



Babies without Borders: Adoption and Migration across the Americas

By Karen Dubinsky



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While international adoptions have risen in the public eye and recent scholarship has covered transnational adoption from Asia to the U.S., adoptions between North America and Latin America have been overshadowed and, in some cases, forgotten. In this nuanced study of adoption, Karen Dubinsky expands the historical record while she considers the political symbolism of children caught up in adoption and migration controversies in Canada, the United States, Cuba, and Guatemala.

Babies without Borders tells the interrelated stories of Cuban children caught in Operation Peter Pan, adopted Black and Native American children who became icons in the Sixties, and Guatemalan children whose “disappearance” today in transnational adoption networks echoes their fate during the country’s brutal civil war. Drawing from archival research as well as from her critical observations as an adoptive parent, Dubinsky moves debates around transnational adoption beyond the current dichotomy—the good of “humanitarian rescue,” against the evil of “imperialist kidnap.” Integrating the personal with the scholarly, **Babies without Borders** exposes what happens when children bear the weight of adult political conflicts.



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Editorial Review

Review

“Deeply researched, beautifully written, and brimming with insight, **Babies without Borders** illustrates how profoundly narratives about rescuing and stealing children have distorted our understanding of international adoption throughout its history. From Cuba and Canada to Guatemala, babies caught up in the wars, refugee migrations, and other global calamities of the past half-century have paid a very high price for the privilege of serving as symbols of national pride, vulnerability, and destiny. Dubinsky refreshingly shifts our attention from Asia to Latin America, insists on telling stories from both sides of the border, and offers compelling evidence for the view that international power is inextricably linked to some of the most intimate experiences of family life—including her own.”

-Ellen Herman, author of *Kinship by Design: A History of Adoption in the Modern United States*

“By making children the subject of her research, Dubinsky has provided original insight into the moral premises by which power is exercised and experienced. To approach children as highly-prized objects within paradigms of transnational privilege—the continuation of politics by other means—is to expose in the most intimate of settings the ways that the powerful and the powerless are drawn together into an inexorable relationship with one another, with all too predictable outcomes. This is a thoughtful and thought-provoking work of exemplary scholarship.”

-Louis A. Pèrez, Jr., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

"Dubinsky researched three ethnic and national sources of adoption in the postwar Americas that created political storms and left the field of transnational and transracial adoption polarized between those who view these adoptions as postcolonial baby snatching and those who believe these adoptions rescue poor abandoned kids . . . establishes a more nuanced way of viewing cross border adoptions."

-N. Zmora, *Choice Magazine*

"*Babies Without Borders* is meticulously researched. The prose is intelligent and dense."

-Judith L. Gibbons, *Contemporary Psychology*

"Intensely researched and historically relevant to current trends, Dubinsky's book provides insight into both the social workers and political realms of adoption from a multinational perspective." -Farnad J. Darnell, Project Muse

Review

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(Louis A. Pérez, Jr. *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*)

About the Author

Karen Dubinsky is a professor in the Department of Global Development Studies and the Department of History at Queen's University. She is the author of *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooning and Tourism at Niagara Falls* and *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880-1929*.

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