

Foreign Adoptions: A Growing Trend

More and more, Americans who want to be parents and can't have their own children are venturing abroad to adopt children from other countries. The federal agency, Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS), maintains records on these "inter-country" adoptions. According to CIS, about 200,000 foreign-adopted children are growing up in this country today.

The trend of adopting children from abroad began just after World War II when large numbers of children were orphaned or otherwise separated from their parents in the chaos of that terrible conflict. In more recent history, the Korean War, the Vietnamese War, and the overthrow of Romania's communist regime all led to waves of adoptions of foreign children into American families.

In the early days of foreign adoption, adopting couples were not necessarily childless. Often, parents already had one or more biological children but chose to open their home to additional children for religious or humanitarian reasons. Today, it is primarily people who cannot have biological children who choose to adopt.

An international law, *The Hague Adoption Convention*, went into force in April 2008 and regulates international adoptions. Within Latin America, 12 countries allow U.S. nationals to adopt children. At the same time, one of the most popular countries for Americans to adopt from in Latin America, Guatemala, recently put its international adoption program on hold.

What does it mean for a Latino child to be adopted into an Anglo family? "Transracial" adoption, as it is called, refers to adopting a child from one ethnic group into a family of a different ethnic group. The practice has continued to be controversial, with some people arguing that children adopted into a family of another ethnicity suffer emotional or adjustment problems, while other researchers say that transracial families can provide warm, nurturing environments for a child to grow up in.

According to *adopt.com*, transracial adoption can cause some adjustment difficulties for a child, but approximately 75% of transracially adopted preadolescent children adapt well to their new families, while younger children adapt even better. Another study conducted by the Latino research organization, *Estela Andujo*, looked at 30 Anglo families who had adopted Mexican-American children and found that these children did not have any self-esteem issues.

At the same time, it's important to understand that a South American child adopted into an Anglo family will not, culturally, grow up to be Latino. The child will grow up with the language, culture, rituals and beliefs of the family in which he or she is raised. Indeed, *Andujo* has found that Latino children raised by Anglos identify more with their parents' culture than they do with their Mexican-American ancestry.

One great benefit of transracial adoption is that a child finds a home. Without this possibility, many children would wait far longer in orphanages before being placed with an adoptive family. In recent years, the United States has taken legal measures to encourage transracial adoption. In 1994, the federal *Metzenbaum Multiethnic Placement Act* required adoption agencies receiving federal funding to allow for transracial adoptions. In addition, the *Interethnic Adoption Provisions* amendment to this law has helped to decrease the waiting times for transracial adoptions.

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