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Ms. Jennifer Klein
The White House
2nd floor West Wing
Washington, D.C. 20502

October 29, 1997

Dear Jennifer,

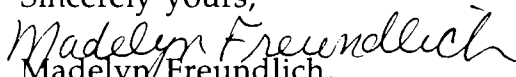
Thank you so much for taking the time to call me back. We are delighted at your interest in this new survey. We believe the information is quite significant and will be very helpful to those formulating adoption policy as well as to those involved in outreach and public education.

President and Mrs. Clinton have consistently shown not only great interest, but real concern and understanding for the issues and challenges facing this country related to adoption. We understand that early in November President Clinton will issue a proclamation declaring November to be National Adoption Month.

As you can see from the enclosed media package, the release of our survey is embargoed until 9 am on Wednesday, November 5. While we feel it is critically important to maintain this embargo, we would be happy to work with you in anyway to incorporate the survey results into the White House activities related to National Adoption Month. Perhaps, the President would want to refer to the survey results in his proclamation.

After you have had an opportunity to review this material, we can have a more informed discussion concerning your interest.

Sincerely yours,


Madelyn Freundlich,
Executive Director

kn: MF
Encl.

**FOR RELEASE:
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 9:00 a.m.**

**First National Survey on Americans' Attitudes On Adoption
Indicates Widespread Ambivalence, Highlights Need for Education**

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An unprecedented national survey released today reveals that while most Americans view adoption very favorably or somewhat favorably (90%), many Americans (64%) have never considered adopting a child and about half (49%) believe that adoption is not quite as good as raising one's own biological child.

"The survey illustrates the public's ambivalence and the need for more education on the issue," according to Madelyn Freundlich, executive director of The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. "The implications of these findings pose significant problems for children who need adoptive homes, as well as major challenges for professionals in the adoption and social service arena."

"One disturbing outcome of the survey is the extent to which we see attitudes toward adoption are significantly related to education, race, and personal experience with adoption," Freundlich says. "The survey results indicate to us that important sectors of American society are ambivalent about adoption and may not see how critical it is for tens of thousands of children in this country who need adoptive families. On the positive side however, for the first time, it also provides data on which to base policy decisions, allocate resources and focus on public education."

According to the survey, the U. S. population generally divides into one of three categories:

- **Full Supporters** (32%) express unqualified support for adoption.
- **Qualified Supporters** (37%) have mostly positive opinions about the institution, but some hesitancy to fully embrace it.
- **Marginal Supporters** (31%) generally are more supportive than not, but less convinced than others of adoption's merits.

Other findings of the survey include:

- Six in ten Americans (58%) have had personal experience with adoption. Those with first-hand experience are more supportive of the institution than those without such experience.
- College educated Americans (48%) are more likely than those with a high school education (23%) to be *Full Supporters* of adoption.
- Women embrace adoption more fully than men. 36% of women are *Full Supporters* compared with 27% of men.
- Whites (35%) are three times as likely as blacks (11%) to be *Full Supporters* of adoption.
- Nearly half (45%) of Americans say family and friends are their main source of information about adoption, while 30% get their information from news sources and 16% from magazines.
- Half (52%) of those surveyed believe children adopted from other countries are more likely than children adopted in this country to have emotional problems, and nearly the same proportion (48%) say children from abroad are less likely to be physically healthy. On the other hand, Americans do not believe that children adopted internationally are any more likely to have trouble in school than children adopted in this country.

Curtis R. Welling, president of the board of The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute and an adoptive parent says, "With these survey results in mind, we need to embark on a public education initiative to educate and provide balanced information about adoption. Adoption has been an important service for children whose birth parents cannot rear them and will remain so only if adoption is viewed positively by prospective adoptive parents."

"Despite the prevailing myth that there is a shortage of children awaiting adoption, the fact is that many children languish in the foster care system for years," Freundlich says. "If we are to place these children without parents in loving homes we need to educate segments of society who are not embracing adoption."

The Benchmark Adoption Survey commissioned by The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute in New York was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates. The probability survey conducted in July of 1,554 Americans drew responses from the general population including an over-sample of African-Americans. The margin of error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute was established in New York in August 1996 as an independent, not-for-profit institute. Its mission is to improve the quality of information about adoption, enhance the understanding and perception of adoption, and advance adoption policy and practice based on reliable information. The survey will be used as the basis of the Institute's programs and initiatives for the coming year.

BENCHMARK ADOPTION SURVEY

REPORT ON THE FINDINGS

Conducted for:

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute

Conducted by:

Princeton Survey Research Associates

November 1997

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Virtually all Americans agree that adoption serves a useful purpose in our society, and most have a favorable opinion of the institution. But many Americans, even those with very favorable opinions about adoption overall, do harbor doubts about the institution. Half feel adopting a child, while preferable to remaining childless, is not quite as good as having one's own. And a quarter think it is sometimes harder to love an adopted child because the child is not your own flesh and blood.

On the surface these data seem puzzling; Americans have an overwhelmingly favorable opinion of adoption, yet only half say adopting is as good as being a birth parent. A more comprehensive view of adoption attitudes takes these possibly contradictory viewpoints into account. On this basis Americans divide into three groups according to their attitudes toward adoption: 1) *Full Supporters* who express unqualified support for adoption; 2) *Qualified Supporters*, who have a mostly positive opinion about the institution but some hesitancy to fully embrace it and; 3) *Marginal Supporters*, who while generally more supportive than not, are less convinced than others of adoption's merits.

Americans' opinions about the members of the adoption triad follow a similar pattern to their assessment of the institution. Most say *adoptive parents* are generous and lucky, but some believe they would have been luckier still to have had their own child. *Adopted children*, a majority says, are well adjusted and secure, but some think adopted children are insecure, poorly adjusted and more prone to behavioral and academic problems than other children. Lastly, many Americans support *birth parents'* decisions to place children for adoption, but a notable minority disapproves of decisions to do so, and some even see it as irresponsible or hardhearted.

Attitudes toward adoption divide starkly by social group. Less educated Americans are more skeptical about adoption than others. There are also gender differences; men are more uncertain of adoption's merits than women. Blacks are more skeptical than whites.

These are among the findings of the Benchmark Adoption Survey conducted July 7 through August 8, 1997 for the Adoption Institute by Princeton Survey Research Associates. This probability survey of 1,554 adults is the first in-depth look at American public attitudes toward the institution of adoption and the members of the adoption triad. The survey also examined opinion about open adoption, adoptees' search for their birth parents and adoption in the context of welfare reform and teenage pregnancy.

Among other key findings:

- Six in 10 Americans have had personal experience with adoption, meaning they themselves, a family member, or a close friend was adopted, adopted a child, or put a child up for adoption. A third have considered adopting a child at least somewhat seriously. Those with personal experience are more likely than those without to have favorable opinions of adoption.
- Americans are divided over whether it is better for pregnant teenagers to place their babies for adoption or raise them themselves. Americans also are divided over which is better for the child in this situation, although slightly more believe the baby is better off adopted than raised by the birth mother.
- Americans are divided over whether the government should promote adoption as an alternative to welfare. Asked about a California plan in which welfare mothers would be encouraged to place their children for adoption, a slim majority oppose this plan, and substantial minority support it. Americans are somewhat more supportive of the plan for pregnant teenagers.
- The public is ambivalent about open adoption, that is, adoption in which birth parents maintain some contact with the child they have placed for adoption. Most Americans think it is a good idea, but only in a limited number of cases. One in five feel it is always

think it is a good idea, but only in a limited number of cases. One in five feel it is always a bad idea for birth mothers to maintain contact with the children they have placed for adoption.

- Americans also have mixed views about the consequences of adoptees searching for and finding their birth parents. In the public's eyes, adoptees are the most likely of the triad to benefit from contacting their birth parents. There is more skepticism about whether adoptive and birth parents benefit.
- Perhaps in reaction to an increase in media stories about international adoptions gone awry, many are skeptical about the prospects for children adopted overseas. Many Americans feel these children are more prone to physical illness and emotional problems than children adopted in the United States. In contrast, Americans are more hopeful than not about the academic promise of children adopted internationally.

Methodological Statement

This survey is based on telephone interviews with a representative sample of 1,554 adults 18 and older, living in telephone households in the continental United States, including an oversample of 50 African-Americans. The sample data were weighted, using parameters from the most recently available Census data (the Current Population Survey, March 1996), to bring the sample characteristics into alignment with the demographics of the 18 and older population of adults in the continental United States. The interviewing took place from July 7, through August 8, 1997.

For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys can introduce error or bias into the finding of opinion polls.

FINDINGS IN DETAIL

Section I: Adoption as an Institution

Adoption Positive and Useful...

Most Americans say they have a favorable opinion of adoption and think it serves a useful purpose in society. A slim majority (56%) voices a *very* favorable opinion and a third (34%) express a *somewhat* favorable opinion of adoption. A small minority (8%) sees adoption in a less positive light, offering an unfavorable opinion. The American public is even more convinced of the utility of adoption. Virtually all Americans *strongly* (78%) or *somewhat* (17%) agree that adoption serves a useful purpose in society.

...But Less Desirable than "Own" Child

At the same time, however, many Americans express reservations about adoption when asked to compare adopting a child to having one's "own" child. Half (50%) believe adoption is better than being childless, but is not quite as good as having one's own child. Half (49%) disagree.

Overall Opinion of Adoption

In general, do you have a very favorable opinion of adoption, a somewhat favorable opinion, a somewhat unfavorable opinion, or a very unfavorable opinion of adoption?

Very favorable	56%
Somewhat favorable	34
Somewhat unfavorable	4
Very unfavorable	4
Don't know	2

Now I'm going to read you a set of statements. For each please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each statement: *Adoption serves a useful purpose in our society.*

Strongly agree	78%
Somewhat agree	17
Somewhat disagree	2
Strongly disagree	2
Don't know	1

Adoption Compared to Biological Child

Now I'm going to read you a set of statements. For each please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each statement: *Adoption is better than being childless, but it is not quite as good as having one's own child.*

Strongly agree	21%
Somewhat agree	29
Somewhat disagree	17
Strongly disagree	32
Don't know	1

Full Supporters, Qualified Supporters and Marginal Supporters of Adoption

How do we reconcile these data? How can nine in 10 Americans say they have a favorable opinion of adoption, but only half say they think adopting is as good as being a birth parent? Americans support adoption, but many do not necessarily think it is the preferred way to form, or add to, a family. Americans think adoption serves a societal need, but perhaps some Americans wish this need did not exist.

In other words, none of these three questions alone tells the whole story. To say most Americans have a favorable opinion of adoption or that most think it serves a useful purpose neglects the reservations that half the country harbors. Yet to say that half think adoption is not quite as good as having one's own child understates public support for the institution. The more complete explanation combines these questions to yield three groups of attitude toward adoption -- *Full Supporters, Qualified Supporters and Marginal Supporters*. All are supporters, but not to the same degree:

- One in three (32%) Americans is a *Full Supporter*. This group expresses unqualified support for adoption. *Full Supporters* voice a very favorable opinion of adoption, strongly agree adoption serves a useful purpose in society and think adoption is as good as having one's own child.
- Four in ten (37%) are *Qualified Supporters*. Overall, this group's opinion of adoption is positive but it is distinguished by some hesitancy to fully embrace the institution. Some in this group express a *very* favorable opinion of adoption but think adoption is not as desirable as having one's own child; others in this group voice a *somewhat* favorable or even unfavorable opinion of adoption but do think adoption is as good as having one's own child.

- Three in ten (31%) are *Marginal Supporters*. They are less convinced than others about the merits of adoption. *Marginal Supporters* believe adoption is less desirable than having one's own child, hold less than a very favorable opinion of adoption and agree only somewhat or disagree that adoption serves a useful purpose in society.

Support for Adoption Differs by Social Demographic Characteristics

Adoption attitudes differ substantially by social demographic characteristics, with education, gender and race being the most important distinguishing elements.

- Those with a college degree (48%) are notably more likely than those with only a high school education (23%) to be *Full Supporters* of adoption. By contrast, the less well educated (39%) are more likely than the well educated (18%) to be *Marginal Supporters*.
- A larger percentage of women (36%) than men (27%) are *Full Supporters*. Men (35%) are more likely than women (27%) to be *Marginal Supporters*.
- Race is another important factor. Whites (35%) are three times as likely as blacks (11%) to be *Full Supporters* of adoption. Conversely, half again as many blacks (44%) as whites (29%) are *Marginal Supporters*.
- Married Americans (36%) are more likely than those who are unmarried (27%) to be *Full Supporters*.
- Four in ten (43%) Americans living in the western part of the country are *Full Supporters*, while just a quarter of those in the South (25%) and Northeast (28%) are *Full Supporters*.

Adoption attitudes do not vary by age, family size or urbanity. Young Americans are as likely as older ones to be *Full Supporters* of adoption, childless Americans are as likely as those with five or more children to be *Full Supporters* and urban residents are as likely as rural dwellers to be *Full Supporters*. Political orientation also does not differentiate support for adoption. As many self-defined liberals as self-defined conservatives are *Full Supporters*.

Americans Are Conflicted about Issues Surrounding Adoption

Although generally supportive of adoption, the American public appears conflicted about specific aspects of adoption, such as: 1) the costs and benefits of adoption to the adoption triad; 2) whether unmarried teen mothers should place their babies for adoption or raise the babies themselves; 3) the wisdom of open adoption and searching for one's birth parents and; 4) adoption as a welfare alternative. We begin examining these conflicted sentiments by describing attitudes toward the adoption triad.

Section II: The Adoption Triad

The American public views each of the parties to any adoption -- the adoptive parents, the adopted child and the birth parents -- distinctly and differently. Many of these attitudes differ by the three groups of supporters, *Full Supporters*, *Qualified Supporters* and *Marginal Supporters*. These data show that while Americans generally support the parties to an adoption, some Americans have serious reservations about what these parties do or concerns about how they are affected by adoption.

For the most part, Americans perceive adoptive parents as generous and lucky. Yet at least some think these parents would have been luckier if they had their own children. Adoptees themselves are also viewed in a positive light, although here too there is a less positive side -- some feel adopted children are more prone to problems than other children. Most Americans view birth parents favorably and approve of their decision to place their children for adoption. Yet some feel this decision is irresponsible and even callous.

Adoptive Parents -- Lucky and Advantaged...

Adoptive parents are the most positively viewed of the triad, or at least they are seen as the member of the triad who benefit most in an adoption. Almost all Americans see adoptive families as lucky (95%) and advantaged (86%). Very few people view their actions as selfish (4%). Furthermore, people believe adoptive parents get the same amount of satisfaction (46%) or even more satisfaction (33%) out of raising an adopted child than a child born to them. Substantially fewer (17%) say adoptive parents get less satisfaction.

Views of Adoptive Parents	
In your opinion, when parents adopt a child are they . . .	
Lucky	95%
Unlucky	2
Don't know	3
Selfish	4%
Unselfish	91
Don't know	5
Advantaged	86%
Disadvantaged	7
Don't know	7

...But Will Love Be As Strong in Adoptive Families?

As many as one in four Americans question whether the love between parent and child can be as strong and true in adoptive families as in more traditional families. A quarter (23%) agree it is sometimes harder to love an adopted child, because that child is not your own flesh and blood, although the majority (76%) disagree. Likewise, although a majority (67%) say it is *very* likely adopted children love their adoptive parents as much as they would have loved their birth parents, a third are less optimistic -- 25% say it is only somewhat likely the love will be as strong, and 5% say it is unlikely.

Marginal Supporters Less Positive than Full Supporters about Adoptive Parents

People who are less enthusiastic about adoption in general have less positive attitudes toward those who adopt.

- Three in ten (30%) *Marginal Supporters* think parents get less satisfaction from raising adopted children compared with two in ten (18%) *Qualified Supporters* and only four percent of *Full Supporters*.
- Likewise, *Marginal Supporters* are more likely than others to see adoptive parents as disadvantaged (15% vs. 6% of *Qualified* and 2% of *Full Supporters*).
- The biggest differences between *Marginal Supporters* and those who are more positively disposed toward adoption, have to do with the quality of the love between parents and children in adoptive families. Most *Full Supporters* (86%) and nearly as many *Qualified Supporters* (72%) believe it is *very* likely adopted children will love those who adopt them as much as they would have loved those who gave birth to them. Less than half (45%) of *Marginal Supporters* concur. Moreover, four in ten (40%) *Marginal Supporters* agree it is sometimes harder to love an adopted child because it is not your flesh and

blood, compared with only two in ten (23%) *Qualified Supporters* and less than one in ten (6%) *Full Supporters*.

Social Demographics Differentiate Opinion about Adoptive Parents

As is the case with adoption in general, people's opinions about adoptive parents vary by education, gender and race. The less well educated, men and blacks are more likely than the better educated, women and whites to voice negative feelings toward adoptive families themselves and to feel adoptive parents are getting shortchanged in the adoption process. Likewise, the less well educated, men and blacks are more likely than others to say it is sometimes harder to love an adopted child than a child born to you. Similarly, these groups are *less* convinced adopted children will have as strong a love for their adoptive parents as they would have had for their birth parents. These differences persist even when other demographic variables are taken into account.

Views about Adoptive Parents by Demographic Groups

	Total	Education		Gender		Race	
		No College	Some College	Male	Female	Black	White
Adoptive parents get less satisfaction out of raising an adopted child	17%	21	13	20	14	31	14
Sometimes it is harder to love an adopted child	23%	27	17	28	17	32	20
It is <i>very likely</i> adopted children will love their adoptive parents as much as they would have loved the parents who gave birth to them	67%	61	75	60	73	51	70

Adopted Individuals -- Well-Adjusted, Secure and First-Rate...

Most Americans have a positive view of adopted children. Solid majorities say adopted kids are well-adjusted (76%) secure (68%) and first rate (70%). Yet minorities up to a quarter see them as not well-adjusted (14%), insecure (23%) and second best (20%).

...But One in Three Americans Predicts School and Behavioral Problems

People are divided as to whether adopted children are more likely than other children to have problems at school (35%), less likely (36%) or equally likely (21%). And there is disagreement as to whether adopted kids are more likely (39%), less likely (34%) or equally likely (19%) to have behavioral problems. By contrast, people do not foresee adopted children developing drug and alcohol problems at higher rates than other children. In fact, more people say adopted kids are *less* likely than other kids to have such problems (39%) than say they are *more* likely to (28%).

Views of Adopted Children

Next, I am going to read pairs of words or phrases. For each pair please tell me which one best describes your opinion of adopted children . . .

Well adjusted	76%
Not well adjusted	14
Don't know	10
Insecure	23%
Secure	68
Don't know	9
First rate	70%
Second best	20
Don't know	10

Marginal Supporters More Concerned about Adjustment Problems than *Full Supporters*

Those whose support for adoption is most conditional, *Marginal Supporters*, are more likely than others to see adopted children as insecure (36%) and poorly adjusted (22%). Majorities of *Marginal Supporters* believe adopted children are more likely than other kids to have problems at school (54%) and behavioral problems (57%). Those who express more support for adoption, on the other hand, tend to see adopted children as equally prone or even less likely than others to have academic and behavioral problems.

Demographics Differentiate Opinions about Adopted Children

People's opinions about adoptees differ by education, sex and race. The less educated are more likely than better-educated Americans to view adopted kids as insecure and second best and to think adoptees are more prone to substance abuse, academic and behavioral problems. Likewise, men are more likely than women to question how well adjusted and secure adopted children are. A larger share of men than women foresee behavioral problems, problems in the classroom, and problems with drugs and alcohol. Similarly, blacks are more likely than whites to hold these less positive views of adoptive children.

International Adoptions More Troublesome

Americans are decidedly less optimistic about the prospects of children adopted from other countries. These views may result, in part, from recent media stories about troubled international adoptions. Half of those surveyed believe children adopted abroad are more likely than those adopted in this country to have emotional problems and the same proportion say they are *less* likely to be physically healthy. But Americans do not believe children adopted internationally are likely to have trouble in school. In fact, more say these children are *less* likely to do poorly in school than say they are *more* likely to have academic problems.

Views about International Adoptions

These days many Americans are adopting children from other countries such as Columbia and China. Do you think children adopted from foreign countries are MORE likely or LESS likely than children adopted in this country to . .

	More Likely	Just as Likely (VOL.)	Less Likely	Don't know
Have emotional problems	52%	11	29	8
Be physically healthy	29%	13	51	7
Do poorly in school	31%	14	48	7

Most Americans Support Birth Parents' Decision...

Most Americans have positive opinions about birth parents, and are supportive of the decision to place their child up for adoption. Seven in ten (69%) say they generally approve of a birth mother's decision and most view this choice as responsible (76%), caring (78%) and unselfish (77%).

...But Some See it as Irresponsible, Uncaring and Selfish

One in four Americans (23%) generally disapproves of a birth mother's decision to place a child for adoption. Moreover, a small but significant minority sees this decision as irresponsible (16%), uncaring (13%) and selfish (14%). One in five (20%) agrees a mother who gives a child up does *not* love the child as much as one who raises the child herself.

People's opinions of fathers who place their children for adoption are more negative. They are more likely than their female counterparts to have their actions seen as irresponsible (26%), uncaring (24%) and selfish (23%) and people are more likely to disapprove (29%) of their decision.

Full Supporters Most Positive about Birth Parents

People who are most supportive of adoption in general -- *Full Supporters* -- are more approving of a parent's decision to place a child for adoption and are more likely than others to see their decision as loving, responsible, caring and unselfish. Conversely, those who question the institution more are less

Views about Birth Parents

In general, when a MOTHER puts her child up for adoption is she being . . .

Irresponsible	16%
Responsible	76
Don't know	8

Caring	78%
Uncaring	13
Don't know	9

Unselfish	77%
Selfish	14
Don't know	9

And how about fathers, when a FATHER puts his child up for adoption is he being . . .

Irresponsible	26%
Responsible	66
Don't know	8

Caring	68%
Uncaring	24
Don't know	8

Unselfish	68%
Selfish	23
Don't know	9

unanimous in this view, though they are still more likely than not to view birth parents and their decision in a positive light.

The Less Well Educated, Men and African-Americans Most Negative about Birth Parents

Again in-depth analysis shows cleavages within American society. Less well-educated Americans, men and African Americans are more likely to hold negative views of those who place their children for adoption than their counterparts. Here, in fact, the differences are even more pronounced, especially where race is concerned. As the table shows, half or more of African Americans generally disapprove of the decision to place a child for adoption, compared with only about a quarter of whites. Furthermore, blacks are much more likely to view the decision to give up one's child in a negative light.

Racial Differences in Views of Birth Parents			
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>White</u>
<i>Birth Mothers</i>			
Generally <u>disapprove</u> of birth mothers' decision	23%	52	20
By putting child up for adoption mothers are being . . .			
Irresponsible	16%	38	12
Uncaring	13%	35	10
Selfish	14%	31	11
<i>Birth Fathers</i>			
Generally <u>disapprove</u> of birth fathers' decision	29%	56	25
By putting child up for adoption fathers are being . . .			
Irresponsible	26%	54	21
Uncaring	24%	50	20
Selfish	23%	45	20

Birth Fathers Entitled to Say in Adoption Decision

A majority (79%) of Americans think the father of a baby born to an unmarried couple should have at least some say in whether the child is put up for adoption, including almost half who (45%) believe he should have *a lot* of say. Younger Americans see a larger role for fathers in this decision than their older counterparts.

Americans Express Mixed Views about Placing Own Child for Adoption in Dire Circumstances

A majority of Americans generally approve of birth parents' decisions, but they are less certain they would put a child of their own up for adoption were they unable to provide for the child. As the table shows, half the Americans surveyed say they would be likely to place a child for adoption, and half would be unlikely to do so, including more than a third who say they would be *very* unlikely to place their child for adoption.

Americans feelings about whether they would put their own child up for adoption follow similar patterns to their approval of birth parents' decisions in general. Whites are divided between those who say they

would be likely to put their child up for adoption and those who would be unlikely to do so. Conversely, only about a third of blacks say they would be likely to put their child up for adoption, whereas almost two-thirds would be unlikely to do so, including almost half who say it is *very* unlikely. Similarly, better educated people are marginally more likely to say they would consider adoption, whereas those with less education would be more likely to keep their child. These data suggest some sectors of American society are more accepting of birth parents raising their own children even in the face of difficult circumstances.

Placing Own Child for Adoption

Imagine for a moment you had a child you couldn't provide for and there was a loving couple who wanted to adopt the child. How likely would you be to put your child up for adoption?

	Total	Education		Race	
		No College	Some College	Black	White
Very likely	22%	20%	25%	15%	24%
Somewhat likely	25	24	26	22	25
Somewhat unlikely	14	13	14	17	13
Very unlikely	36	41	31	46	35
Don't know	3	3	3	1	3

Section III: Experience and Sources of Information about Adoption

A majority of Americans (58%) have had personal experience with adoption -- meaning they themselves, a family member or a close friend was adopted, adopted a child, or put a child up for adoption. And over a third (36%) say they have given very or somewhat serious consideration to adopting a child. But a sizable minority (42%) lack personal experience with adoption and two in three (64%) have not given serious consideration to adopting a child.

Personal experience with adoption or having considered adoption plays a major role in shaping adoption attitudes. Almost three in four (72%) *Full Supporters* of adoption have had intimate experiences with adoption compared with less than half (44%) of the *Marginal Supporters*. Having given serious consideration to adopting a child apparently fosters positive sentiments as well. Respondents who have never considered adopting a child are substantially less likely to voice positive views about adoption than those who have.

Experience with Adoption Differs by Group

Adoption experience varies widely by social characteristics. Just one in three blacks but nearly two in three whites say they have had personal experience with adoption. Similar, but less striking patterns prevail for gender, age, education and income. Women, younger people, the college educated and higher income households are more likely than others to say a family

Experience with Adoption

Has anyone in your family or among your close friends ever been adopted or adopted a child or put a child up for adoption?

Yes	58%
No	42
Don't know	--

Percent Having Considered Adoption

How seriously, if at all, have you ever considered adopting a child-- would you say very seriously, somewhat seriously, not too seriously or not at all seriously?

Very seriously	15%
Somewhat seriously	21
Not too seriously	17
Not at all seriously	47
Don't know	--

member or close friend has been adopted or has placed a child for adoption. Since these data suggest personal experience and positive views about adoption are linked, those social groups with less personal exposure may have fewer opportunities to develop positive sentiments toward adoption.

Family and Friends Main Source of Information

A plurality of Americans says their family and friends (45%) are their main source of information about adoption, followed by the news (30%), books and magazines (16%), and movies and entertainment programs (6%).

Each of the three categories of supporters turn to somewhat different sources for information about adoption.

Among *Full Supporters* a majority (55%) rely on family and friends, while news (21%) and books and magazines (18%) place a distant second. By contrast, *Marginal Supporters* are as

Main Source of Information about Adoption			
What is your main source of information about adoption?			
	Adoption Supporters		
	Full	Qualified	Marginal
Family and Friends	55%	42%	39%
News	21	32	38
Books and Magazines	18	16	13
Movies and Entertainment prgs.	3	7	7
Don't know	2	3	3

likely to say their main source of adoption information is the news (38%) as family and friends (39%). Among all three groups only a handful turn to movies and entertainment programs as their main source of information about adoption.

Section IV: Alternatives to Adoption

Adoption or Raising Baby -- What's Best for the Teenage Mom?

Americans divide over whether it is best for an unmarried pregnant teenager to raise the baby herself or place the baby for adoption. Just as many think it is best for the teenage mother to place the baby for adoption (37%) as believe she is better off raising the baby herself (39%). One in five (20%) says it depends on the individual situation. Among those who have a more definite opinion, two in three *Full Supporters* of adoption (67%)

favor the teenager placing the baby for adoption, while a third (33%) think she should raise the baby herself. Just the opposite pattern prevails among *Marginal Supporters* -- 64 percent believe the teenager should raise the baby herself while 36 percent favor placing the baby for adoption.

Here again, these data suggest the social milieu of some sectors of American society are more open than others to unmarried teen mothers raising their biological children regardless of economic circumstances. African Americans (69%) are twice as likely as whites (34%) to favor teen mothers raising their babies themselves. Similar age, education and income differences exist. Half or more of the young (18-29 year olds -- 50%), the non-high school educated (57%), and those from low income households (under \$20,000 -- 49%) favor unmarried teen mothers raising their babies themselves. Only a third or less of the older (30 years of age and older) (33%), the college educated (24%), and those from wealthier households (\$50,000 and over) (30%) concur. Men (42%) are slightly more likely than women (36%) to think it is better for teen mothers to raise their babies themselves. And never married respondents (48%) are somewhat more favorable toward teen mothers raising their babies themselves than those who

Unmarried Pregnant Teen Mothers: Raise Baby or Place for Adoption?

Today many teenage girls get pregnant and don't have the option of marrying the father. Let's suppose a pregnant teenager decides to have the baby, do you think it best for her if she raises the baby herself or puts the baby up for adoption?

Raise baby herself	39%
Put baby up for adoption	37
Depends (VOL.)	20
Don't know	4

are or have been married (36%). Finally Southerners and those with a pro-life stance on abortion are slightly more inclined to favor a mother raising the child herself than placing the baby for adoption.

Public Divided about What's Best for Baby

What about the baby of the unmarried teenage mother -- is it best for the baby to be adopted or be raised by the mother? Again, opinion is divided, although slightly more think the baby is better off being placed for adoption (42%) than being raised by the birth mother (36%). Similar social demographic patterns to those noted above prevail.

What's Best for the Baby?

And what about for the baby? Do you think it is best for the baby to be raised by the teenage mother or be put up for adoption?

Best to be raised by the teenager	36%
Best to be put up for adoption	42
Depends	18
Don't know	4

Section V: Adoption as an Alternative to Welfare

The current wave of welfare reform has prompted politicians to rethink America's social safety net, and has lead some to wonder if encouraging adoption would ease welfare rolls. In particular, California Governor Pete Wilson has proposed a plan to encourage welfare mothers to place their children for adoption. A slim majority of Americans (54%) oppose promoting adoption as an alternative to welfare, but a sizable minority (43%) support it. Support for such a plan is stronger when the mother in question is a pregnant teenager. Two in three (67%) would support a plan to encourage pregnant teens who are unable to provide for their newborn to place the baby for adoption.

Full Supporters are as likely as *Marginal Supporters* of adoption to oppose promoting adoption

as a alternative to welfare. But, when the referent is teenage mothers, *Full Supporters* (76%) are slightly more likely than *Marginal Supporters* (65%) to approve of encouraging teenage mothers to place their babies for adoption. People who describe themselves as politically conservative, who have higher incomes and the better educated are more likely than others to favor adoption as

Adoption as an Alternative . . .

For Welfare Mothers . . .

A state governor has recently announced a plan to encourage *welfare recipients* to consider putting their children up for adoption. Some people say the plan is good because if these children are adopted the state would be relieved of any responsibility for the children and the children would grow up in more financially and emotionally secure households. Others say the plan is bad because the state should try to keep families together. How do you feel about this plan? Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose it?

Strongly support	12%
Somewhat support	31
Somewhat oppose	22
Strongly oppose	32
Don't know	3

. . . And Pregnant Teens

The same proposal suggests that *pregnant teenagers* who aren't able to provide for their babies be encouraged to put their babies up for adoption. How do you feel about such a plan -- do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose it?

Strongly support	32%
Somewhat support	35
Somewhat oppose	15
Strongly oppose	16
Don't know	2

an alternative to welfare. Those who favor adoption in this situation are also more likely than others to agree with the statement "*Poor people today have it easy because they can get government benefits without doing much of anything in return.*" This suggests these sentiments may be as much a reaction to the perpetuation of a culture of dependency as a reflection of their adoption attitudes.

Section VI: Open Adoption and Searching for Birth Parents

Relatively Few Favor Open Adoption in Most Cases

Open adoption -- when the birth and adoptive families maintain contact with each other -- has become more commonplace in the United States. Despite this move toward open adoptions, the public offers only modest support for the practice. Less than two in ten (16%) say it is a good idea in *most* cases while the plurality (40%) think it is a good idea in *some* cases, suggesting they feel decisions

about openness should be made on a case-by-case basis. The remaining 42% say contact is *seldom* (23%) or *never* (19%) a good idea. This split prevails regardless of whether one is a *Full* or *Marginal Supporter* of adoption. It would seem that open adoption has won only limited acceptance even by those members of the public who unconditionally support adoption.

Open Adoption

Sometimes mothers who put their child up for adoption maintain contact by occasionally sending cards and letters. Do you think this is a good idea in most cases, in some cases, very few cases, or no cases at all?

Most cases	16%
Some cases	40
Very few cases	23
No cases at all	19
Don't know	2

Public Lukewarm on Searching for Birth Parents

Perhaps one reason many Americans are reluctant to fully support open adoption is the mixed views they hold about the consequences of adoptees searching for and finding their birth parents. From the public's perspective, adoptees benefit more from contacting their birth parents than either the birth parents or adoptive parents. Two in three (68%) say it is usually good for adoptees to find their birth parents. Somewhat fewer (56%) believe it is usually good for the birth parents to be contacted by their birth child, and even fewer (44%) think it is a positive event for the adoptive parents. In all three cases, *Full Supporters* of adoption are more likely than *Marginal Supporters* to judge these actions as beneficial, indicating the greater confidence and trust *Full Supporters* place in the resilience of the adoption triad.

Benefits and Costs of Finding Birth Parents

Sometimes people who were adopted as children look for and find one or both of the parents who put them up for adoption. When this happens, is this usually a good thing or a bad thing for the ADOPTED PERSON?

Usually good	68%
Usually bad	21
Don't know	11

When people who were adopted as children look for and find one or both of the parents who put them up for adoption, is it usually a good thing or a bad thing for the PARENTS WHO PUT THEM UP FOR ADOPTION?

Usually good	56%
Usually bad	31
Don't know	13

How about the parents who adopted the person. . . When people who were adopted as children look for and find one or both of the parents who put them up for adoption. Is this usually a good thing or a bad thing for the PARENTS WHO ADOPTED THEM?

Usually good	44%
Usually bad	45
Don't know	11

VII: Gay and Interracial Adoption

Gay and interracial adoption were not explored in this survey because data on these topics are available elsewhere. The data presented below show most Americans are opposed to gay couples adopting children. Conversely, most have a positive opinion about interracial adoption.

Americans Hesitant About Gay Couples Adopting . . .

A May 1996 Princeton Survey Research Associate survey for Newsweek magazine asked whether it should be as easy for gay couples to adopt as it is for heterosexual couples. A minority (30%) said it should be as easy. Most either thought it should be more difficult (20%) or should not be allowed at all (44%). Younger Americans, and those under 30 in particular, are more accepting of gay adoption than older people. Women are more open to gay adoption than men.

Opinion of Gay Adoptions

If gay couples are allowed to marry, should it be as easy for them to adopt children as it is for heterosexual married couples, should it be more difficult, or should they not be allowed to adopt at all?

As easy	30%
More difficult	20
Not be allowed at all	44
Don't know	6

. . . But Interracial Adoption has Public Support

Interracial adoption, or at least adoption between whites and African-Americans, has broader public acceptance. The majority of the public supports white couples adopting black children (80%) and black couples adopting white children (77%), according to a June 1995 survey by Yankelovich for Time magazine and CNN.

Interracial Adoption between Whites and African-Americans

Do you approve or disapprove of a married couple who is white adopting a baby who is African-American?

Approve	80%
Disapprove	14
Don't know	6

Do you approve or disapprove of a married couple who is African-American adoption a baby who is white?

Approve	77%
Disapprove	16
Don't know	7

Methodological Statement

This survey is based on telephone interviews with a representative sample of 1,554 adults 18 and older, living in telephone households in the continental United States, including an oversample of 50 African-Americans. The sample data were weighted, using parameters from the most recently available Census data (the *Current Population Survey*, March 1996), to bring the sample characteristics into alignment with the demographics of the 18 and older population of adults in the continental United States. The interviewing took place from July 7, through August 8, 1997.

For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys can introduce error or bias into the finding of opinion polls.

Legislation Currently Pending in the 105th Congress

The pending proposals are intended to promote adoption for children in foster care and make additional improvements in the child welfare system. The legislation would primarily amend child welfare, foster care, and adoption assistance programs under the two titles of the Social Security Act that provide federal funding for these services: Title IV-B (Child Welfare Services) and Title IV-E (Foster Care and Adoption Assistance)

The two major pieces of legislation currently pending in the Congress are:

H.R. 867 Adoption Promotion Act of 1997

Passed by the House on April 30, 1997 by a vote of 416-5

Sen. 1195 PASS Act

Promotion of Adoption, Safety, and Support for Abused and Neglected Children Act
Introduced into the Senate on September 18, 1997

Hearings held before the Senate Finance Committee mid-October 1997

A vote on the bill is anticipated before Congress adjourns for the year

Both these bills elevate the safety of foster children over efforts to reunite them with their families. This becomes a critically important factor for the system's ability to place these children, as well as for the psychological well-being of these children once they leave foster care and are placed with adoptive families. Both bills call for a judicial hearing to determine whether parental rights should be severed (they differ only in time period 12 vs. 18 months). Both require states to make a more concerted effort to find adoptive families for children in foster care. Both provide financial incentives from the federal government to the states to speed adoption.

S. 1195 differs from the House bill in that it re-authorizes and increases funding for the Family Preservation and Family Support Program which is designed to keep families together and reunite families after their children enter foster care. This bill also makes more children in foster care with "special needs" eligible for government aid such as adoption assistance and Medicaid once they are adopted. This would provide additional support for families who adopt "special needs" children.

Because of the differences in the two bills, if the Senate passes S. 1195, a compromise bill will be required. The principal points of contention are that S. 1195 re-authorizes the Family Preservation and Family Support Act and that funding would be needed to expand federal subsidy payments to the states.

National Adoption Statistics

In 1992, the last year for which total adoption statistics were available, 127,441 children of all races and nationalities were adopted in the United States (National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, 1996).

It is estimated that currently about 1 million children in the United States are adopted. (Stolley, 1993).

Adoption and Children in Foster Care

At the end of Fiscal Year 1995, there were 483,000 children in foster care. This number represents a 72% increase over the number of children in care in 1986. (Voluntary Cooperative Information System, 1997).

In 1995, children of color outnumber white children in foster care:

45.1% African American;
36.5% White;
11.3% Hispanic;
1.6% American Indian/Alaskan Native;
1.0% Asian/Pacific Islander; and
4.6% unknown or other racial/ethnic background.
(Voluntary Cooperative Information System, 1997).

The United States Department of Health and Human Services estimates this year that as many as 100,000 children currently in foster care need adoptive families.

According to one study, children in foster care wait for adoption, on average, between 3.5 and 5.5 years. (McKenzie, 1993).

The number of finalized adoptions for children in foster care has remained relatively stable over time, despite the fact that the number of children in foster care continues to grow. In FY 1993 -- the year for which the most complete information is available -- there were 18,000 finalized adoptions of children in foster care. These 18,000 adoptions represent only about four percent of the total number of children in care that year. (Voluntary Cooperative Information System, 1993)

It is primarily younger children who are adopted from foster care. As children age, they are less likely to be adopted. In FY 1990, for example, almost 55% of all finalized adoptions were of children between birth and five years of age. About a third [37.4%] of the adoptions were of children between the ages of 6 and 12 and only a small 7.7% of the adoptions were of children between 13 and 18 years of age. (Voluntary Cooperative Information System, 1993)

In 1990

- 47% of the adoptions of children in foster care were by foster parents to whom the children were not related
- 7% were by relatives
- 42% of the adoptions were by families to whom the children were not related
(CRS Report for Congress, 1997)

International Adoption

The number of international adoptions over the past several years is as follows:

1992 6,536
1993 7,348
1994 8,195
1995 9,679
1996 11,316

(U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services and U.S. Department of State)

The primary sending countries for children adopted internationally in 1996 were China [3,318 children], the Russian Federation [2,531 children], Korea [1,580] and Romania [554]. (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service and U.S. Department of State).

Infant Adoption

The rate at which women relinquish their infants for adoption has declined dramatically. Between 1982 and 1988, 3% of white women relinquished their children for adoption, dropping from 19% in 1965-1972. The rate of relinquishment among black women has consistently been under 2% for unmarried births. (Mosher and Bachrach, 1996).

Who Adopts?

About 200,000 people are, at any one time, seeking to adopt a child.
(Bachrach, London, and Maza, 1991).

Research shows that only 11% to 24% of couples with infertility problems take a step toward adopting a child. (Mosher and Bachrach, 1996).

There are approximately 3.3 adoption seekers for every actual adoption.
(Bachrach, London, and Maza, 1991).

Single parents are adopting in greater numbers. Prior to the 1990s, only a small percentage of adoptions were by single parents - ranging from 2.5% to 5%. (Meezan, 1980; Shireman, 1995). Studies now show that single parents represent a significant percentage of adoptions, ranging from 12% in some communities to one-quarter or more in other communities. (Shireman, 1995).

Adoption and Search and Reunion

In only three states - Kansas, Alaska, and Tennessee - may adopted adults obtain copies of their original birth certificates.

As of November 1996, mutual consent registries were in place in at least twenty-one states. Mutual consent registries permit parties to an adoption to register their willingness to meet at some point in the future, but they allow the release of identifying information only when a birth parent and an adult adoptee both file formal consents to the disclosure of their identities. (Hollinger 1996)

As of November 1996, "search and consent" statutes were in place in at least sixteen states. These statutes provide that when a birth parent, upon being contacted by an individual or agency acting as a "confidential intermediary", consents to the disclosure of his or her identity to the adoptee, the disclosure may then be authorized by a court. (Hollinger 1996)

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute

The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute was formally incorporated in August 1996. It was created with a grant from Spence-Chapin Services to Families and Children after an extensive feasibility study to assess the need for an Institute that would focus on adoption information and awareness. The consensus was there exists a critical need for an independent progressive voice for adoption.

The Adoption Institute, provides knowledge-based policy analysis and development, promotes quality adoption practice, offers training and educational opportunities for adoption professionals working with all members of the adoption triad, provides the media with a more informed understanding of adoption issues based on current research and data, and supports adoption focused research.

In addition to the national public opinion survey released in November for National Adoption month, the Institute is engaged in compiling a comprehensive compendium of the research on adoption. This written product will organize and annotate the major empirical research on adoption since 1986 and will be available in early 1998. In the fall of 1997, the Institute held a two-day conference for adoption professionals on prenatal alcohol and drug exposure.

The Adoption Institute plans to become a clearinghouse of information and research on adoption providing data to families, professionals and policy-makers.

The Executive Director, Madelyn Freundlich, is a social worker and attorney whose work has focused on child welfare policy and practice for the past decade. She and two additional staff members work with a 15 member Board of Directors made up of adoptees, adoptive parents, birth parents and adoption and child welfare professionals. The Adoption Institute is aided by a Practice Advisory Committee and a Research Advisory Committee.

The Benchmark National Adoption Survey Spokespeople

Madelyn Freundlich, Executive Director of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, is a social worker and lawyer whose work has focused on child welfare policy and practice for the past decade. She formerly served as General Counsel for the Child Welfare League of America and Associate Director of Program and Planning for the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. She is the author of a number of books and articles on child welfare law, policy and financing. Her most recent writing has focused on the impact of welfare reform on foster care and special needs adoption; interstate adoption law and practice; genetic testing in adoption evaluations; wrongful adoption; and confidentiality in adoption law and practice. Ms. Freundlich holds masters degrees in social work and public health and holds a JD and LL.M.

Katharine S. Legg has served as the Executive Director of Spence-Chapin Services to Families and Children since 1990. As Executive Director, she expanded the agency's adoption programs to include international and special needs adoption and a broad array of post-adoption services. She was instrumental in establishing The Adoption Resource Center, a program providing workshops, seminars, books, and resource materials for those concerned with adoption issues. Ms. Legg serves as a member of the Adoption Action Network, a statewide adoption advocacy group in New York, and is a member of the Adoption Task Force of the Child Welfare League of America. Prior to assuming her current position, she served as Deputy Commissioner of Income and Medical Assistance Programs and as Deputy Administrator of Management, Budget and Policy for the New York City Human Resources Administration. Ms. Legg holds a MBA in Economics from New York University.

Curtis R. Welling, President of the Board of Directors of The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, President and Chief Executive of Societe Generale Securities Corporation. Prior to joining Societe Generale, Mr. Welling was a Senior Managing Director at Bear Stearns & Company, Inc. He is a graduate of Dartmouth College, Vanderbilt Law School, and the Amos Tuck School of Business. Mr. Welling serves as President of the Board of Directors of Spence-Chapin Services to Families and Children, Trustee of the Adirondack Council, and a member of the Wilton, Connecticut Board of Finance. He and his wife are the adoptive parents of two children.

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