3 Science, Social Work, and Bureaucracy: Cautious Developments in Adoption and Foster Care, 1930–1969

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The 1920s marked the beginning of the end for zealous urban welfare work on behalf of dependent children. The righteous indignation over the plight of abandoned and abused youth that had erected grand orphanages and carried out vast rescue and relocation schemes withered from a flame to a flicker. The years that followed, from Roosevelt's New Deal to Johnson's Great Society, were relatively staid in terms of tenacious innovation. Compared to activists in the late 1800s and early 1900s, adoption and foster care administrators of the mid-twentieth century cultivated an atmosphere of studied objectivity, painstaking adherence to scientific principles, and above all, caution.

Nevertheless, these were groundbreaking decades in which significant developments transformed adoption and foster care into the multifaceted systems we know today. The transformation was driven by a diverse collection of increasingly specialized policymakers and reformers who segmented those seeking adoption and foster care services into distinct populations along social, economic, and ethnic lines. Therefore, this chapter explores this important period thematically rather than chronologically so the reader can better grasp how particular interest groups shaped adoption and foster care in often contrary ways.

The first two sections discuss how foster care and adoption gradually eclipsed orphanages, the dominant mode of sheltering and caring for dependent children in the nineteenth century, as social workers and child development experts imposed new standards and practices on voluntary organizations. The next four themes focus on the forces driving the emergent white adoption market in a more bureaucratized direction, while simultaneously homogenizing adoptive families. The final three sections

detail the momentous contrary developments that truly distinguished adoption in the mid-twentieth century from previous decades: the growth in international adoption across racial lines which openly rejected the "as if begotten" model of adoptive kinship, and the simultaneous increase in confidentiality surrounding most other adoption procedures that frustrated adoptees' efforts to trace their biological origins—a frustration that would eventually lead some to publicly denounce legalized secrecy in adoption by the end of the period.

The four decades surveyed here may have lacked some of the passion and boldness of earlier times, but they deserve careful consideration for the historic shifts in ideology, policy, and practice that redirected dependent child care down unexplored pathways, toward an uncertain future.

ORPHANAGES AND ORPHAN TRAINS

By the 1920s, time-honored solutions to child dependency were dissolving as new sensibilities emerged regarding the nature of poverty and dependent children. In 1929, the last of the New York Children's Aid Society orphan trains deposited their cargos in western communities before finally succumbing to mounting obstacles, including laws barring the interstate traffic of children, a growing tendency among professional social workers to keep troubled families together, and mandatory education statutes that discouraged the use of dependent children as indentured labor (Holt 1992; see also Chapter 2 in this volume). Enthusiasm for charitable orphanages had also steadily declined among child-welfare advocates. Boarding children in private homes or, better still, enabling mothers to keep their children with the help of state-funded mothers' pensions was the new strategy of choice (Mink 1995; Cauthen and Amenta 1996). During the 1920s, many institutions emptied their beds and released their wards into foster care or suburban cottage systems, amending their missions to institutionalize only those with physical and emotional challenges.

Distress caused by the Great Depression, however, temporarily revived the demand for institutional services. At the height of the economic crisis, hundreds of thousands of homeless children were set adrift to search for work and shelter. Destitute youth who remained at home remained vulnerable to the demoralizing effects of poverty that drove their parents to illness, alcoholism, desertion, and death. Many ended up as dependent cases, some orphaned or abandoned, but most committed by destitute family members who hoped to reclaim them at some future date. Journalist and humorist Art Buchwald recalled the years after his mother was committed to a mental institution as a nomadic, unpredictable time. He and his sisters were shuffled from one institution to another, while their father struggled to pay their boarding fees with his meager income. "As I changed shelters, I became convinced that I would always be on the move," he wrote

in his autobiography, *Leaving Home*. "I adjusted to the shifts, first with tears, but, as I grew older, with a smile. I never let on how frightening the moves were to me." Buchwald recalled never being certain to whom he really belonged. No matter how kind the matrons of the orphanages and foster homes were, he "felt like an intruder using one of their bedrooms" (Buchwald 1993).

By the mid-1930s the orphanage population had swelled to 144,000, the highest capacity ever (Berebitsky 2000). In order to stretch their already meager resources, they crowded two or three residents into each bed, cut services, dug into their own capital funds, and begged contributions for food and fuel. When the crisis abated, however, orphanages found themselves worse off financially than before the Depression. Some picked up where they had left off in the 1920s, redirecting their work to serve children deemed ineligible for foster care. Others emptied their beds and closed their doors for good.

SUBSIDIZED FOSTER CARE

As institutions groaned under the weight of overcapacity during the 1930s, the growing system of paid foster care experienced a similar strain. Many parents used both foster homes and orphanages to shelter and feed their children until the family could be reunited. Since most dependent children were not available for adoption, they failed to attract applicants with free homes who were seeking sons and daughters to call their own. Over time, subsidized foster care eclipsed the free foster system, forcing agencies to provide stipends to foster parents under increasingly harsh financial conditions. Compounding the problem was the difficulty caseworkers faced in finding qualified applicants who could provide a stable, healthy environment. One Jewish orphanage launched an earnest, if ultimately ineffectual, radio campaign to recruit new foster parents, imploring listeners to respond to their call for "new homes" and "good homes," because "One family home is likely to serve one child or family of children and befriend it for many years" (Boretz 1938). The rising tide of needy children forced agencies to make exceptions for less-qualified applicants, and overload foster parents already on the payroll.

The ongoing challenges of caring for children made homeless by family stress demanded a federal initiative that could keep families from dissolving in the first place. Mothers' pensions, a collection of unevenly distributed and meagerly funded state programs that benefited only a select few white widows, were a Progressive Era innovation that had proved utterly inadequate. Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), Title IV of Roosevelt's 1935 Social Security Act, expanded the definition of dependency to include children who had lost a parent's care due to death, absence from the home, or prolonged incapacity (Cauthen and Amenta 1996). Although it was far

from adequate to meet the needs of all who might benefit, especially foster children living away from home, ADC did serve to reduce child dependency by providing just enough funds to keep many parents from having to relinquish their children. In 1933, 59 out of every 10,000 children in the United States lived in foster care, an all-time high. Gradually, the number fell to 38 per 10,000 by 1960 (Ashby 1997).

In 1962, just as the ever-shrinking system was suddenly flooded anew with children displaced by a revived interest in detecting and preventing child abuse, further amendments extended ADC's scope to cover foster care costs for children who became wards of the state. By the mid-1970s, the number of children in foster care had ballooned once more to an all-time high of 75 out of every 10,000, leading to new congressional initiatives in the early 1980s to expedite the adoption of children languishing in unstable foster arrangements (Ashby 1997).

MATERNITY HOMES AND PROFESSIONAL CASEWORK WITH UNWED MOTHERS

Interest in infant adoption also grew during the Depression. Since the late nineteenth century, significant improvements in pediatric medicine, nutrition, and prevention of epidemics in infant hospitals had dramatically increased the number of dependent babies surviving to childhood. And significant shifts in social work practices with unwed mothers channeled these infants directly into the adoption market.

Up until the late 1920s, the evangelical women who staffed maternity homes pressed unwed mothers to keep their offspring in order to redeem themselves and avoid future indiscretions. In the early 1910s, professionals in the emerging field of social work were seeking new domains of influence. Turning their gaze on the perceived crisis of illegitimacy, they launched an attack against what they termed the sentimental, antiquated approach of religious reformers that treated unwed mothers as innocent victims of seduction and abandonment. Social workers saw these same women as neurotic, delinquent, ignorant, and unfit to raise their own children. They began scrutinizing maternity home operations and advocating for trained caseworkers to be brought on staff. Once in charge, social workers counseled clients to sign relinquishment agreements, freeing up thousands of healthy, white infants for adoption (Kunzel 1993).

Awaiting these babies were thousands of middle-class, childless couples eager to open their homes to the newborn of a perfect stranger. A Minnesota study published in 1933 revealed that most adoptive parents of the early twentieth century lived in the city rather than the country and rejected working-age children in favor of babies they could raise as their own. (Leahy 1933). Typically middle-aged and financially secure, they viewed adoption not as an act of charity or a means of acquiring household help, but as a

path to personal fulfillment through parenting. For this purpose infants were ideal—particularly girls, who were often perceived as more malleable and innocent—allowing couples to raise a child who had known no other parents and match their adoptive family to the biological model. The *New York Times* reported in 1935 that adoption agencies were having difficulty placing older children. One "nice 10-year-old boy" was repeatedly rejected by prospective parents who complained he was "too old," without ever seeing him ("Adoption Sought" 1935).

This new demand for infants coincided with the rise of the "companionate" family, the end result of the marked transformation in the family's social role over the course of the nineteenth century from performing "economic, educational, and welfare functions" to providing emotional and psychological contentment for its members (Mintz and Kellogg 1988). The ability of childless couples to meet the new expectations of domestic bliss depended heavily on the availability of adoptable infants, which in turn depended on the willingness of unhappily pregnant young women to relinquish their offspring.

After World War II, social workers moved with increasing authority toward a revised diagnosis of unwed mothers as "disturbed" but "curable" (Solinger 1992). Relinquishment now offered the maternity home client an unprecedented opportunity to transform herself and reemerge into respectable society, childless and unscathed. Through the mother's transformation, her baby, too, could be cleansed of stigma and made into a highly marketable commodity.

Since states denied women easy access to birth control and abortion, it is little wonder that most residents complied with the maternity home's adoption mandate. Social workers counseled the mother to consider the advantages her child would receive in its new home, which the worker promised to select with extreme care. One unmarried mother noted the way her social worker expressed approval of adoption with body language: "It's not what Mrs. K. says exactly, it's just that her face lights up when I talk about adoption the way it doesn't when I talk about keeping Beth" (Kunzel 1993). It was also not uncommon for agencies to withhold financial assistance from uncooperative mothers, while offering those interested in adoption free room and board. Yet casework was not a one-way street. Many birthmothers collaborated with social workers in streamlining the process. Nevertheless, some caseworkers and even public officials took extreme measures to separate reluctant women from their babies, using deceitful and illegal means. One unwed mother in Georgia reported that a juvenile detention officer, in cahoots with a pro-adoption juvenile court judge, "informed me that my baby had been born dead" and advised her to sign a paper "authorizing the burial of the child." Later she was "shocked" to receive adoption documents in the mail from California since she had been "under the impression that the child was deceased" (Solinger 1992).

"ILLEGITIMACY" IN BLACK FAMILIES

In contrast to the highly marketable white child, black illegitimate infants were considered to be an encumbrance upon society, an attitude that "exacerbated racism and racial antagonism in the postwar era" (Solinger 1992). The same psychiatric theory that advocated investing considerable time and resources in saving white mothers from stigma rejected black mothers as sexually deviant, beyond rehabilitation. Some adoption policymakers dismissed the idea of providing services to pregnant black women on the grounds that black culture condoned unwed motherhood. Referring to the resourceful black tradition of kinship care in the face of exclusion from mainstream welfare programs, they offered the circular argument that since "Negroes always care for their own children," there was "very little need for foster care for dependent Negro children" (Solinger 1992). A minority of the professional social work set did welcome pregnant black women who were interested in relinquishment and reform, and set out to place their babies in black adoptive families. Despite studies claiming a significant number of black couples were willing to adopt, however, most maternity homes still refused to admit black clients, claiming there were no black applicants that measured up to their standards of propriety and affluence. The result was a pervasive neglect of black dependent children by the adoption community. In 1951, they constituted only 4 percent of all U.S. adoptions (Melosh 2002).

The Urban League temporarily revived the tradition of zealous child advocacy in the 1950s by confronting widespread racial discrimination in adoption work. The campaign met with skepticism from white agencies that were reluctant to relax their prohibitions against adoptive mothers working outside of the home, a bias that disqualified most black women from consideration. The number of black children placed in same-race families remained miniscule. Estimates for 1960 revealed that only 5 percent of adoptable nonwhite babies ended up in permanent homes, whereas workers placed-out a full 70 percent of white babies (Solinger 1992).

Meanwhile, the shortage of white babies was becoming more acute due to the emergence of oral contraceptives and the growing number of sexually liberated unwed mothers who rejected relinquishment. Agencies began offering black children instead. From the mid-1960s through the early 1970s, estimates placed the number of such adoptions at around 15,000 (Berebitsky 2000). In 1972, however, the National Association of Black Social Workers, informed by ideals of black pride and separatism, condemned the practice. It called for adoption workers to prioritize same-race placements and implement more flexible standards for black parent applicants (Melosh 2002). Advocates for Native American children likewise charged that the discriminatory tradition of separating Indian children from their families and placing them in government boarding schools and white

homes amounted to cultural genocide (Garner 1993; Melosh 2002, 175–76; see also Chapter 4 in this volume).

ADOPTION BECOMES MAINSTREAM

In the 1930s, as interest in adoption grew, so did the frustration of would-be adoptive parents. Applicants faced the bewildering prospect of being unable to find adoptable children among the hundreds of thousands temporarily committed to state and private agencies by their own parents. Couples were further frustrated by the cool reception they received from professional social workers who presumed them unfit until extensive interviews, background checks, and invasive home studies proved otherwise. From would-be parents everywhere letters of complaint and yearning poured in to President and Mrs. Roosevelt. One desperate California woman pleaded with the First Lady, "Please oh Please can't you help me get a baby I grieve every time I see a baby, my heart aches to have one." She and her husband had "tried every way to get a child" but were told it would take at least two years due to the high demand. "I just don't know how I can go on much longer without a child," she confided. "I love children dearly" (Berebitsky 2000).

Yet, in reality, adoption was growing at an astounding rate. According to the U.S. Children's Bureau, there were approximately 17,000 adoptions in 1937. By 1945 that figure nearly tripled to 50,000, and only twelve years later improved survey methods revised the total upward to 91,000 annually (Melosh 2002). Many different factors converging over several decades produced the steady surge.

Imbued with new ideas about the emotional benefits of parenting described above, couples began rejecting adoption as a charitable gesture and framed it instead as a way to indulge in the rewards of family life. In the words of one adoptive father who published his own story in the 1950s, he and his wife "were dead set against the idea of adoption" because they refused to pick up the pieces of "other people's mistakes." But when their friends began expanding their own households, "we suddenly began to realize that we were missing something in life . . . something that hobbies, entertaining or a three-year-old cocker spaniel could never provide." After adopting their daughter, they often received compliments for being so "nice" to take in a homeless child. "They probably think we are a couple of do-gooders, when actually we are two of the most selfish people in the world," he insisted. "We adopted Barbara because we wanted her, and not because we thought we were doing her a favor" (Bell 1954).

Historians also credit the expansion of adoption to rising rates of illegitimate pregnancy and the compatibility of adoption with American Cold War culture. Barbara Melosh explains that in the postwar era of intense nationalism and pro-democratic fervor, adoption "gained new credibility as a

kind of social engineering that appealed to American dreams of upward mobility and self-invention" (Melosh 2002).

DEVELOPING STANDARDS OF PARENTAL "FITNESS," INDEPENDENT BABY BROKERS, AND "BLACK MARKET" BABIES

The transformation of adoption from an act of charity to a legitimate—albeit still inferior—form of family-making went hand in hand with the growing influence of social workers. They became powerful gatekeepers, guiding birthmothers' decisions, meticulously screening prospective parents, and selectively distributing available children. In 1937, Sophie van Senden Theis, a prominent New York adoption advocate, defended the increased prominence of social workers in the field, saying, "Adoption work is not easy, but that is all the more reason for having it in skilled hands" (Theis 1937). By 1941, thirty-four states had amended their adoption statutes to require an official investigation by a social work professional into every adoption (Berebitsky 2000).

As social workers grew more dominant, licensed adoption work became increasingly bureaucratized and the application process for would-be adopters more intrusive. Couples now had to pass psychological muster by submitting to extensive interviews and background checks. Marjorie Winter described the grueling ordeal in a book about adopting her daughter. She recalled how she and her husband behaved as "humble petitioners, prostrate enough, we hoped, to satisfy the power-lust of some of the social workers we had to woo." The marathon application process left them "so thoroughly demoralized by the threat of rejection" that by the end "we had no more character left than a couple of rennet puddings" (Winter 1956). In return for their endurance and cooperation, social workers promised applicants to scientifically evaluate the health, intelligence, and temperament of each baby to ensure that the child selected would match as perfectly as one that might have been born to them (Berebitsky 2000; Melosh 2002). According to Theis and others who trumpeted the merits of "skilled social service," only professionals could provide the "understanding and experience" necessary to "prevent unnecessary and ill-advised adoption placements" (Theis 1937).

Many couples evidently decided, however, that obtaining a baby shortly after its birth and being left alone to pursue their dreams of parenthood were more important than infant IQ tests and guarantees. Independent baby brokers, mostly doctors and lawyers, attracted couples and birthmothers seeking faster transactions with less red tape and greater confidentiality. Their business boomed despite lurid tales of predatory dealers peddling defective babies (Berebitsky 2000; Melosh 2002). In the 1950s, the Kefauver Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency held hearings on the black market that condemned all unlicensed adoption

transactions. Nevertheless, illegal trafficking continued to thrive, and professional agencies were forced to compete by relaxing some of their requirements. Their efforts paid off with a steady rise in the number of adoptions transacted through licensed agencies. In 1945 they attracted only about one-fourth of all adoption business. By 1951, however, half of adopters acquired their children through agencies, a ratio that would climb to 80 percent by 1971 (Melosh 2002).

Despite ongoing competition from black market dealers, licensed adoption practitioners enjoyed a huge surplus of applicants from which to select the most desirable parents. Young, infertile couples had the best chance because their family would most closely adhere to the baby-boom mandate of early marriage and pregnancy. Older couples were steered toward hard-to-place children (Berebitsky 2000). Single women, who were once thought to possess useful maternal instincts, found themselves dropped from consideration altogether following the emergence of the "lesbian menace" in the 1920s. Not until the late 1960s, when the increasing frequency of divorce began normalizing the single-parent family, and the women's liberation movement encouraged new expressions of independence and self-sufficiency, were single women again able to adopt (Berebitsky 2000).

TRANSRACIAL AND INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

Experiments in racial diversity within adoptive families began in earnest after World War II, when some American couples took in Japanese children orphaned by the atomic bomb attacks. Similar efforts followed with Korean children, Afro-German babies (the biracial offspring of black American servicemen stationed overseas), and later with American Indian and Latin American children, as well as Vietnamese refugees (Altstein and Simon 1991; Collmeyer 1995; Melosh 2002). Some advocates of transracial and transnational adoption were politically conscious citizens making a statement in favor of racial integration. Pearl S. Buck, prize-winning author and humanitarian, was one of the first to take a public stand on behalf of homeless children overseas, especially mixed-race "G.I. babies" marginalized and abandoned in their own countries. "We Americans must take up our responsibility because we helped bring these children into the world," she declared. Her adoption agency, Welcome House, founded in 1949, placed children of American-Asian parentage with couples of all racial and religious backgrounds. She and her husband also adopted several themselves. "A child is a child," she insisted, "no matter what his race or religion" ("Pearl Buck" 1958; Rockwell 1972).

Others believed their work was infused with a divine mandate. Harry Holt, an Oregon farmer, embarked on "the work of the Lord," adopting several homeless Korean children and founding his own adoption organization in 1956 that placed some 3,000 mixed-race abandoned Korean youth

in American families ("Harry Holt" 1964). Likewise, Helen Doss and her husband, a Methodist minister, adopted a large brood of children from East Asia, Europe, and the Philippines, many of whom were also multiracial. Doss rejected notions of white superiority and racial segregation in adoption on theological grounds. "East may be East and West may be West, but the twain *can* meet and get along with each other" because "God is the father of all mankind; we are all God's children, and all men are brothers" (Doss 1954).

The persistent shortage of healthy white babies on the adoption market also contributed to the willingness of white Americans to transgress racial and national boundaries in search of parenting opportunities. The sexual revolution and the arrival of the birth control pill ushered in a new acceptance of female sexuality outside of marriage, and even of unwed pregnancy. As the stigma of "illegitimacy" faded, mental health experts retreated from their previous assertion that relinquishment was the only viable solution for unwed mothers. One doctor admitted that he had "yet to see any woman willingly relinquish her child" to adoption. "Giving away a baby, even a baby a girl doesn't want," he insisted, "leaves deep emotional scars." Another physician lamented "the heartlessness, the cruelty, and the sadism" foisted on accidentally pregnant women in the interests of adoption. Most of the women he saw "adamantly rejected" suggestions to give birth to a baby "and then hand it over, never to see it again, to someone else to rear" (Solinger 1992). Later, legalized abortion allowed women to avoid altogether the agonizing dilemma of keeping a child they were unready for or relinquishing their newborn to strangers. Maternity homes soon became obsolete. Between 1952 and 1972 over half of all white unwed mothers gave up their babies. By the early 1980s, however, only about 3 percent did so (Berebitsky 2000). For an increasing number of childless couples, overseas adoption provided their best opportunity to achieve the family life they so desired.

Whatever their motives, the number of adopters seeking nonwhite children from other countries grew steadily in the late twentieth century. Their families conspicuously challenged the "as if begotten" model of American adoption, lending credence to the notion that kinship was not so much about biological heredity as selflessly caring for another (Berebitsky 2000; Melosh 2002).

CASE RECORDS, SECRECY, AND DISCLOSURE

Prior to World War II, adoption agencies willingly disclosed case record information. Adoptive parents usually received an extensive medical and social history of their child, and most agencies gladly facilitated meetings between blood relatives separated by adoption.

The first statute protecting records from public view to shield children from the stigma of illegitimacy was the 1917 Children's Code of Minnesota.

By 1938, however, only five other states had adopted similar laws, and not until the 1940s did an amendment to the Social Security Act increase the confidentiality of adoption records in many other states. The practice of issuing a second, falsified birth certificate listing the adoptive parents in place of the child's biological parents was only gradually adopted by individual states beginning in the 1930s (Carp 1998).

Not until the postwar era would adoption proceedings become shrouded beneath a nearly impenetrable veil of silence. Wayne Carp attributes this change in part to the increasingly upscale population of unwed mothers who demanded that the transaction leave no trace in the public record. Social workers became more suspicious of adult adoptees returning for information about biological relatives, and more inclined toward "secrecy and legalism," recasting adoptees' inquiries as a sign of maladjustment (Carp 1998). One psychotherapist proposed that the "antidote" for such inclinations could be found in "a healthy, secure, satisfying relationship between the child and his adoptive parents" (Carp 1998). Withholding identifying information from all parties became the new casework standard.

Social workers did, however, advocate disclosing the fact of the adoption to the child beginning in the preschool years by framing the news within a sanguine "chosen baby" story. Parents were advised to emphasize their earnest quest to find a child, their implicit rejection of other children who did not meet their expectations, and the perfect suitability of the son or daughter they selected for their new adoptive family. Josephine Antoine, opera singer and adoptee, wrote in 1947 of learning the truth when she was still a toddler: "I want to tell you something before anyone else does," her mother began hesitantly. "We adopted you because you were so sweet and dear, and we wanted you so much." She urged her daughter not to feel "different" or "ashamed," but rather "proud" because "We picked you out" (Antoine 1947). By the 1930s the theme had become so widely accepted that when Valentina Wasson's *The Chosen Baby* storybook appeared in 1939 it became an instant success (Wasson 1939).

Critics, on the other hand, felt that lying to children about the adoption process was harmful. Few couples were actually allowed to peruse several babies among the few available and pick their favorite. The first psychiatrist to publicly challenge the "chosen" school of telling, Irene M. Josselyn, warned that children would soon realize "he who has been chosen on account of certain values, while others were rejected, could in turn be rejected if he disappointed his parents" (Carp 1998).

Many parents rejected the idea of telling altogether. They feared disclosing the adoption might result in losing their child's love. A 1959 issue of *McCall's* featured a confessional piece by an adoptive mother entitled "To My Adopted Daughter: I Wish I Hadn't Told You," mourning the many social and psychological troubles her daughter had endured since learning of her true status. Lying is better, she insisted, because "the knowledge that

one is adopted creates far more problems than the one it is supposed to solve" (Carp 1998).

Beginning in the 1950s, recalcitrant parents began receiving support from some child development experts who came out against early and frequent disclosure. Psychoanalyst Marshall D. Schechter reported that many disturbed adopted children appeared in his practice suffering from "severe narcissistic injury" because they had been told of their adoption when their "immature ego" could not yet "cope with the knowledge of the rejection by its original parents" (Carp 1998). Thus, according to Carp, parents seeking to adopt in the 1960s and 1970s faced a "cacophony of advice" in both academic and popular literature. Not until the mid-1970s would the voices of the different camps be eclipsed by "a single voice" calling for "openness not only in telling but in all aspects of adoption" (Carp 1998).

ROOTS OF THE ADOPTION RIGHTS MOVEMENT

As adoption surged in the postwar era, the population of adoptees raised with "chosen baby" stories, vague explanations of their backgrounds, and permanently sealed adoption records was large, affluent, and receptive to new interpretations of their experience.

In 1953, Jean M. Paton, a social worker and adoptee, founded the Life History Study Center and shortly afterward the first adoptee search organization, Orphan Voyage (Carp 1998). Her groundbreaking study, *The Adopted Break Silence* (1954), introduced the radical concept that adoptees comprise a community of people oppressed by the legalized gag rules surrounding adoption. "If adopted people wanted to try to build a responsible way of reconciling with natural families, should they not be allowed to try?" she reasoned in her follow-up study, *Three Trips Home*. "Were they inferior people, who must cool their heels outside of the agency office, waiting for a nod?" (Paton 1960). Florence Fisher, who later took up Paton's call and launched ALMA, the Adoptees' Liberty Movement Association, recalled in her autobiography the "strained, tense atmosphere" in her childhood home caused by the fear surrounding the "dark secret" of her adoption that her parents tried to keep from her at all costs. Upon reaching adulthood she tracked down the doctor who had arranged the adoption for her parents. When she pressed him to admit she had another set of parents, he responded indignantly, "Didn't you have a good home? Aren't you grateful?" (Fisher 1973). Paton's groundbreaking notion of facilitating constructive meetings between adoptees and their relatives through centralized reunion registries together with Fisher's righteous militancy would provide an ideological foundation for ARM, the Adoption Rights Movement, which emerged in the early 1970s to shake up the entire adoption community. A few years later, activist birth parents would follow suit by forming their own organization to denounce the "inhumane" sys-

tem of adoption and demand the right to reunite with their long lost children (Carp 1998).

CONCLUSION

The momentous course of dependent child care from the 1930s through the 1960s laid the groundwork for the profound developments we have witnessed in recent decades, including backlashes against entitlement programs for dependent children; continued conflicts over racial matching in foster care; grassroots rights movements by adoptees, birthmothers, and adoptive parents; custody suits brought by birth parents to reclaim their biological children; open adoption, gay and lesbian adoption, and the proliferation of transracial and transnational adoption opportunities. What began as evangelical child-saving in the mid-1800s was transformed during the course of the twentieth century into a professional, bureaucratized, complex network of efforts to confront illegitimacy and dependency. What has emerged is a new understanding of kinship that at once challenges and upholds the biological nuclear family concept in American culture, and that will continue to shape our responses to dependent children and their caregivers well into the new millennium.

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