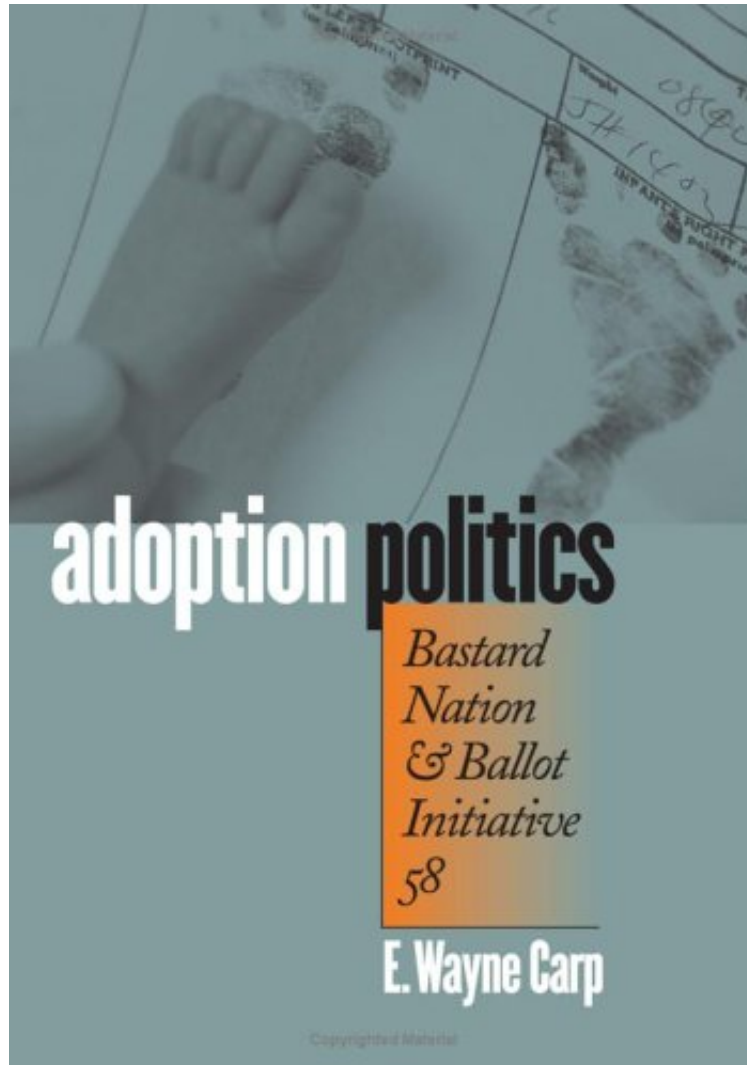


Adoption Politics: Bastard Nation and Ballot Initiative 58

E. Wayne Carp

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E. Wayne Carp : Adoption Politics: Bastard Nation and Ballot Initiative 58 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Adoption Politics: Bastard Nation and Ballot Initiative 58:

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Adoption Politics Gets it RightBy CynAs someone who was closely connected to the events detailed in Adoption Politics: Bastard Nation Ballot Initiative 58, I was very happy to see that Professor Carp has changed his position on open records for adult adoptees since his Family Matters, in which he advocated mutual consent registries as the most equitable solution to the contentious issue of adoptee access to adoption and birth records. Here he clearly comes out for open records for those to whom they pertain, the adult adoptee.In his introduction to Adoption Politics, Carp says: "In blending adopted adults' access to their original birth

certificates with a protection for the birth mothers' right to privacy through a contact preference form (without legal penalties for violation), Measure 58 should be viewed as a model piece of legislation for other states to emulate." (p. 3-4) And in the conclusion: "It [a coalition of adoption activists, adoption agencies and social workers] would not only confirm that a new age is dawning, but also that this new age makes it imperative to give adult adoptees access to their original birth certificates. It would be a clarion call that in the world of adoption it is time to look with fresh eyes at an old institution." (p. 169) I do have to disagree with several points, though, such as the following in the conclusion: "But to achieve this goal nationwide, Bastard Nation and its supporters must free themselves of ideological blinders and recognize that adoption agencies do not constitute a single, monolithic 'adoption industry.' They must recognize that, either out of altruism or self-interest, the majority of adoption agencies support openness in adoption, including open records. ... The NCFA [National Council for Adoption]...will become increasingly isolated." (p. 168) I think BN does recognize that. The "adoption industry" usage was appropriate political rhetoric for our ballot initiative campaign in Oregon. On the other hand, in California, for example, many adoption agencies joined the CA Open Coalition in its legislative push for open records for adult adoptees, at BN's urging. One has to recognize that the neutrality of Oregon's Right to Life and Catholic Charities was extremely fortunate and unusual, and not something BN can count on elsewhere. In many states Catholic Charities is one of our biggest foes. I was dismayed by the imputation of anti-birth mother sentiment to BN as a whole on p. 109 ("BN's dislike of birth mothers"), explained by the fact that "some adopted adults harbored resentment toward their birth mothers, whom they viewed as having callously abandoned them." I can't argue that some adoptees didn't/don't feel that way, but it was unjust to tar the organization as a whole with that sentiment. Nothing in Bastard Nation's policy, strategy or tactics reflects such a bias. In regard to his discussion of the controversial use of the term "birth whore": the book states that "e-mail messages from Bastard Nation members ... that frequently referred to birth mothers as 'birth whores'" were found on the unmoderated Usenet newsgroup, alt.adoption, by members of the Boys and Girls Aid Society of Oregon, which opposed Measure 58. (p. 86) Carp does say in a footnote that this term wasn't used on BEST (BN's internal e-mail listserv) or in BN publications or in public during the campaign (can you imagine?!), and that the organization wasn't a home for "virulent anti-birth mother beliefs," having several respected birth mothers as members, but he doesn't put those many messages on alt.adoption into any kind of context. (p. 194-195) Only one person used that term seriously, and she wasn't a Bastard Nation member for long. The vast majority of posts were from BN members and others who objected to her use of that term, and several were posts in which BN birth mothers themselves used the term as a joke, as in someone's calling herself the leader of Birth Whore Nation. It is really too bad that this kind of misinterpretation has found its way into this book since one of the points we've always tried to make is that the struggle for open records isn't one of adoptees vs. birth mothers, but of all of us (enlightened adoptive parents as well) against the dinosaur faction of the industry as represented most strongly by the NCFA. On the whole, though, very well done! The roller coaster excitement of those days was vividly brought back to me, the feeling of making history in adoption reform. The case on both sides is fairly presented, and the legal explanations are exceptionally lucid. (...)

The passage of Measure 58 in Oregon in 1998 was a milestone in adoption reform. For the first time in U.S. history a grassroots initiative restored the legal right of adopted adults to request and receive their original birth certificates. Within a day after the law went into effect, nearly 2,400 adoptees had applied for these previously sealed records, elevating their right to know over a birth mothers right to privacy. E. Wayne Carp, a nationally respected authority on adoption history, now reveals the efforts of the radical adoptee rights organization Bastard Nation to pass this milestone initiative. He has written an intimate history of a passionately proposed and opposed initiative that has the potential to revolutionize the adoption reform movement nationwide. Carp follows the campaign from its inception through the hard-fought signature drives of proponents Helen Hill and Shea Grimm to the electoral campaign and ensuing court battles. The opposition was formidable: government officials, adoption agencies, news media, the ACLU, religious organizations, and ad-hoc citizen political groups. Using correspondence and his own candid interviews with all the key players, Carp shows how both sides mobilized their constituencies and formed their strategies. In describing challenges to Measure 58's constitutionality, Carp reveals legal arguments that were never publicized by the Oregon media and remained unknown to the American public until now issues centering on privacy rights that are crucial to understanding both sides of the controversy and the hazards of initiative politics. As Carp shows, Measure 58 was important because it framed the issue of adoption reform in terms of civil rights and equal protection of the law rather than in terms of psychological needs or medical necessity. The resulting law now gives adult adoptees access to birth certificates but it also allows birth mothers to indicate whether or not they wish to be contacted. Carp not only chronicles a milestone initiative and a model piece of legislation for other states to emulate, he also proposes a sensible way to cut the Gordian Knot that bedevils adoption reform today.

From the pathbreaking historian of adoption secrecy and disclosure, *Adoption Politics* provides a gripping account of local politics in the Internet age and a perceptive analysis of how a new kind of grassroots initiative transformed adoption law. Barbara Melosh, author of *Strangers and Kin: The American Way of Adoption* A rich, detailed, and

fascinating account. The voices of activists on both sides of the issue, framed by Carps keen analysis and elegant prose, make this book essential reading for all those touched by adoption, as well as anyone interested in the politics of private life. Elaine Tyler May, author of *Barren in the Promised Land* A timely, balanced, and thought-provoking book that raises questions about adoption, citizen initiatives, and privacy rights that we cannot afford to ignore. Steven Mintz, author of *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of Family Life* From the Back Cover From the pathbreaking historian of adoption secrecy and disclosure, *Adoption Politics* provides a gripping account of local politics in the Internet age and a perceptive analysis of how a new kind of grassroots initiative transformed adoption law. --Barbara Melosh, author of *Strangers and Kin: The American Way of Adoption* A rich, detailed, and fascinating account. The voices of activists on both sides of the issue, framed by Carp's keen analysis and elegant prose, make this book essential reading for all those touched by adoption, as well as anyone interested in the politics of private life. --Elaine Tyler May, author of *Barren in the Promised Land* A timely, balanced, and thought-provoking book that raises questions about adoption, citizen initiatives, and privacy rights that we cannot afford to ignore. --Steven Mintz, author of *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of Family Life* About the Author E. Wayne Carp is professor of history and chair at Pacific Lutheran University. His other books include *Family Matters: Secrecy and Disclosure in the History of Adoption* and *Adoption in America: Historical Perspectives*.