate of birth is on file at this office bearing the name

Born at \_\_\_\_\_ Father's Name \_\_\_\_\_

on \_\_\_\_\_ 19 \_\_\_\_\_ Mother's Name \_\_\_\_\_

No. of Certificate \_\_\_\_\_

*GE Harmon*  
Registrar

Signed *R.H. Bishop, Jr.* M.D.  
Commissioner of Health