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Immigration Law and Improvised Policy in the Making of International Adoption, 1948–1961

In 1953, Congress passed a bill often seen as inconsequential in immigration history, sandwiched between the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act and the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act. The Refugee Relief Act (RRA) offered four thousand nonquota visas for overseas orphans *regardless* of origin country, setting it apart from the 1948 Displaced Person's Act intended primarily for European orphans. This legislation provokes a question central to the institution of international adoption: Why did orphans become classified as *de facto* refugees?¹

The changes in immigration, refugee, and proxy adoption legislation from 1948 to 1961 shed important light on the transformation of international adoption policy from an informal, emergency provision to a permanent social policy. As intercountry adoptions increased steadily over the postwar period, the act of family creation became the subject of many public debates among legislators, social workers, and religious humanitarians—especially about countries embroiled in Cold War military struggles, such as Korea. Mixed-race Korean adoptees, children of Korean mothers, and white or black U.S. GIs, became salient visual symbols of America's growing political interest in Asia, concerns over refugee and immigration policy, and attempts

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to minimize racial difference. Rifts within the public/private welfare state over issues of jurisdiction further complicated these tensions.²

This article examines how the Holt Adoption Program competed with professional organizations to control and reform refugee policy in response to American families' increasing interest in adopting both GI babies and indigenous orphans from Korea. Harry and Bertha Holt, an evangelical couple from rural Oregon, drew national attention to intercountry adoption in 1955 by adopting eight Korean GI orphans through a special act of Congress. In the following year, hundreds of families bombarded the Holts with requests to help them adopt GI orphans as well, leading the couple to open an adoption agency in 1956. The key to their success was the 1953 Refugee Relief Act. Using a provision of this act permitting Americans to adopt orphans by proxy—adoptions completed abroad by a third party without the parents' presence—the Holts rapidly processed adoptions and sent planeloads of children to U.S. families. They bypassed the long-established social welfare procedures that ensured domestic orphans' protection and used the refugee measures to avoid racially restrictive immigration quotas. Although the proxy process was legal, social-work organizations believed that the Holts' interpretation of the law endangered children, offering them limited recourse from risky placements.

This article argues that from 1948 to 1961 immigration law became the chief vehicle for an improvised international adoption policy because conflicting state laws and a lack of federal or international adoption legislation created a policy vacuum. Policy vacuums can emerge when legislation fails to provide adequate coverage, when legislators do not provide enough official oversight, or when agencies unevenly implement laws or regulations. Because policy vacuums are products of temporary and unstable situations, in adoption law they allowed for the creation of black markets, where babies were sold like commodities, or even "gray" markets, where well-meaning individuals often took the place of professional social welfare workers.³ The Holts acted as informal policymakers who took advantage of this policy vacuum in adoption law to fashion their own child placement standards that served their adoption philosophies and religious worldview.

In many respects, this policy vacuum existed because legislators questioned what, if any, federal intervention was needed. Indeed, the Senate black-market adoption hearings throughout the 1950s revealed lawmakers' reluctance to intervene in adoptions across state and national borders since states had jurisdiction over child welfare policy.⁴ Federal agencies, such as the

U.S. Children's Bureau (USCB), historically served state-run Departments of Public Welfare. While the USCB occasionally acted as a liaison between states and the federal government for international adoptions from Canada and Europe, this was not its primary role. Mass international adoptions, like the Holts' "babylifts," complicated this fragile system because they overwhelmed existing structures, requiring significant legislation and federal oversight from the Senate Judiciary committee, the State Department, and the INS. Through the visa process, the federal government had authority to "approve" children for adoption, creating both an uneven implementation of policy between domestic and international cases and a jurisdictional quagmire.

Agencies like Holt Adoption Program played a role in setting child welfare policies because two different shades of policymaking existed: traditional and untraditional.⁵ In its initial stages, international adoption created a space where improvised policies could and did flourish. While traditional policy was worked out through official channels, untraditional policies provided structure in the interim, sometimes evolving into more formalized structures, as was the case with international adoption in 1961.⁶ During the period from 1948 to 1961, concrete and permanent international adoption policy simply did not exist. Even though social workers claimed that the Holts' religious humanitarianism bypassed traditional social practices through "loopholes," the Oregon couple cannot simply be reduced to missionaries working outside the system when the system was in its initial stages of negotiation. In fact, the Holts' popularity and success with adoptive families forced social agencies to acknowledge the sizable gaps that existed in international child welfare policy and to curtail informal policymaking through legislative action and public relations tactics.

International orphans' status as immigrants dramatically changed the parameters of domestic child welfare policy, fashioning a new relationship between immigration law and child welfare policy. The Holts and their adoption campaign serve as an ideal lens to refract the policy complexities, domestic tensions, and international concerns that converged in the making of international adoption. This drama involves an unwieldy cast of characters—including legislators, social workers, constituents, adoptive parents, religious mavericks, Korean government officials, and the GI children themselves—who all contribute to the overall policy narrative this article seeks to capture. The first section will trace the progression of orphan legislation from 1948, when the first orphan provision was included in refugee law, through 1961. The second section will narrate the Holts' story, their improvised policies, and the formation of their adoption agency. Bringing together both the Holts'

perspective and the policy story shows how traditional and untraditional policymakers struggled to govern family formation and how styling orphans as refugees served both domestic and foreign objectives in the postwar period.

THE “BEST POSSIBLE IMMIGRANTS”

International orphan legislation was born during a period of advancements and constraints in immigration law. The 1924 Johnson-Reed Act excluded Asian immigrants on the basis of race while establishing a European quota system predicated on nationality rather than race or ethnicity.⁷ During World War II, propaganda lauded the United States as a nation committed to racial, ethnic, and religious diversity. To underscore American commitment to ideals of cultural pluralism, the U.S. government initiated a wave of reforms beginning with the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Acts in 1943. Three years later, Congress lifted restrictions against Filipino and South Indian immigration and amended the War Brides Act in 1947, permitting Asian American servicemen to bring their Asian-born wives to the United States. This liberalization of immigration law culminated with the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act, which for the first time allowed Asian immigrants to become U.S. citizens, established immigrant quotas for Asians, and included a provision for family reunification for persons applying for entry from Asia.⁸ Yet even in a legislative context that appeared to liberalize immigration laws, the 1952 act maintained a quota system that reified racial difference and privileged certain migrants groups.

Although ostensibly discrete, immigration and refugee policy shared similar functions and strictures during the postwar period. Government officials considered refugee law an emergency response to specific global problems, most notably conflicts linked to the growing influence of Communist regimes. In a 1953 letter to Congress, President Eisenhower urged representatives to pass refugee legislation because refugees were “look[ing] to the free world for haven.”⁹ The humanitarian rhetoric persistent in refugee law did not, however, shorten the path to citizenship or alter the standards for admittance. In fact, some argue that legislators used the RRA to circumvent existing immigration quotas and achieve policy solutions to varying problems—such as those posed by the situation of Korean GI children. Historian Michael Gill Davis contends that the much-contested RRA provided an interim step between the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act and the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act by offering more immigrant spots to eligible Asian refugees. He posits that legislators consciously acknowledged a relationship between

foreign policy goals and immigration law, which they demonstrated through the extension of five thousand extra visas to Asian migrants through the RRA.¹⁰ Bruce Nichols further argues that the RRA was also known informally as the “church bill” since churches, disappointed by the lack of reform in the McCarren-Walter bill, lobbied extensively for more generous provisions for specific groups of refugees. Therefore refugee law, especially under the RRA, offered legislators a way to uphold immigration and citizenship screening while relaxing aspects of the rigid quota system, meeting persistent humanitarian needs.

Beginning with the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 (DPA), policymakers incorporated orphan provisions into refugee legislation, even though the creators of the bill specified that orphans were not technically considered refugees. The DPA aimed to quell European unrest created by an excess of one million refugees, primarily from Germany, Austria, and Italy, offering 205,000 visas for displaced persons.¹¹ Prompted by a wealthy constituent’s desire to adopt an identified orphan from Poland, Senator Irving Ives (R-N.Y.) introduced the orphan provision to help the “innocent victims of war.” Ives stipulated that “this is not an immigration bill but an expression of the great heart of the United States which always went out to children” and should be kept “separate and distinct from the overall problem of the refugee, the persecuted, and the displaced person.”¹² He also urged the committee not to discriminate on the basis of race or nationality since this bill was intended as humanitarian relief. Yet Ives did not realize his desire for an orphan law that transcended national and racial boundaries, which representatives from both the State Department and the Department of Justice argued would prove extremely difficult to accomplish in light of current immigration law.¹³ The DPA’s final version provided two thousand orphan visas under normal immigration quotas. It defined orphans as children under the age of sixteen, from Italy or the British, French, or American sectors of Germany and Austria, who were missing both parents.¹⁴ Ives’s advocacy, however, had opened the legislative door to orphaned children and brought to the Senate’s attention the plight of children outside Europe.

In the DPA hearings, legislators considered orphan provisions in light of U.S. parents’ demand for adoptable children. Committee members specifically asked, “Do you think there will be a sufficient number of citizens . . . who will qualify in order to adopt a reasonable percentage of these orphans?” Without the reassurance from the State Department representative, Ben Brown, that their office believed both parents and organizations could care for these orphans, senators were hesitant to bring additional children into the

country.¹⁵ This exchange illustrates that the DPA's orphan provisions partially rested on the existence of a U.S. market for orphans.

With its emphasis on matching orphans with adoptive parents, the DPA laid the foundation for international adoption policy. Under its provisions, from 1948 to 1953, U.S. citizens adopted 4,052 European children and 466 Asian children (mostly Japanese-American).¹⁶ Most important, the DPA established that orphans could be considered refugees for the purposes of immigration law. Yet legislators intended the DPA to relocate only European orphans, upholding the restrictive quota system already in place. Few Japanese-American orphans qualified for the existing visas, and those that did were adopted by military families. Finally, since the act did not permit proxy placements, and had strict oversight from the Committee on Displaced Persons, it did not offer the same opportunity for independent agencies to conduct mass adoptions.

Subsequent laws after the DPA demonstrated how orphan provisions evolved into the RRA of 1953. In 1950, congressional legislation extended citizenship to the foreign wives and children of American military forces, regardless of race. Although this act did not directly affect orphans, it did establish a precedent for exceptions to race-based immigration quotas, revising Section 13(c) of the 1924 Immigration Act.¹⁷ Also tangentially related to future orphan provisions was the landmark McCarren-Walter Act in 1952, which made all races eligible for naturalization and gave internationally adopted children the blanket of citizenship.¹⁸ Finally, two months before the passage of the RRA, the House ratified a joint resolution that permitted the admittance of five hundred orphans adopted abroad by military families.¹⁹ Unlike the DPA, this resolution provided orphans with nonquota visas safe from racial restrictions. The House set two significant procedural standards through this resolution: it initiated adoptions from abroad—or by proxy—while also giving the State Department and Congress, perhaps unwittingly, the authority to approve adoptive families, effectively bypassing social welfare agencies. Lawmakers argued that it would increase efficiency to approve five hundred nonquota visas at once, rather than reviewing hundreds of individual requests from military personnel.²⁰ This practical policy decision set a precedent that reverberated throughout the subsequent RRA and decisively shaped 1950s intercountry adoption.

In its revision of the DPA, the 1953 Refugee Relief Act signaled a new direction in orphan provisions. Although still considered an emergency and therefore temporary provision, the RRA extended four thousand nonquota visas to eligible orphans, lasting for over three years. Like the joint congressional

resolution two months earlier, it permitted children to be adopted by proxy regardless of race, nationality, or ethnicity. Because of the sheer number of available visas without race-based restrictions, the RRA made mass adoption from Asian countries possible.²¹ While lawmakers established a committee of voluntary professional social welfare agencies and state welfare departments to oversee legislative implementation, they brokered no real power since states legislated adoption policy.²² Without a centralized authority to ensure that agencies followed child placement procedures, the RRA offered activists a significant degree of procedural freedom. The problems of jurisdiction and oversight in international adoption led to a child welfare policy vacuum, giving independent practitioners like the Holts the opportunity to create policies.

So why did orphans become classified as *de facto* refugees? One possibility is that it began as a way to alleviate the adoption process for American servicemen and citizens living abroad. One month before the RRA was enacted, Congress passed a special resolution to permit the entry of five hundred orphans adopted abroad intended to “free the [Judiciary] committee from devoting its time to individual consideration of each private bill.” The committee identified that it wanted to do whatever it could to “ease the difficulties confronting [these] adoptive parents.”²³ Another possibility was that designating orphans as refugees, instead of immigrants, helped lawmakers to sidestep the racialized immigration quota system. As historian Michael Davis argues, through emergency refugee provisions “White House officials hoped to expose the problems and inequities of the quota system without reopening a direct debate on the McCarran-Walter Act.”²⁴

Regardless of the RRA's original intentions, throughout the 1950s the Subcommittee on Refugees and Escapees—the lawmakers responsible for administering the RRA—used the classification of orphans as refugees to accomplish not only foreign objectives but also domestic ones. Coinciding with the U.S. baby boom and an increased social pressure to have children, the RRA became an efficient route to provide orphans with families and American couples with offspring.²⁵ According to calculations in the RRA's final report, even though the number of adoptable children increased in the postwar era, prospective adoptive parents still exceeded available children ten to one. The report further claimed that adoptions increased 80 percent over the same period.²⁶ In fact, the subcommittee concluded that the growing “popularity” of adoptions had led to a “supply and demand” crisis that the RRA sought to rectify.²⁷

This demand from American families drove the subcommittee and State Department to push for numerous extensions of the RRA. For instance, when

an article about GI orphans ran in the March 1955 edition of *JET* magazine, the RRA administrator Scott McLeod informed Congressman Adam Clayton Powell that “letters are still coming in, after topping the 500 mark.”²⁸ In the 1956 report that would lead to an extension of the RRA visas that year, the subcommittee drew a direct link between the demand for children and the continuation of orphan provisions. It stated that “based on the hundreds of letters from reputable United States citizens wanting to adopt foreign orphans . . . it may be concluded that it would be to the advantage of this country, as well as the orphan, to increase the number of orphan visas permissible.”²⁹

Domestic considerations, such as the baby boom and dearth of adoptable children, in part, influenced the U.S. response to orphans; yet, in putting an official “face” on the RRA orphan provisions, officials obscured these domestic priorities and focused on Cold War geopolitics. Authors of the RRA gushed, “Friendly international relations engendered by America’s helping hand stretch[ed] out to these children [was] a forward step toward better international understanding and lasting peace in the world.”³⁰ In this way, children were reduced to metaphorical olive branches—peace offerings for America to improve its international reputation. It also did not hurt that, in the words of the Subcommittee on Immigration, international orphans made the “best possible immigrants from the standpoint of their youth, flexibility, and lack of ties to any other cultures.”³¹ Since orphans’ youth prohibited them from forming strong cultural ties to their home countries, they assimilated easily into American culture and posed no threat to political institutions, making them ideal foreign recipients of U.S. beneficence.³²

The Cold War discourse of cultural pluralism lent legitimacy to the domestic concerns of American families and helped legislators to fashion ordinary citizens into foreign policy activists.³³ As one report claimed, the “admission of 4,000 orphans brought happiness to many American homes, and an awareness of the part citizens can play in helping their Government carry out its foreign policy.”³⁴ Framed this way, intercountry adoption focused less on the predominantly self-interested desires of prospective adoptive families and more on their humanitarian impact. Although humanitarianism certainly prompted some to adopt GI babies, many parents just wanted a child and could not obtain one easily in the United States.³⁵ Regardless of the motivations of prospective adoptive parents, the RRA afforded them new opportunities because private parties, like Bertha and Harry Holt, used this legislation to facilitate international adoptions on their own terms.

THE HOLTS' COMMISSION

The evening of December 14, 1954, was a fateful one for the Holt family. At the invitation of a neighbor, they attended a film screening describing postwar South Korea. Dr. Bob Pierce, director of World Vision—an evangelical relief organization that provided international humanitarian services, built churches and funded evangelism—hosted the event. The documentary film, titled *Other Sheep*, detailed the plight facing hundreds of “mixed-race” GI babies.³⁶ While statistics were generally hard to gather, the United Nations estimated that fifteen hundred mixed-race children needed homes and World Vision approximated that orphanages received twelve children every week.³⁷ According to Dr. Pierce, mothers abandoned their racially different children in a Korean society where they often suffered ostracism, beatings, and occasionally even death at the hands of their peers.³⁸ Watching the children’s desperate situation compelled the Holts to help the abandoned babies. That night they offered to sponsor twenty children.³⁹

The Holts’ hearts were pierced by the tableaux of blond-haired, blue-eyed Koreans living in garbage dumps, deserted and alone. Their concern was inextricably linked to these children’s status as the offspring of American military. When they remarked that “we had never thought of such suffering and heartbreak . . . such poverty and despair . . . such wistful little faces searching for someone to care,” their reaction was not directed toward any suffering child but specifically to children they considered partly American.⁴⁰ Thus, three months later, Harry Holt booked a flight to Korea with the intention of adopting eight GI children, which would double their family’s size. They owned a thirteen-room ranch-style home, referred to as the “pink mansion” in their small Creswell, Oregon, community, and had a plentiful income from their lumber mill and farm to support a large number of orphans.

After four months in Korea, Harry Holt received government approval to adopt all eight children.⁴¹ During this first trip, Holt sought to bring home not only his own children but orphans for other families as well, including two GI orphans adopted through state welfare departments and two children adopted by proxy for a local family, the Colliers. A little girl intended for a Texas family, named Yummy, stayed with the Holt brood until her passport cleared and Harry Holt included her on the “stork flight.” The other addition to the “baby-lift” was Lee Young Soni, the first black-Korean child to be adopted through the Michigan Department of Social Welfare, whose adoptive family was an African American couple living in Benton Harbor, Michigan. These adoptions demonstrate his early commitment to rescuing all of the GI babies of Korea.

Holt's mission soon became about much more than just incorporating eight children into his family or sending money to sponsor other orphans he had visited in Korea. When Harry Holt returned to Oregon on October 14, 1955, with his adopted children, he still "could not forget those tiny, outstretched arms he had left behind in Korea."⁴² In these first months, Holt continued to work under the auspices of World Vision and encouraged families to send donations directly to that organization. Once he returned to Korea in April, however, he realized that the World Vision Reception Center was too small to house the hundred or more orphans Holt had in mind. He sent his wife a letter urging her to sell \$10,000 worth of stock and open a bank account under the name Holt Adoption Program (HAP), so he could start building a larger orphanage.⁴³ Less than seven months after the first "stork flight" delivered Korean GI orphans on American soil, Holt had rededicated his life to what he considered a divinely appointed mission.

HAP'S POLICYMAKING

The Holt Adoption Program (HAP) had a distinctive philosophy shaped by the Holts' experiences and worldview, rather than the social welfare standards of the time. For the Holts, protecting children meant removing them from the aftermath of war and sparing them from racial marginalization in Korea. As activists on a mission, the tedious process of approving American homes did not concern them. HAP's more urgent task, they felt, was to save the lives and souls of mixed-race GI children. With great conviction, the Oregon couple believed that orphans needed a chance to survive and, subsequently, to be placed into a "loving" evangelical household. The welfare system, in their opinion, delayed such action by charging exorbitant fees and subjecting families to invasive inspections by social workers. As Bertha Holt opined, "I think of all the love-hungry, emaciated little babies over there starving and dying for want of a home . . . and all these love-hungry couples over here just pining their hearts out for children to love [and] I am forced to conclude that the Welfare needs to incorporate common sense into its program."⁴⁴ The Holts centered HAP on their evangelical faith, which shaped their approach to child-saving as well as their idea of family creation.⁴⁵

The Holts' conservative Christian theology guided their involvement with Korean orphans because it stressed the importance of child-saving and seeking conversions through missionary work. The burgeoning neo-evangelical movement led by cultural icons like Billy Graham in the late 1940s and early 1950s likely shaped the Holts' passion for world evangelization.

Certainly, missionaries had worked in the Far East for centuries; however, this new evangelical group of missionaries envisioned worldwide conversion as the primary goal of their faith. According to historian Nathan Hatch, these evangelicals “virtually organized their faith around the issue of communicating the gospel,” fostering “leaders such as Billy Graham.” Graham’s international outreach organization, Youth for Christ, developed many church leaders in evangelism and active missionary work, including Bob Pierce, who founded World Vision in 1952.

The Holts’ mission-minded adoption process downplayed rigorous screening procedures and challenged the secular principles of professional social work. Couples interested in adopting a child through the Holts would submit an application form with extensive information on their religious faith, yet with only cursory data about their residences and incomes. Then, the Holts used a California credit agency to conduct a criminal and credit background check on the applicants. Unlike public social welfare agencies, they never visited families’ homes, interviewed couples, or mandated physical or mental health evaluations. The Holts required applicants to pay for the credit check, the child’s airfare, and a small processing fee—a fraction of what the average social welfare adoption cost. Also, the average Holt adoption lasted less than six months, while a professional placement could take more than three years. As Bertha Holt vehemently exclaimed, social workers “say the family must be matched perfectly to the baby . . . How can they be so heartless as to deny homes to dying children? Any home would be better than a dump or a ditch.”⁴⁶ Finally, 1950s social workers championed the Progressive-era notion that scientific matching, not religious affiliation, would guarantee a less risky adoption placement.⁴⁷ The Holts’ ideology and practice, however, decried the social welfare practice of racial matching. As Holt explained, “human nature is universal . . . not confined to any race or standard of living . . . [because] love is the key that unlocks a heart.”⁴⁸

Yet the Holts’ claim that all people were “equal” in the eyes of God was misleading. Even though they espoused “colorblind” views, the Holts did not embrace all cultures as equal. As Harry Holt asserted, “I will bring my eight up as Americans in America.”⁴⁹ Since the Holts identified their adopted children as Americans rather than Korean-Americans, they celebrated American holidays, served American food, and dressed their children in American clothes. They did not encourage their children to be bilingual or practice Korean traditions because they did not consider them valuable. This Western notion of cultural supremacy has a long tradition in Protestant mission communities. Historian Richard Eves asserts that “the Christian vision of

equality is only notional, for in practice it does not entail respect for the other, but rather antipathy to the other's difference, seeking to erase difference and subsume the other into the same."⁵⁰ The Holts demonstrated a marked ambivalence toward Korean culture and their children's Korean identity.⁵¹

Also, the Holts' fundamental belief in the "power of love" to create families was unevenly practiced regarding race. They only permitted mixed-race black-Korean children to be placed in African American homes.⁵² Although they received many letters from prospective parents who were "willing to take the babies with oriental and negro blood," the couple hoped that "the negro people will open their hearts and homes to those children" since they felt "it would be so much kinder for the children to grow up in the society of the race their fathers belonged to."⁵³ The Holts believed that Korean orphans could "become white" and assimilate, but black-Korean children would always be marked by their racial difference. This practice belied Bertha Holt's adamant stance against the social welfare community's scientific matching practices.

To make their adoption program work, the Holts, and other independent agencies, relied on the Refugee Relief Act (RRA), which legalized the adoption of foreign children abroad by proxy.⁵⁴ Before the Holts discovered that they could adopt GI children by proxy, they had started the adoption process through their local social welfare office. The Portland Department of Public Welfare rejected the Oregon couple's request to adopt eight children after it deemed their home unsuitable for such a large family.⁵⁵ Rather than allowing this rejection to signal the end of their hopes, the Holts used the existing RRA provisions and their relationships with legislators to pursue adoption. Bertha Holt wrote that while a social welfare "representative had voted against our adopting eight children, the Lord managed to legally bypass its roadblock" and gave social workers "no authority over us."⁵⁶ The proxy process gave Congress the final authority in child placement rather than social welfare agencies, a necessary strategy for the Holts' program to work. Perhaps spurred by their own experience with welfare officials, the Holts included a card in their quarterly newsletter that accurately outlined the differences between the welfare method and their interpretation of the proxy process. Not surprisingly, the Holts stressed the negative aspects of an adoption through official welfare channels. They also boasted that they "saved" more children than those organizations encumbered by "bureaucratic red tape."⁵⁷ Once the couple successfully negotiated the legislative labyrinth themselves, they employed the same method to help other families adopt GI orphans.

Harry and Bertha Holt illustrate how independent practitioners fashioned policy for their own purposes by using the RRA's proxy provisions.

Although other independent agencies operating in Korea also used the proxy process, what differentiated the Holts' agency was its size, popularity with adoptive parents and the media, and aggressive tactics.⁵⁸ HAP handled half of the 320 Korean children adopted in 1956 under the RRA, far exceeding both other independent agencies and state programs.⁵⁹ This trend continued until legislators removed the proxy adoption provision in 1961.⁶⁰ Also, the Holts' active pursuit of media attention generated significant publicity for their program. When Harry returned from his first Korea trip with his newly adopted octet on October 14, 1955, more than fifty reporters from around the United States greeted the flight.⁶¹ Over the next decade, whenever the Holts shuttled another airlift of babies, reporters waited expectantly, hoping to capture an image of the rescue campaign that would merit a spot on their newspaper's front page. Headlines proclaimed "Mr. Holt Moves the World," "International Santa Claus," and "'Stork' Plane Brings 12 Korean Foundlings," attesting to the uniqueness of the Holts' program. This national exposure propelled the Holts into the consciousness of adoptive families—many of whom felt alienated by the formality of the social welfare process but inspired by the Holts' humanitarian rescue mission.

In part, the Holts succeeded because, unlike professional "child savers," they proved both persistent and entrepreneurial in exploiting the vacuum in immigrant and refugee policy. They felt convinced that their methods best addressed the dire needs of GI children by expediently placing them with evangelical families. They creatively employed formal congressional policies, such as proxy adoption, and pressed for special legislation that bypassed the authority of social welfare agencies. As the next section will illustrate, this strategy was possible because international adoption offered legislators a way to ameliorate domestic tensions while styling their policies as humanitarian relief efforts that served Cold War aims.

THE "HOLT BILL"

The RRA not only made it logistically possible for Harry and Bertha Holt to adopt from Korea, it also educated them in the process of reshaping formal policy for their own purposes. While the law provided nonquota visas for eligible orphans, it limited the number of visas to two per family, except in the case of siblings. Holt discovered this a month before he left for Korea but, in his haste to travel, decided to leave without the assurance that he would be able to return with the anticipated eight children. When a friend mentioned this inconsistency to him, Holt responded, "Yes I know, but this is the Lord's

work. He will direct Congress,” emphasizing his evangelical mission.⁶² Immediately, the couple sent a letter to Senator Richard Neuberger, an Oregon Democrat newly elected to the Senate in 1955, asking him to sponsor a bill that would allow them to adopt six more children given the desperate circumstances in Korea. Neuberger agreed, believing that the Holts’ project embodied the “American spirit” of humanitarian goodness and moral purity.⁶³

Although the senator thought it unlikely that the bill would pass before January, he introduced “A Bill for Relief of Certain Korean War Orphans” on June 24, 1955, while Holt was still in Korea.⁶⁴ Following Neuberger’s advice, the Holts collected hundreds of letters from acquaintances, vouching for their character and ability to care for adoptive children. In a surprising turn of events for congressional legislation, the bill passed both houses and had presidential approval by August 12, 1955—a speed that shocked Representative Edith Green (D-Ore.): “Ordinarily it takes several months, sometimes years, after a private bill is introduced before it is passed.”⁶⁵ Both Neuberger and Green fought hard to get the bill passed before Congress adjourned, with Neuberger pushing through the bill at 11:53 P.M., the last legislation of the session. While the legislators were astounded by the speed, Bertha Holt knew that “those tired, worn-out senators just had to sit there until they passed our bill. Even if they wanted to quit and go home, the Lord wouldn’t let them until those children were taken care of.”⁶⁶ Her theory notwithstanding, Neuberger’s commitment to the Holts’ mission likely contributed to their success with Congress, and the terms of the RRA complemented such advocacy. Letters submitted on the Holts’ behalf emphasized the desperate situation that Korean orphans faced, painting the Oregon couple as altruists. Their efforts garnered national media coverage, giving them credibility with adoptive families and piquing the attention of professional social workers.

SOCIAL WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS AND CHILD WELFARE POLICY

In the nascent era of international adoption, International Social Service–American Branch (ISS), a nonsectarian refugee and family organization founded in 1921, collaborated with federal and state child welfare agencies to help families find adoptable children as well as to ensure that organizations upheld professional standards.⁶⁷ The administrators of the RRA recognized ISS as a key service organization by designating it a member of the Inter-country Adoption Subcommittee.⁶⁸ For agencies committed to rigorous professional standards, the Holts became a threat and an intense rivalry formed between welfare officials and the Oregon couple.⁶⁹ What began initially

as a loose, decentralized collaboration grew into a tight-knit network that relied on strength in numbers to combat Holt Adoption Program's popularity and success.

In the social welfare community, the "best interests of the child" served as the guiding principle that established and regulated adoptive placements.⁷⁰ In this vein, ISS, like other professional social welfare agencies, incorporated standards for child placement that it considered "best practices" or scientifically verifiable methods for maximizing a successful bond between adoptive children and their new parents. These standards included a range of benchmarks, including age, marital status, income, religion, health, and the presence of other children in the family.⁷¹ Licensed social workers evaluated all prospects through a detailed investigation of their home and background in an attempt to rule out unsafe conditions and histories of mental illness or criminal behavior. Next, a child would be racially and religiously "matched" to prospective parents, ensuring that the child would adapt to her new environment and that the parents would form an appropriate attachment to her. Once a child was placed, a licensed social worker would monitor the relationship for a year before the adoption was finalized. In one 1963 study on the outcomes of independent placements, the authors determined that when a social welfare professional was not included in the process, the child's well-being suffered, confirming the need for experts in adoptive placements.⁷²

Yet regulatory organizations and the judiciary process continually challenged and revised "best practices." Starting in the mid-1950s, the courts increasingly contested the practices of racial and religious matching. When a Presbyterian couple disputed the Adoption Act in Illinois, which prohibited them from adopting Roman Catholic twin girls, the state supreme court ruled that the law did not proscribe families from adopting children of different religions.⁷³ A Maryland couple was not as fortunate, however, when they challenged the welfare board's matching practices in state court. Invoking their constitutional rights of religious freedom and equal protection under the law, Mr. and Mrs. Frantum argued that as Lutherans they should be allowed to adopt a Roman Catholic boy. The Baltimore Welfare Department disagreed, not only advocating for the biological mother, who insisted her child be raised as a Catholic, but also admitting that they thought Mr. and Mrs. Frantum, ages fifty-four and forty-eight, were too old to parent a two-year-old. The court ruled in favor of the welfare department.⁷⁴ These disputes signified the willingness of prospective adoptive parents to contest policies that restricted their abilities to form families while simultaneously illustrating the significant policy variance between states.⁷⁵

In addition to adoptive parents, Pearl Buck, the famous author and adoption advocate, also challenged mainstream social welfare, publishing an article that decried its lack of unity and leadership. She argued that the regional isolation and lack of cooperation among agencies contributed to the mismanagement of domestic adoption cases. Buck averred, “If the professional social agencies do not take leadership in setting the orphans free for adoption, the black markets can never be suppressed, for they exist always where supply does not meet demand.”⁷⁶ In addition to black markets, Buck also determined that “gray market” adoptions, those conducted by well-meaning and altruistic amateurs like the Holts, would increase with a lack of professional leadership.⁷⁷

These legal and popular contests occurred because of the uneven application of social welfare policy, which varied from organization to organization. In a 1958 Child Welfare League publication, officials determined that if a child of mixed race background “appeared” white, then the child was likely to adjust “best in a white family.”⁷⁸ Yet the authors also qualified that racial “matching” should be applied only if it facilitated the child’s acceptance into his or her new family, demonstrating the contested nature of child placement even among professionals.⁷⁹ Conference surveys from the 1940s show how agency policy also varied significantly from state to state. For example, in a survey of seventy-five agencies, thirty-nine employed age limits in determining a child’s adoptability, whereas thirty-six reported that age was not a factor.⁸⁰

The RRA accentuated the lack of unity within the social welfare community and its leadership vacuum. The law failed to give social welfare agencies authority because it placed international adoption policy supervision concurrently under the Departments of State and Justice. Thus the RRA created a jurisdictional nightmare that made intervention by professional social workers time-consuming and often fruitless. Exploiting this policy “Bermuda Triangle,” the Holts used the decentralization to their advantage when creating their program. Rather than subjecting themselves to the rigid, and in their opinion unnecessary, social agency requirements, they could approve families without oversight and maintain the utmost control over the process—acting within the realm of the gray market that so worried adoption advocates like Pearl Buck.

If anything, the Holts’ flagrant rejection of basic standards offered an opportunity for social welfare agencies to unify against a common enemy. From social workers’ point of view, proxy adoptions were deeply flawed for several reasons: they rushed a careful, calculated process, circumvented licensed social workers, allowed a child to be adopted “sight unseen,” and

eliminated a trial period, giving parents immediate legal custody.⁸¹ To ISS, HAP's slipshod tactics and abuse of the proxy "loophole" violated key principles of modern social welfare practice and ultimately harmed the children it was trying to help. In response, ISS mounted an intense opposition to both proxy adoptions and the Holts by publicizing HAP's transport and placement of tubercular children, lobbying for reforms in legislative policy, and establishing networks with other social welfare organizations to build an informal coalition against proxy adoptions.

BUDDING CONFLICT BETWEEN ISS AND HAP

In 1955, soon after Harry Holt arrived back in the United States with his adopted Korean children, an ISS social worker convinced the embassy to stop issuing immigrant visas in Seoul for proxy adoptions, claiming they were illegal.⁸² After a concerted effort to leverage their congressional contacts and reopen the embassy for visa processing, the Holts succeeded in getting State Department support. The deputy administrator of the Refugee Relief Program informed Senator Neuberger's office that "proxy adoptions are permissible if legal in the adoptive country."⁸³ The first attempt by the ISS to challenge the legality of proxy adoption had failed and Holt used this to his advantage. Writing to prospective clients, he claimed that "welfare groups are building up strong opposition against adoption by proxy" and in an effort to protect their interests "are going all out to influence Congress to turn it down. If they should win," he warned, "I cannot help you get a child."⁸⁴

In early 1956, World Vision financed a West Coast trip for Susan Pettiss, the assistant executive director of ISS, hoping to ameliorate the growing tensions between the social welfare community and HAP. The meeting focused on common ground between ISS and the Holts—both sides agreed that the situation in Korea required attention from U.S. authorities. Besides agreeing on the general plight of Korean orphans, Pettiss and Holt concurred that the situation was particularly dire for the mixed-race children of African American heritage since they were exceptionally hard to place. As a result of their brief acquaintance, Pettiss wrote, "I was impressed by Mr. Holt's real sincerity," describing him as "disarming, friendly, [and] unpretentious."⁸⁵

This seemingly friendly encounter did not change Pettiss's mind about the Holts' methods, however. During her visit, Pettiss reaffirmed her distrust of proxy adoption and the implications of such placements. After discussing specific cases with social workers in California and Oregon, Pettiss reiterated that proxy adoptions were dangerous and expressed deep concern over

HAP's plans to use a credit agency to conduct home studies. She noted that Holt's defensiveness toward social welfare agencies prevented him from comprehending the long-term implications of his speedy placements.⁸⁶ Even if she questioned the professional merit of rapid adoptions, Pettiss did recognize that they mattered to the general public. She lamented the agonizingly protracted processing time of professional social agencies, particularly since "Mr. Holt [was] breathing down their necks."⁸⁷ While Pettiss's visit created the appearance of cooperation between the two organizations, neither side made the concrete changes necessary to establish a lasting peace. By mid-1956, Pettiss perceived HAP not just as a nuisance but also as a serious threat to intercountry adoption.

One of the ways that social workers rhetorically combated proxy adoption law was to deem it a "flagrant loophole."⁸⁸ This language evolved when social welfare agencies made the explicit connection between proxy adoptions and the military act issued two months before, which first permitted adoptions to be completed abroad. Social workers suggested that legislators did not anticipate the creation of "a legal loophole that has made it possible for children to be adopted by proxy."⁸⁹ Yet in 1956, 1957, and 1960—during the height of the disputes between the Holts and adoption professionals—the Subcommittee on Refugees and Escapees, chaired by Senator William Langer (R-N.D.) from 1953 until his death in 1959, continued to extend adoption provisions and modify requirements without ending the purportedly "unintended loophole."⁹⁰ Would these lawmakers have continued to permit proxy adoptions if they were simply designed as a circumvention intended for military families?

Constituent pressure likely played a role in extending proxy adoption law. When the orphan provision neared its original expiration date of December 31, 1956, Chairman Langer received ninety-six letters from his North Dakota constituents interested in seeing the proxy provision extended so they could adopt internationally.⁹¹ During the much publicized 1959 extension hearings, adoptive parent groups and individuals bombarded the chair with telegrams and letters asking that he protect the ability to adopt by proxy.⁹² When a geology professor from the University of Wisconsin and an adoptive father of five pled with Senator Langer to extend the law, he responded, "I agree with you 100% both to the enactment of S.1532 and to the continuance of proxy adoptions." Then the senator asked permission to forward the letter to Senator Neuberger and include it in the *Congressional Record*, suggesting that constituent appeals contributed to legislators' decision to maintain the proxy option.⁹³

From the perspective of legislators like Senator Neuberger, the Holts continued to be the most efficient at solving the “problem” of GI children—pleasing both the general public and American families. Continued support from the Korean government, which awarded Holt with a humanitarian commendation in 1955, also mattered.⁹⁴ The Subcommittee on Refugees and Escapees report acknowledged in 1957 that the RRA’s proxy provision allowed for two competing policy systems: one under state jurisdiction and one under the oversight of foreign governments. But the subcommittee justified this by classifying all orphan provisions until 1961 as “emergency” legislation. The report further recognized that voluntary agencies such as ISS were troubled by the Holts’ use of the proxy system, mentioning the Oregon couple by name.⁹⁵ Yet legislators permitted this situation to continue, likely because HAP met the overwhelming needs of U.S. families and championed Cold War humanitarianism. Social workers’ language of “loopholes” misrepresented certain legislators’ intention to maintain the “emergency” proxy provision as long as necessary to achieve their policy goals.⁹⁶

RRA revisions in 1956 and 1957 further illustrated the subcommittee’s desire to maintain proxy adoptions. Through Senator Neuberger’s advocacy, prospective adoptive parents’ demand, and officials’ opinion that the original four thousand orphan visas would be “exhausted long before the expiration date of December 31, 1956,”⁹⁷ legislators extended the RRA for one year and increased the number of nonquota visas to nine thousand.⁹⁸ When this law expired on July 31, 1957, lawmakers could not reach an agreement on another extension in time. In the forty-day gap between laws, the Holts drew on their past experience with special legislation, encouraging one of their previous clients, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Kay, to appeal directly to Congress for their second child’s adoption.⁹⁹ Even in situations without the usual umbrella of proxy, the Holts avoided professional agencies and had Congress perform social welfare screening instead. Of the 916 children adopted from Korea from late 1957 through mid-1958, the Holt agency placed approximately 373 orphans, or more than one-third.¹⁰⁰

The last revision of adoption law before ISS launched its legislative counterattack came in 1957, when Congress ended the RRA and placed adoption policy under the Immigration and Nationality Act, while still framing orphans as refugees. Titled the Refugee-Escapee Act, this provision established an unlimited number of nonquota visas for orphans under the age of fourteen and made two important revisions to the RRA. First, it mandated that adoptive parents meet any state preadoption requirements, increasing the authority of certain professional state agencies. Second, the

Refugee-Escapee Act also permitted the immigration of orphans with tuberculosis on the recommendation of President Eisenhower, which would become an especially contested policy over the next year. Again, Congress reemphasized the temporary nature of these provisions, extending the law only until June 30, 1959.¹⁰¹ While Pettiss wanted to propose legislation outlawing proxy adoptions during the 1957 revision, ISS felt that “it would not be strategic to push for that measure at that time as it was a controversial issue and might jeopardize” future legislation.¹⁰² Before attacking proxy adoptions in Congress, ISS wanted to ensure that it would win.

THE LEGISLATIVE CONTEST

Although ISS hoped to see the Holts’ agency censured, it lacked the appropriate “ammunition” to discredit a noteworthy American family and their lauded humanitarian crusade. Starting in late 1957, however, ISS gained its first substantive leverage against the “rogue” agency. The Holts’ transport of tubercular children into the United States provoked an intense reaction from the public health community. In 1955, President Eisenhower lobbied Congress for a reevaluation of immigration restrictions against tubercular migrants, arguing that “the [U.S.] no longer regard[s] tuberculosis with dread. Our treatment standards are high and modern treatment is increasingly effective.”¹⁰³ The president believed that accepting these migrants would not negatively affect public health and convinced Congress of this by 1957. Legislators inserted a provision into the 1957 INA that allowed children with contagious diseases like tuberculosis to be admitted into the United States at both the Surgeon and Attorney Generals’ discretion. The Holts, overwhelmed with sick children in their orphanage, brought children over immediately for care in American hospitals.¹⁰⁴ When they shuttled their first planeload of sick children into Oregon, a tremendous public uproar ensued, especially in states that admitted the orphans.¹⁰⁵ While the Holts did nothing illegal, ISS, along with the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and the American Medical Association, used this conflict to strengthen the campaign against proxy adoptions by conflating the transport of unhealthy children with the Holts’ overall “ill-considered and hasty placements.”¹⁰⁶

ISS also tried to discredit proxy adoptions by tracking cases of unsuitable parents through state welfare agencies, providing further “ammunition with Congressional leaders.”¹⁰⁷ In one instance, ISS closely followed the case of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Butler, a HAP family who exemplified one of ISS’ worst

nightmares—an adoption that ended in disruption.¹⁰⁸ Rejected by Indiana welfare officials, Mrs. Butler suffered from a history of mental illness and the couple lived in squalor.¹⁰⁹ Under her care, the child endured physical and emotional abuse, including indelible bite marks all over her body. This case illustrated to lawmakers what could happen if child placements were made without the supervision of professional social workers.

Building on the controversy over HAP's placement of ill children and incidents of disruption, ISS joined together with the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) to publish a study in August 1958 on proxy adoptions' effect on a child's development, health, and welfare. The Hyde Report, compiled by social scientists Laurin and Virginia Hyde, studied the placements of ninety-seven children into seventy-seven families. After a thorough evaluation, the Hydes concluded that twenty-nine of the placements were either "not successful" or "in question" and that "adopting a child sight-unseen . . . has already produced many tragic consequences, including the death, beating and abandonment of children."¹¹⁰

With the Hyde Report's completion, ISS crystallized its strategy for combating the general threat of proxy adoption and the specific threat of the Holts' successful agency. The report provided ISS with the expert-backed proof "to educate the public as to the hazards inherent in proxy adoptions," giving legislators the requisite evidence to outlaw them.¹¹¹ With the proxy provision set to expire in June 1959, ISS, CWLA, and USCB sent its directors to testify before the Senate Immigration and Naturalization Subcommittee. Using the Hyde Report as evidence, they asked senators to close the jurisdictional gaps that allowed proxy adoptions in order to protect children from negligence and harm as well as to make legislation for international orphans permanent.¹¹² While CWLA's Joseph Reid used the Holts as examples of misguided humanitarians, he also accused the Oregon couple of bribing Korean officials and securing a "monopoly" on Korean orphans.¹¹³ As the only advocate for proxy adoptions at the hearing, Senator Neuberger acknowledged that problems had occurred with these placements, but he feared that eliminating them would limit the number of children who could be helped. He did encourage the committee to increase unspecified safeguards to prevent children's exploitation, offering a compromise between independent agencies and social professionals.¹¹⁴

As Neuberger proposed, the Senate voted to extend the current orphan law for another year. Legislators, however, added a rider mandating that INS officers also conduct home investigations to safeguard the welfare of the children.¹¹⁵ The Holts "rejoiced" when they heard the news that the INS,

instead of social welfare agencies, would be responsible for conducting home studies—unsurprising given their past success working with the federal government to circumvent social workers.¹¹⁶ On July 14, 1960, Congress extended the 1959 act for another year to assess the INS home study's effectiveness before making legislation permanent.¹¹⁷ Under the 1959 amendment and 1960 extension, HAP adoptions increased annually. In 1959, HAP placed 389 Korean orphans with U.S. families—this number rose to 488 in 1960 and 659 in 1961.¹¹⁸ Even with INS home studies, they continued to navigate the policy vacuum, remaining outside the jurisdiction of welfare agencies.

Yet the Holts' improvised policy solutions could not ultimately weather the counter campaign launched by ISS and its allies. The persistence of ISS in lobbying Congress finally succeeded; in 1961, legislators passed a bill requiring parents to meet their prospective child before the adoption could be finalized, effectively ending the proxy provision. Although the Holts waged a desperate fight to maintain their right to perform proxy adoptions, their methods simply could not triumph over a unified opponent with "expert" status. HAP's adoptions dropped by over 60 percent in 1962 to only 199 placements, demonstrating the significance of proxy adoptions to their agency strategy.¹¹⁹ To conform to changing legislation, the Holts surrendered the control and autonomy to which they had grown accustomed. While HAP would not become an official, licensed social agency until after Harry Holt's death in 1964, this legislative triumph signified a reversal of fortune—if they wanted to continue practicing, they would have to conform to professional social welfare standards.

Lawmakers incorporated the new orphan law into the 1961 INA, making the adoption of foreign orphans permanent.¹²⁰ President Eisenhower, who first advocated for a permanent adoption law in 1957, noted that "orphans admitted under earlier special legislation have successfully adjusted to American family life" and that many Americans were still "eager to adopt children from abroad."¹²¹ Since the emergency facing Korean GI orphans had passed, lawmakers could no longer justify "stopgap" provisions that excluded the role of licensed social workers. In addition, with the 1961 revision lawmakers no longer positioned orphans as refugees who required "emergency" legislation but as a permanent category of immigrants. Yet, unlike most immigrants, foreign children were not subject to quota restrictions, cementing their status as "desirable" migrants and possibly even as ambassadors for the imminent removal of the quota system in the 1965 INA. As President Eisenhower predicted in 1957, the demand for foreign children

by American couples persisted even as the baby boom began to ebb in the early 1960s.¹²²

CONCLUSION

From 1948 to 1961, independent adoption practitioners, religious humanitarians, legislators, and professional social workers vied for the authority to create international adoption policy in the postwar period, frequently using adoption law to further their own competing interests. Religious humanitarians, like Harry Holt, could fashion improvised policies by exploiting a policy vacuum in the area of intercountry adoption—a vacuum created by conflicting state laws and a lack of federal adoption legislation. This “gray” market—where well-meaning individuals could circumvent the oversight of professional social welfare workers through the proxy adoption provision first legalized in the RRA of 1953—lasted until international adoption law became permanent in 1961.

When Holt passed away suddenly in 1964, many West Coast newspapers published tributes to the “Good Samaritan of Korea.” The editorial board of the *Oregonian* proclaimed, “Mr. Holt fought redtape [*sic*] . . . and opposition from some social welfare agencies to bring unwanted waifs into American homes. His story is a classic in selflessness and adherence to religious conviction.”¹²³ Oregon governor Mark Hatfield described Holt as a “rare individual who translated his sincere Christian beliefs into dynamic action in an eloquent demonstration of brotherhood.”¹²⁴ These panegyrics touch on the many themes woven throughout the making of international adoption: adoptions as missionary work; the false racial tolerance of “colorblindness,” which persisted in reifying white and black difference; the humanitarian rescue of “unwanted waifs” as part of a Cold War project; American couples’ demand for “adoptable” babies, which influenced legislators to maintain a seven-year policy vacuum; the validation of improvised policy as a better alternative to the “red tape” of professional agencies; and the ersatz representation of foreign children as refugees because they were the “best possible immigrants.” The story of international adoption involves many characters, plot lines, climaxes, denouements, scene changes, and resolutions. Yet it is in its narrative complexity that the contest over federal international adoption policy becomes a fitting lens through which to understand domestic social policy, immigration, refugees, and the making and meaning of families in postwar America.

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NOTES

1. Although I use the terms “international,” “transnational,” and “intercountry adoption” interchangeably, “intercountry adoption” was the term primarily used in the 1950s.

2. Two potentially confusing terms are used throughout this study: *orphan* and *GI baby*. Since Congress enacted the Refugee Relief Act in 1953, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has defined orphans as children who are either separated from both parents by death, desertion, or abandonment, or who have only one parent because of similar circumstances and “the remaining parent is incapable of providing care for such orphan and has in writing irrevocably released him for emigration and adoption.” This study employs the INS definition because it most aptly describes the Korean children who were placed into U.S. homes. The term *GI baby* was also coined during the post–World War II period as a way to describe children in Europe and Japan who were fathered by American soldiers. The media popularized the term during the Korean War, using it to depict the thousands of children with white or black fathers and Korean mothers. See “Oregon Farmers Brings 12 More Orphans from Korea for New Homes in America,” *Oregonian*, 8 April 1956, 18.

3. Other scholars have also identified this policy vacuum in adoption law although they refer to it differently. For the argument that “cross-cutting jurisdictional responsibilities” in international adoption were an opportunity, see Karen Balcom, *The Traffic in Babies: Cross Border Adoption and Baby-Selling Between the United States and Canada, 1930–1972* (Toronto, 2011), and “Phony Mothers and Border-Crossing Adoptions: The Montreal-to-New-York Black Market in Babies in the 1950s,” *Journal of Women’s History* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2007). For the argument that these “jurisdictional responsibilities” were a barrier, see Catherine Ceniza Choy, “Institutionalizing International Adoption: The Historical Origins of Korean Adoption in the United States,” in *International Korean Adoption: A Fifty-Year History of Policy and Practice*, ed. Kathleen Ja Sook Berquist, M. Elizabeth Vouk, Dong Soo Kim, and Marvin D. Feit (Binghamton, 2007), 25–42. Credit goes to Alice O’Connor for suggesting this terminology.

4. I want to thank Karen Balcom for this insight.

5. Jacob Hacker’s definition of a welfare regime as a multifaceted configuration of public and private interests formed through political negotiation particularly influences the way that this project considers child welfare policy development and implementation. See Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State: The Battle over Public and Private Social Benefits in the United States* (Cambridge, 2002). See also Jennifer Klein, *For All These Rights: Business, Labor, and the Shaping of America’s Public-Private Welfare State* (Princeton, 2006); and Michael Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York, 1996).

6. Postcolonial theorist Ann Laura Stoler examines imperial sites where moral policies developed to police racial boundaries. She envisions an informal policy space where intimate matters are decided through domestic interactions that blur cultural and racial lines as well as lines of dominance. In similar ways, international adoption occurs on “contested terrain” where races and cultures mix and definite power structures emerge. See Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies,” *Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (December 2001): 829–65.

7. According to historian Mae Ngai, this codified a framework of immigration that relied on quotas and racial hierarchy, drove future conflicts with “illegal aliens,” limited Asian migrants’ attempts at citizenship, and created a system that simultaneously excluded and included. See Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, 2004), 230.

8. Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2003), 225.

9. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Final Report of the Administrator of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953, As Amended*, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 156 November 1957, 1, 15. The RRA defined a refugee as “any person in a country or area which is neither Communist nor Communist-dominated, who because of persecution, fear of persecution, natural calamity or military operations is out of his usual place of abode and unable to return thereto, who has not been firmly resettled, and who is in urgent need of assistance for the essentials of life or for transportation.”

10. Michael Gill Davis, “The Cold War, Refugees, and U.S. Immigration Policy, 1952–1965” (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1996), 99–100; and J. Bruce Nichols, *The Uneasy Alliance: Religion, Refugee Work, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Oxford, 1988), 84–85, 99.

11. *Displaced Persons Act*, Public Law 774, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 1009 (25 June 1948). This legislation was the first to provide relief to victims of persecution.

12. Senate Committee of the Judiciary, *To Permit Certain Displaced Persons Under 14 Years of Age Orphaned as a Result of World War II to Enter the United States as Non-Quota Immigrants: Hearings on S. 830*, 18 July 1947, 28–30, 51; and Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=I000050> (accessed 12 February 2008).

13. Senate Committee of the Judiciary, *Certain Displaced Persons Hearing*, 5, 47.

14. *Displaced Persons Act*, sec. 2(e).

15. Senate Committee of the Judiciary, *Certain Displaced Persons Hearing*, 17.

16. Robert H. Weil, “International Adoptions: The Quiet Migration,” *International Migration Review* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 280–81.

17. *Act of August 19, 1950*, Public Law 717, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 464 (1950).

18. *Immigration and Nationality Act*, Public Law 414, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 163 (27 June 1952), sec. 323.

19. *To Permit the Entry of Certain Eligible Orphans*, HJ Res 228, 83rd Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 607, no. 605 (21 July 1953).

20. *To Permit the Entry of Certain Eligible Orphans*, 2–3.

21. *Refugee Relief Act*, Public Law 203, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 400 (7 August 1953), sec. 5(a).

22. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Final Report of the Administrator of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953*, 57. For a list of the voluntary agencies, see p. 134.

23. *To Permit the Entry of Certain Eligible Orphans*, HJ Res 228, 83rd Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 607, no. 605 (21 July 1953).

24. Michael Gill Davis, “The Cold War, Refugees, and U.S. Immigration Policy,” 78.

25. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, 1988), 121, 125.

26. The *New York Times* reported that petitions to adopt increased 30 percent from 1944 to 1953. “New Laws Sought by Adoption Units,” *New York Times*, 25 June 1956, 24.

27. Because the desire for children was so acute, differences in race and religion became less important than in the past, as noted in the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Final Report of the Administrator of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953*, 57.

28. Letter from Scott McLeod to Rep. Adam Clayton Powell, 3/29/1955, box 2, RRA, National Archives II, College Park, Md.

29. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Authorizing Additional Visas for Orphans*, 84th Cong., 2nd sess., 1956, S. Rpt. 2684, 3.

30. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Final Report of the Administrator of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953*, 62.

31. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Authorizing Additional Visas for Orphans*, 3.

32. For more on this, see Karen Dubinsky, *Babies Without Borders: Adoption and Migration Across the Americas* (New York, 2010), esp. chap. 2.

33. Scholar Christina Klein asserts that the international adoption of GI babies served as a symbolic extension of Cold War foreign policy, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between cultural constructions of family and political prerogatives. See Klein, "Family Ties and Political Obligation: The Discourse of Adoption and the Cold War Commitment to Asia," in *Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of United States Imperialism, 1945–1966*, ed. Christian G. Appy (Amherst, 2000), 35–66.

34. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Final Report of the Administrator of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953*, 65.

35. Much of the "unavailability" resulted from adoptive parents' specific criteria. From the early twentieth century, adoptive families classified the ideal "adoptable" child as a blonde-haired, blue-eyed, healthy infant. Most available children, however, did not meet this narrowly prescribed category, making this shortage more acute during the baby boom. Social workers faced continual difficulty in locating adoptive homes for domestic nonwhite or older children. See Elaine Tyler May, *Barren in the Promised Land: Childless Americans and the Pursuit of Happiness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), chap. 4; Barbara Melosh, *Strangers and Kin: The American Way of Adoption* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 160; and E. Wayne Carp, *Family Matters: Secrecy and Disclosure in the History of Adoption* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 34.

36. Memorandum received from American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign Service, Inc., January 1955, p. 1, box 10, folder 29, ISS papers. "Mixed-race" was the terminology most often used in the 1950s.

37. "Holt 'Babylift' Slows Only for Diaper Shift," *The Oregonian*, 7 April 1956. The UN speculated that the total number of orphans in Korea to be approximately 100,000 children. "Amendment of Refugee Relief Act of 1953," *Congressional Record*, 84th Cong., 2nd sess., vol. 102, part 6 (30 April 1956): 7247–49, as cited in Oh, "A New Kind of Missionary Work" 161–88; and Susan Pettiss, Report of Meeting with Dr. Pierce of World Vision, 13 March 1956, box 10, folder 29, ISS papers.

38. The Korean War introduced a mixed-race population to an Asian nation that valued racial purity. See Report of Meeting with Dr. Pierce of World Vision, 13 March 1956, box 10, folder 29, ISS papers. Bertha Holt and David Wisner, *The Seed from the East* (Los Angeles, 1956), 25.

39. Holt and Wisner, *The Seed from the East*, 27. The Holts' close relationship with World Vision indicates that they shared a like-minded purpose of meeting physical needs as well as spiritual ones.

40. Ibid., 25.
41. H. P. Sconce, "Lenten Guideposts," *The Vidette-Messenger* (Valparaiso, Ind.), 19 April 1957.
42. Bertha Holt, *Bring My Sons from Afar* (Eugene, Ore., 1986), 9. An alternate take on it comes from Bob Pierce, who bluntly explained to ISS assistant director Susan Pettiss, "For four months, Mr. Holt changed diapers on babies, waiting for the red tape to unwind . . . he was bound to be a little bitter." Report of Meeting with Dr. Pierce of World Vision, 13 March 1956, box 10, folder 29, ISS papers.
43. Holt, *Bring My Sons from Afar*, 17.
44. Ibid., 156.
45. Arissa Oh has completed the most thorough research on the Holts' religious motivation and how it gained support amid a surge of, what she calls, Christian Americanism. See Oh, "Into the Arms of America: The Korean Roots of International Adoption" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2008).
46. Ibid., 156.
47. For more on the Progressives and child adoption, see Julie Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own* (Lawrence, Kans., 2000); Ellen Herman, "The Paradoxical Rationalization of Modern Adoption," *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 2 (2002): 339–85; and Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890–1945* (New Haven, 1993).
48. Holt and Wisner, *The Seed from the East*, 221.
49. Henry Chang, "From Korea to Creswell: Waifs, 'Aboji,' Eye Departure," *Register-Guard*, 5 October 1955.
50. Richard Eves, "'Black and White, a Significant Contrast': Race, Humanism, and Missionary Photography in the Pacific," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29, no. 4 (2006): 739.
51. The Holts' bias toward American culture also shaped their definition of orphans and treatment of birth mothers. Throughout the Holts' writings, they minimize the birth-mother relationship with Korean GI orphans, a topic that I will explore more in the larger dissertation project.
52. Holt, *Bring My Sons from Afar*, 21.
53. Holt and Wisner, *The Seed from the East*, 240.
54. Section 5 of the RRA permitted a foreign child to be adopted by an American couple sight unseen as long as the child qualified as an orphan under INS policy. This policy effectively circumvented professional social workers' approval and state welfare departments' oversight, only requiring a State Department health test to get the child's visa.
55. Susan Pettiss, Memo to Files regarding ISS trip to visit County Department of Public Welfare, World Vision, and Holt family, box 10, folder 29, ISS papers.
56. Holt, *Bring My Sons from Afar*, 9. Throughout her book, Bertha refers to ISS as the American Social Agency and Susan Pettiss as Miss Perry.
57. Letter from Holts to supporters, February/March 1956, p. 2, box 10, folder: Independent Adoption Schemes, 1955–57, vol. 1, Harry Holt, ISS papers. See "Adopted Korean Kids Cleared for U.S. Entry," *Register-Guard*, 25 September 1955. See also Holt, *Bring My Sons from Afar*, 12; and "89 Korean Orphans Here for New Homes," *San Mateo Times* (Calif.), 17 December 1956. This article refers to the airlifts as "novel."
58. Christ is the Answer Foundation and Everett Swanson Evangelistic Association are two other groups studied by Choy, "Institutionalizing International Adoption: The

Historical Origins of Korean Adoption in the United States,” in *International Korean Adoption: A Fifty-Year History of Policy and Practice*, 25–42.

59. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Final Report of the Administrator of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953, As Amended*, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 15 November 1957, 135. In 1956, HAP processed 179 adoptions. “Holt Annual Report,” 1965, folder: Independent Adoption Schemes, 1955–57, vol. 3, Harry Holt, box 10, ISS papers.

60. A DOJ report from 10 July 1958, calculated that from 11 September 1957 to 30 June 1958, 916 orphan visas were issued to Korean adoptees. An estimated 500 of these children arrived through HAP’s efforts. See folder: Independent Adoption Schemes, 1955–57, vol. 3, Harry Holt, box 10, ISS papers.

61. Holt, *Bring My Sons from Afar*, 8. The total number to greet the flight was estimated at 1,000. See “Holt Plane Arrives at Portland Airport,” *Register-Guard*, 14 October 1955, 1.

62. Holt and Wisner, *The Seed from the East*, 54.

63. Richard Neuberger, “What Has Happened to American Spirit?” *Washington Calling* IV, January 1958, as cited in Holt, *Bring My Sons from Afar*, 61.

64. *Certain Korean War Orphans Act*, 84th Cong., 1st sess. (28 July 1955).

65. Holt and Wisner, *The Seed from the East*, 124–26; and Michael Barone, Grant Ujifusa, and Douglas Matthews, *The Almanac of American Politics* (au: Chicago?>Gambit, 1972), 675.

66. *Ibid.*, 114.

67. The International Social Service–American Branch website, <http://www.iss-use.org/site/subsection.asp?IdSection=1&IdSub=19> (19 accessed January 2008). “Expediting Adoption of Korean Orphans,” *Christian Century*, 11 July 1962, 857. Using Jane Russell’s organization World Adoption International Fund (WAIF) as an intermediary, ISS also conducted international placements.

68. Working with the CWLA, the USCB, and State Departments of Welfare, ISS primarily served as a facilitator between agencies. See ISS website, <http://www.iss-use.org/site/subsection.asp?IdSection=1&IdSub=19> (19 accessed January 2008).

69. Another reason the Holts’ distrusted social welfare authorities was the confusion surrounding an adoption by the Colliers, close friends of the couple. Holt completed the Colliers’ adoption by proxy with his own eight children because he claimed that the state welfare authority never forwarded their home study to Korea and inaccurately construed the status of the Colliers’ approval. See Letter from Andrew Juras to Susan Pettiss, 4 May 1956, ISS papers.

70. Helen L. Witmer, Elizabeth Herzog, Eugene A. Weinstein, and Mary E. Sullivan, *Independent Adoptions: A Follow-Up Study* (New York, 1963), 43. See also *Child Welfare League of America Standards for Adoption Service* (New York, 1958), 4; and Michael Schapiro, *A Study of Adoption Practice: Adoption Agencies and the Children They Serve* (New York, 1956).

71. Witmer, Herzog, Weinstein, and Sullivan, *Independent Adoptions*, 35–37. Prospective parents who wanted to adopt a highly demanded white infant or toddler needed to demonstrate a family history free of disease and a prudent use of financial resources. Neither parent could be older than forty and each family needed to pay the required fees. See Schapiro, *A Study of Adoption Practice*, 75, 76. Of course, social workers frequently waived requirements for couples that were willing to adopt an older child or a child of mixed-race background. For an example of this, see Helen Doss, *The Family Nobody Wanted* (Chicago, 1954).

72. Witmer, Herzog, Weinstein, and Sullivan, *Independent Adoptions*, 255. For more on that status of social workers, see Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls*; and Solinger, *Wake Up Little Suzie*.

73. AP, "Differences in Religion Held No Bar to Adoption," *New York Times*, 25 January 1957, 45.

74. UP, "Baltimore Couple Lose Plea for Boy," *New York Times*, 26 November 1957, 35.

75. For more on the legal implications of adoptive family construction, see Naomi Cahn and Joan Heifetz Hollinger, eds., *Families by Law: An Adoption Reader* (New York, 2004).

76. Pearl S. Buck, "The Children Waiting," *Woman's Home Companion*, September 1955, 131.

77. Joseph Reid of CWLA did write a letter to the editor of *Woman's Home Companion*, objecting to Buck's arguments about available children. There is nothing in the letter, however, that refutes Buck's assertion of a leadership vacuum. See Letter from Joseph Reid to Mr. Paul C. Smith, Editor-in-Chief of *Woman's Home Companion*, 15 September 1955, box 23, folder: Welcome House, ISS papers; and Buck, "The Children Waiting," 32–33.

78. *Child Welfare League of America Standards for Adoption Service*, 19, 24.

79. *Ibid.*, 23.

80. Henrietta L. Gordon, *Adoption Practices, Procedures, and Problems: Report of Workshop Material and Proceedings of the Adoption Conference, May 19–21, 1948 in New York City* (New York, 1949), 25–26.

81. *Child Welfare League of America Standards for Adoption Service*, 68.

82. Holt, *Bring My Sons from Afar*, 11.

83. *Ibid.*

84. Holt Newsletter, n.d., box 10, folder: Independent Adoption Schemes, 1955–57, vol. 1, Harry Holt, ISS papers.

85. Pettiss, Memo to Files, box 10, folder 29, ISS papers.

86. *Ibid.*

87. *Ibid.*

88. Helen Fradkin, *The Adoption Home Study* (Trenton: State of New Jersey, Department of Institutions and Agencies, Division of Public Welfare, and the Bureau of Children's Services, 15 August 1963), 65.

89. Laurin and Virginia P. Hyde, "A Study of Proxy Adoptions," 1958, box 17, folder 1, Child Welfare League of American papers, Social Welfare History Archive, University of Minnesota, 1 (hereafter CWLA papers). This language was also picked up in the press; see UP, "Agencies Urge Bill to Prohibit Proxy Adoptions," *Albuquerque Journal*, 1 August 1958, 45.

90. Also 1954, see Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *To Amend the Refugee Relief Act of 1953*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., H.R. 3005 (7 April 7 1954).

91. List of Prospective Adoptive Parents, 4 April 1956; Mrs. Henry Luehr to William Langer, 1 April 1956; and William Langer to Mrs. Henry Luehr, 9 April 1956, all in box 4—Subcommittee on Immigration, 1955–59, National Archives I, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Archives I).

92. Letter from William Langer to Jocelyn Ames, Adoptive Parents Committee, 6 July 1959; Letter from William Langer to Richard Neuberger, 18 May 1959, re: Mr. & Mrs. P. N. Haakenson; Lawrence Newhouse to William Langer, 30 July 1957; and Lawrence Newhouse

to Eleanor Guthridge, 23 December 1958, all in box 4—Subcommittee on Immigration, 1955–59, Archives I.

93. Letter from George Wooley to William Langer, 12 May 1959, box 4—Subcommittee on Immigration, 1955–59, Archives I.

94. Letter from Susan Pettiss to ISS Headquarters and Branches, 28 July 1958, box 10, folder: Children—Intercountry Adoption Seminar (1960), ISS papers; and Holt and Wisner, *The Seed from the East*, 169.

95. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Final Report of the Administrator of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953*, 65.

96. This language often has been directed at wealthy citizens who avoid paying taxes through loopholes. Pettiss once referred to Harry as an “Oregon backwoods millionaire,” implying that he not only lacked the experience and sophistication necessary to spearhead an international adoption program but that only his substantive wealth permitted him to do so. See Letter from Susan Pettiss to Lorena Scherer, 8 January 1957, box 10, folder 29, ISS papers.

97. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Authorizing Additional Visas for Orphans*, 84th Cong., 2nd sess., 1956, S. Rpt. 2684, 2–3; and Holt, *Bring My Sons from Afar*, 17.

98. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Authorizing Additional Visas for Orphans*, 2–3.

99. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *A Bill for the Relief of Judy-Ellen Kay (Choi Myosoon)*, 85th Cong., 1st sess., S. Rpt. 914 (14 August 1957), 1–3.

100. DOJ Report, 19 July 1958, box 10, folder: Independent Adoption Schemes, vol. 3, Harry Holt, ISS papers.

101. *Refugee-Escapée Act*, Public Law 85–316, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 639 (11 September 1957), sec. 101(e).

102. Memo from Susan Pettiss to ISS HQ and Branches, 28 July 1958, box 10, folder: Children-Intercountry Adoption Seminar (1960), ISS papers.

103. President Eisenhower, Message to Congress Recommending Certain Changes in the Refugee Relief Act of 1953, on 27 May 1955, 84th Cong., 1st sess., 3.

104. “Lane County Tuberculosis Assn. Hears Mrs. Holt, Salem Doctor,” *Register-Guard*, 25 April 1958.

105. *Refugee-Escapée Act of 1957*, Public Law 85–316, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 639 (11 September 1957), sec. 6. When Oregon refused to admit the GI children into its state tuberculosis facilities, sectarian organizations like Denver’s Jewish hospital and a handful of Catholic hospitals in California took the children instead.

106. Letter from William Kirk to Eugene Carson Blake, ISS Board Member, 17 June 1958, box 10, folder: Independent Adoption Schemes, vol. 3, Harry Holt, ISS papers.

107. Letter from Susan Pettiss to Lorena Scherer, 8 January 1957, box 10, folder 29, ISS papers.

108. This is an industry term frequently used to refer to a failed adoption.

109. Letter to Harry Holt from Wilmer Tolle, 20 March 1958, box 10, folder: Independent Adoption Schemes, vol. 2, Harry Holt, ISS papers.

110. Laurin and Virginia P. Hyde, “A Study of Proxy Adoptions,” 1958, box 17, folder 1, CWLA papers, SWHA.

111. Letter from William Kirk and Joseph Reid to Member Agencies, 28 July 1958, box 17, folder 1, CWLA papers.

112. Letter from Joseph Reid to Harry Holt, 15 July 1959, box 10, folder: Independent Adoption Schemes, vol. 2, Harry Holt, ISS papers; and Elsie Carper, "Hearing to Air Refugee Needs," *Washington Post*, 22 June 1959, A9.
113. Senate Subcommittee on Immigration, *Hearings on S. 1468, S. 1532, S. 1610, S. 2004*, 86th Cong., 1st sess., 23 June 1959, 56.
114. *Ibid.*, 41–43.
115. *Amendment to Refugee-Escapee Act of 1957*, Public Law 86-253, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 490 (1959); Internal memo, 16 September 1959, box 10, folder: Independent Adoption Schemes, vol. 2, Harry Holt, ISS papers; and Holt, *Bring My Sons from Afar*, 102. This legislation extended Section 4 of PL 85-316 until 30 June 1960.
116. Holt, *Bring My Sons from Afar*, 98. The Holts failed to specify whom INS designated to perform these home studies.
117. *Amendment to Refugee-Escapee Act of 1957*, Public Law 86-648, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 504 (1960).
118. HAP Annual Report, 1965, box 10, folder: Independent Adoption Schemes, 1955–57, vol. 1, Harry Holt, ISS papers.
119. *Ibid.*
120. *Act of September 26, 1961*, Public Law 87-301, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 650 (1961), sec. 25(b); House of Representatives, *Amending the Immigration and Nationality Act and for Other Purposes*, 87th Cong., 1st sess., 12 September 1961, H. Rpt. 1172; and Holt, *Bring My Sons from Afar*, 144.
121. President Eisenhower, *Special Message to the Congress on Immigration Matters*, 31 January 1957.
122. The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, <http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/FactOverview/international.html#22> (accessed on 3 March 2008). Domestic adoptions also rose steadily in the 1950s and 60s, rising an average of 10 percent to 15 percent annually, showing American families' increased cultural acceptance of adoption. See Penelope L. Maza, "Adoption Trends: 1944–1975," *Child Welfare Research Notes* #9 (U.S. Children's Bureau, August 1984), pp. 1–4, box 65, folder: "Adoption—Research—Reprints of Articles," CWLA Papers, as cited on the Adoption History Project, <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~adoption/archive/MazaAT.htm> (accessed on 3 March 2008).
123. "Editorial: Classic Compassion," *Oregonian*, 29 April 1964.
124. Dan Sellard, "Heart Attack Kills Father of Babylift," *Register-Guard*, 28 April 1964.