What stories are adoption stories?
Historians Talk About Memories, Bureaucracies, Narratives, and Numbers

participants:
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How do we know what we know about adoption? How have competing memories of adoption controversies shaped adoption policy and practice locally, nationally, and globally? What influential stories have bureaucratic priorities told about adoption? In what ways are the adoption narratives embedded in survey data and quantitative research different than personal testimony and the evidence of experience?

This session will explore a variety of ways that adoption has been made an object of knowledge and representation in 20th-century history and culture. Karen Balcom will focus her attention on how historians' use of institutional records shapes the stories that are possible to tell about adoption history. Karen Dubinsky will discuss her research on Operation Pedro Pan, a mass exodus of children from Cuba in the early 1960s, and how it is remembered in Miami and Havana. Ellen Herman will describe the evolution of quantitative research on adoption during the 20th century in order to reflect on numbers as narratives that have made a distinctive mark on adoption knowledge.

Dr. Karen Balcom (McMaster University), "Government Policy, Institutional Imperatives and the History of Adoption: The Case of Canadian Adoption Exchanges"

If historians are tellers of stories–narrators of the past–then historians of adoption must be the tellers of stories about adoption's past. But, which stories–which pasts–are narrated in the history of adoption? The answer to this question depends to a large degree on the kinds of sources individual historians use. For example, in my recent work on border-crossing adoptions inside North America in the period 1930-1970, my focus has been on the institutional records of government agencies (the United States Children's Bureau, State and Provincial Departments of Public Welfare) and large umbrella organizations in professional child welfare (The Child Welfare League of America, the Canadian Welfare Council). These institutions or bureaucracies were interested in the development and implementation of adoption policy on a broad scale. The stories in their records–and the stories historians will tell out of these records–are tales of negotiation between the priorities of professional social workers and the regulatory power of the state. The resulting history of adoption policy (produced by historians like me) can seem very far removed from the deeply personal and personalized struggles of birth parents, adoptees and adopting parents. And yet, the policy and regulatory environment of adoption provides the framework within which individuals live adoption. In this paper, I use the example of the Canadian experience of negotiating an interprovincial/international adoption exchange to think about how the sources I use shape the history I write, and to suggest both the strengths and the limitations/blindspots in the past I narrate from these sources.

Karen Dubinsky (Queen's University), "Saving Cuba's Children, From Operation Peter Pan to

Elian Gonzalez"
This paper is framed by two phenomena: the ideological rescue of children in post-revolutionary Cuba, circa 1960, namely "Operation Peter Pan, a Cold War-inspired scheme organized by the Catholic Church and the CIA in Miami and Havana, which brought (and then promptly stranded) fourteen thousand unaccompanied Cuban children to Miami, and the events of early 2000 which focused similar concerns on one child, Cuban refugee Elian Gonzalez. In this presentation, I want to make two points. During times of war or revolution, foster or adoptive parents are encouraged to imagine themselves, as Salvadoran adoptee Patrick McDermott has recently explained, as "helping to get the kids out." Such situations are usually far more complicated than a simple rescue narrative suggests. Furthermore, the Cuban case illustrates well the on-going power of the Symbolic Child: how the fate of actual children can serve as a compelling metaphor for a fractured and unsettled nation, and live on, a generation later, in individual and collective memory. A deeper understanding of such allegedly 'humanitarian' mass evacuations of children can help, I believe, understand current conflicts and complications around international adoption.

Ellen Herman (University of Oregon), "Of Numbers and Narratives"
First-person narratives have played a starring role in adoption history. During the past several decades, adoption reform movements have also relied heavily on personal testimony, the evidence of experience, and what we might call "story-truth" to make the case for changing policy and practice. This paper will describe less publicized but critically important methods of knowing adoption: trust in numbers. It will briefly describe the evolution of quantitative research over the course of the twentieth century. Examples will include local field studies conducted in the 1910s and 1920s, the classic outcome study, *How Foster Children Turn Out* (1924), and the compilation of adoption statistics by private organizations, states, and the federal government up through the 2000 U.S. Census, the first census in U.S. history to include the category "adopted son/daughter." How did counting influence which adoptions were counted? What difference did numbers make? When and how did adoption numbers and narratives intersect?

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Education and Employment

2000   Assistant Professor of History and Women's Studies, McMaster University
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Recent Publications and Projects

'Phony Mothers' and Border-Crossing Adoptions: The Montreal-to-New-York Black Market in Babies in the 1950s," *Journal of Women's History*, 19/1(March 2007): 107-117.

"Constructing Families, Creating Mothers: Gender, Family, State and Nation in the History of Child Adoption," *Journal of Women's History*, 18/1 (March 2006): 219-232

"Baby-Selling," in Kathy Stolley and Vern Bullough (eds.), *The Praeger Handbook of Adoption, Vol. I.* New York: Praeger: 2006: 90-95.

"Scandal and Social Welfare: The Ideal Maternity Home and The Evolution of Social Policy in Nova Scotia, 1935-1955," *Acadiensis*, XXXI (Spring 2002): 3-37.

The Traffic in Babies: Cross-Border Adoption, Baby-Selling and the Development of Child Welfare Systems in Canada and the United States, 1930-1970, book manuscript in preparation.

"The Logic of Exchange: The Child Welfare League of America, The Adoption Resource Exchange Movement and the Indian Adoption Project, 1958-1967," in Emily Hipchin (ed.), *Adoption and Culture: Essays on Literature, History, and the Visual Arts*. London: Cambridge Scholars Press (under review).

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Selected publications:
 "Babies Without Borders: Kidnap, Rescue and the Symbolic Child," Journal of Women's History Vol 19, No. 1, Spring, 2007.

"We Adopted a Negro: Interracial Adoption and the Hybrid Baby in 1960's Canada" in Magda Fahrni and Robert Rutherdale (eds) Creating Postwar Canada – Community, Diversity and Dissent, 1945-75 (University of British Columbia Press, 2007)

The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooning and Tourism at Niagara Falls (Toronto: Between the Lines and New Brunswick New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, May, 1999)

Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880-1929 (University of Chicago Press, 1993)

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Selected Publications

The Adoption History Project (initial launch date: June 1, 2003)
http://uoregon.edu/~adoption

"Supervising Spoiled Selfhood: Interpretation and Inquiry in the History of Modern American Child Adoption, " *Osiris* 23, special issue on "The Self as Scientific and Political Project in the Twentieth Century," Greg Eghigian, Andreas Killen, and Christine Leuenberger, eds., forthcoming, summer 2007.

"The Adoption History Project," "Arnold Gesell," and "Timeline of Adoption History" in *The Praeger Handbook of Adoption*, Vern Bullough and Kathy Stolley, eds. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 27-29, 274-275, 677-680.

"Can Kinship Be Designed and Still Be Normal? The Curious Case of Child Adoption," in *Histories of the Normal and the Abnormal: Social and Cultural Histories of Norms and Normativity,* Waltraud Ernst, ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), 205-224.

"Rules for Realness: Child Adoption in a Therapeutic Culture," in *Therapeutic Culture: Triumph and Defeat*, Jonathan B. Imber, ed. (Somerset, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 189-214.

"Psychologism and the Child," in *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 7: The Modern Social Sciences, Theodore Porter and Dorothy Ross, eds. (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 649-662.

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

"Adoption" in *Historical and Multicultural Encyclopedia of Women's Reproductive Rights in the United States*, Judith A. Baer, ed. (Greenwood, 2002), 20-24.

"Child Adoption in a Therapeutic Culture," *Society* 39 (January-February 2002):11-18.

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

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