

INTRODUCTION

Impertinent Questions

These kids I know were sitting at a Chinese restaurant in Berkeley a few years ago, on the evening of their preschool's Winter Gathering, the centerpiece of which is performances by the preschoolers of little shows they mostly wrote themselves. My daughter Reba, then five, was in the older group, and her show was to be about the adventures of a brown paper package: it gets picked up by two dogs, which are chased by two cats, which drop it in front of two mailmen, who deliver it to a Superboy, who takes it to two astronauts, who send it on a rocket into outer space, from which it floats down to earth and lands on two sleeping girls, Reba and her friend Donatella. Reba was practicing her line while munching a pot sticker: "A brown paper package tied up with strings, this is one of my favorite things!" Next to her, her friends Diego and Flora were playing with chopsticks, while several parents and grandparents chattered across her.

"If she doesn't have a mom," Diego asked me out of the blue, pointing to Reba, "how did she get born?" Diego was blond, almost five, obsessed with sports, missing a front tooth, and wore glasses. His father, Owen, looked at me with amusement and awaited my answer. It was noisy, but I saw Ronda, Flora's grandmother, lean toward us from two chairs down. One of Ronda's other grandchildren, Flora's cousin Milo, has two mothers.

"That's a great question," I said, buying a little time. For a second I wanted to ask what made him think of this question right now, then

thought better of it. The five-year-old mind presents questions—why trees are called trees, what is the purpose of the rib cage, where water goes when you flush the toilet, whether *American Idol* is real—whose origins are mysterious and the tracing of which is often futile. Other paths of questioning reveal more.

“Do you want to try guessing?” I asked. Diego liked to puzzle things out. The week before, he’d thrown up on his way down the school staircase and had to be taken home, and I’d agreed to pop over to babysit so his parents could go to various work-related meetings. We’d played checkers. When his tears began to well up, I’d made some very bad moves, but I could see that he was as interested in pathways as in winning: if he made a move here, I might capture his guy, but if he moved there, I would get crowned.

He was in. “Did her grandma have her?” Diego asked. Owen’s amusement grew, as did mine. The image of my mother or my mother-in-law pregnant with our child was charmingly repulsive.

“No, but that’s a really good guess,” I said, smiling at Owen.

“Maybe one of you guys had her,” Diego suggested. Reba quieted a little bit beside me. She knew I usually told people with questions about her to just ask her directly.

“No, men’s bodies can’t get pregnant,” I said, reminding him of the fact that sat behind his original question. “But we really wanted to have a baby, and since we couldn’t get pregnant, we needed help.” I could feel Diego’s attention start to flag and ready itself for the next topic or activity, so I quickly cut to the chase. “So an old friend of ours helped us, and she got pregnant with Reba and carried her in her belly for nine months and then gave birth to her.”

“Oh,” said Diego, grabbing a pot sticker. “My chopstick holder is orange!”

“So’s mine,” said Reba.

“Mine, too,” said Flora.



Almost five years earlier, a few months into Reba's life, on a work trip to Santa Fe we'd turned into a family vacation, my husband Richard and I were in a jewelry store looking for southwestern stuff to give as gifts. We'd plopped baby Reba on the floor to entertain herself and others.

"Where did you get her?" the proprietress asked, leaning over the counter to coo at Reba. In the beginning of Reba Sadie's life, we regularly encountered such impertinent questions from strangers—on the street, at the airport, in the park. "Where did you get her?" was a common one and also "How long have you had her?" Usually, these questions were preceded by compliments on our baby's cuteness—round face, bald head, observant eyes, quick smile—and asked in a kind tone, though one I found somewhat patronizing, the way you might ask a friend about a new puppy. The questioners clearly meant well. They seemed to be indicating that they really *got* us, that they understood our unusual family. They had no idea that they were communicating quite the opposite, triggering an urge to shoot down their presumptions, bam-bam-bam, until they were flustered, squashed, and ashamed.

Instead, I usually smiled. I tend not to rage in public. If they had a child with them, I'd sometimes say, "Long story. Where did you get yours?" Or I'd answer with a polite smile, "Oh, we've had her since way before she was born." Or I'd just repeat the question, all innocent-like: "Where did we get her? I don't understand what you mean." Richard is in many ways my mirror. Whereas my anger leaks out through the cracks in a cold wall, he sometimes rages hotly and openly, which quickly frees him to laugh and smile. So he let the Santa Fe jewelry store lady have it.

"What is it with you people?" he blasted. "Why do you always ask that?" Et cetera, until he was fully unloaded, by which time the saleswoman was sobbing.

The next thing I knew, I was outside corking the baby with a bottle, and Richard and the woman were deep in intimate conversation. It turned out she wanted kids but had been told that she was too old; she'd recently married a man with grown children who had no interest in adopting. She was grieving the life she'd thought she would have and saw

in us some kind of possibility or familiar dream. She was identifying, not objectifying. And so, standing outside the store, Richard gave her a gift: he told her the whole story of Reba's willful and complicated creation, which we kept rather close: of this black Jewish baby, conceived by in vitro fertilization with one dad's sperm and the egg of a woman close to us, who almost wasn't but then became an embryo on the anniversary of the death of her namesake, my grandmother, then was implanted inside the ex-girlfriend of one of her fathers, who carried her in Virginia and birthed her in Massachusetts, from whose winter the family returned to her home in California to get on with it. While I was impatiently waiting, they were laughing a lot and crying some, and they parted with a hug.

It was she who suggested an answer to the question she'd asked. "The next time," she said, "just say, 'We conceived her.'" And that's what we took to saying. *We conceived her*. We imagined her, dreamed her up, and, with lots of help, brought her into being.

It wasn't long before the questioning subsided—as Reba Sadie's proximity to creation faded, so apparently did the issue of her beginnings—but that experience shifted and pushed me. I started to reinterpret, with more generosity, the constant questioning we'd received. The assumptions and presumptuousness were there, but behind them, I saw, was often not so much ignorance as curiosity and not so much the misrecognition of us as some kind of self-recognition. People really just wanted to know about origins: how a life and a family started when not everything was easy and scripted; how biology, social roles, choice, circumstance, and intention conspired to create and locate this little person; whether and how this child's entry into a family was the same as that of the kids they knew or had. The questions, in retrospect, weren't that different from a child's: *If she doesn't have a mom, how did she get born?*

And so I decided to answer them.



As I started to compile the story of making my own family, it seemed that everywhere I turned I bumped into another child whose family was deliberately unconventional and whose entry into that family was somehow extraordinary. This one was the child of two mothers and was made with one mother's egg and the sperm of a man none of them has ever met; that one the child of two mothers and was made with the sperm of one mother's old friend, who remained prominent in her life as something between an uncle and a father. This one was born to a man and a woman in Ethiopia and was delivered by his natural grandmother to an orphanage when both his parents died in close succession and then to the arms of his mother, whom I've known for thirty-five years and who was raising him solo. These twins were made when their parents chose an egg donor from an online description, fertilized her eggs with some sperm from each of them, and implanted their embryonic selves into the uterus of another woman who had agreed to carry them for a fee. Those twins were made when their mother, who after much trying discovered she could not become pregnant and whose husband was sterile, used both donor eggs and donor sperm and gave birth to them months after being told that they would have to be removed to protect her body from a lethal infection. That one was made when his mothers, a couple, made an arrangement with his fathers, also a couple, to become parents together; these two were adopted from Nepal and India by Richard's best friend, who was raising them with her girlfriend and a gay couple in another four-parent family. Those are just a few of the kids I saw most days. Plus, there were these kids right here, my own two daughters.

When as a child in Ann Arbor I imagined being a father, I knew no such elaborate stories. Like almost everyone else I knew, my own creation story hardly seemed worth discussing. The reproductive biology, once learned, was assumed, as was some parental dating backstory that was none of anybody's business. We trotted my story out on birthdays, and even then it was entirely focused on the few hours surrounding birth. It goes like this: Two weeks after my due date, I showed no interest in emerging; this perhaps suggested an inherent tendency toward

caution, laziness, or both. My parents, already annoyed at how much of their lives had been on hold since my sister's birth a couple of years earlier, went ahead with a party for a visiting scholar. Just as the party was getting going, my mother's contractions began, as if the sounds of small talk and clinking glasses were enough to summon me from the womb; this indicated an inherent taste for dramatic entrances, parties, or both. Anyway, the festivities continued while my parents were at the hospital and erupted into a cheer when my father called our house after midnight to announce to the partygoers that the baby boy had arrived. More glasses were clinked. The end.

I figured my future kids would each have a story like mine but with its own unique twist. Maybe it'd be about rushing to the hospital in a speeding car with a police escort and almost being born in a beaten-up Ford Escort. Maybe it'd be about arriving a little early, when we were on vacation at the beach or something, taking a taxi to a nearby hospital, and about entering the world to the smells of saltwater and taffy. The stories would be sweet, exciting, and brief.

That's not really how it worked out.



This book tells the tales of how several different families, including my own, were created against the grain of conventions and also often of institutions. The stories involve different types of unconventional family creation: adoption and assisted reproduction, gay and straight and transgendered parents, coupled and single- and multiparent families. They often began many years before any actual birth and involved constellations of characters far beyond mother, father, and doctors. Family creation was painstaking and often difficult, requiring inventiveness, persistence, and capital of various kinds. Often, parts of biological reproduction took place in a different body than that of the parents raising the child; sometimes, the model of kinship was made up virtually from scratch, often in tension with legally and socially sanctioned versions of family.

The stories here may satisfy curiosities, which is great, though not my main objective. I mean to offer an exceptional spot from which to view the norms, conventions, and institutions that regulate contemporary family making. You might do best to think of this not as a systematic study of unconventional family creation—it certainly is not that—but as a series of stories of that process told from inside a particular linked set of social networks. Or you might think of it as an oral history of how some people made their families in the early years of the twenty-first century. More broadly, you might read it as an intimate view of the much-remarked-on transformation of family structures, as seen through the experiences of people who have been, out of necessity as much as anything else, making their families up.

This book is forward looking, but it's also about capturing a period in a much-longer history of family creation and family discourse. As the historian Stephanie Coontz has put it, much family discourse is based on nostalgia for the “way we never were,” a mythical *Leave It to Beaver* time when families were made up of a heterosexual man and a heterosexual woman, married and living together behind a white picket fence, raising together their biological offspring, with a clear division between male breadwinner and female child-rearing roles.¹ To the degree that such a “nuclear” family form ever existed, the psychologist Ross D. Parke points out in *Future Families*, it was dominant only for a brief period and only for some people.² Consult history for a minute. The form slave families took was hardly the nuclear one, the legal scholar Stephen Sugarman has noted, as slave couples weren't allowed to marry, male slaves couldn't possibly be breadwinners, and female slaves couldn't be stay-at-home mothers.³ In the nineteenth century, moreover, poor immigrant women typically worked outside the home, and “multigenerational living arrangements were common.”⁴ Across the twentieth century, too, people raised kids who were not their own biological progeny—a sister's child born out of wedlock, the children of a second husband, and so on. Many children were born to parents who later came out as homosexual,

too. Family arrangements have been far more complex and diverse than a single, normative family form could contain.

Still, even if the nuclear family is a historical myth, it's been very powerful as ideology. As Parke says, it "is the template against which other family forms are judged."⁵ It has encouraged people whose families departed from the norm to treat those departures as family secrets, and that secrecy has in turn helped protect the notion that the One True Family is a husband, a wife, and their biological children. It has encouraged people to see variations—say, the broad kinship networks that have often characterized poor African American communities⁶—as deviant and pathological. Just a few years ago, in a major national survey conducted by the sociologist Brian Powell and his colleagues, 100 percent of respondents agreed that "husband, wife, children" counted as a family, and a single man or a single woman with children counted for around 94 percent; the percentage saying that two women or two men with children counted as a family hovered around 55 percent. "Husband, wife, no children" counted for 93 percent of the respondents, but "two men, no children" and "two women, no children" counted for just 26 percent.⁷ The One True Family ideal is still so strong, that is, that a lot of people's arrangements just don't seem to count.

At the same time, there's no doubt that the heteronormative, biological family ideal has been losing its pride of place over the past few decades; that more than half the people surveyed by Powell and his colleagues saw same-sex parents as a family is actually quite remarkable, given that those very parents were born into a world where homosexuality was still criminalized. The cultural visibility of stepfamilies, adoptive families, mixed-race families, and same-sex families has expanded dramatically in recent years. This is perhaps best illustrated by the long-running television show *Modern Family*, which began airing in 2009: it features Jay, a white guy in his sixties who has remarried a much younger Colombian woman with whom he has a child, and the relationships between them and Jay's grown daughter, her husband, and their three kids and also Jay's grown son, his husband, and the girl they adopted from

Vietnam. It's television, so they all have lovely houses and none of their troubles is too troubling, but the show does present a telling contrast to the 1950s *Ozzie and Harriet* world that the show implicitly references. *Modern Family* was nominated for over a hundred major awards, including fifty-seven Emmy Awards, and won "Best Comedy" Emmys five years in a row. Family diversity is not just visible; it gets awards.

Even children's books, which have long reinforced the One True Family ideology—with adoptive, blended families, same-sex families, and even mixed-race families treated mainly as special topics—have begun to make family diversity more visible. As Todd Parr, an award-winning and best-selling children's book author and illustrator, summed it up in *The Family Book*, a staple in many a home and preschool,

Some families are big. Some families are small. Some families are the same color. Some families are different colors. All families like to hug each other! Some families live near each other. Some families live far from each other. Some families look alike. Some families look like their pets. All families are sad when they lose someone they love. Some families have a stepmom or stepdad and stepsisters or stepbrothers. Some families adopt children. Some families have two moms or two dads. Some families have one parent instead of two. All families like to celebrate special days together! There are lots of different ways to be a family.⁸

Years after becoming a best-seller, *The Family Book* was banned by a small Illinois school district after some parents complained about the page acknowledging two-mom and two-dad families, arguing that it raised "issues that shouldn't be taught at the elementary school level."⁹ The ban appeared to be a sad and lonely one, though, indicating perhaps that even many defenders of the mythical "traditional family" now recognize that, when it comes to families, nontraditional is well on its way to becoming the new normal.

Much of this promotion of family diversity—and the cultural demotion of the One True Family ideology—reflects the simple fact that

new family forms have become more common in recent decades and their existence thus harder to deny.¹⁰ And that phenomenon is due in large part to the expansion of pathways to parenthood. A large cluster of social forces has converged over the past several decades to make it possible for people to pursue parenthood in nontraditional ways: the actions of social movements pushing for women's reproductive freedom and lesbian and gay family rights; the development of reproductive technologies that make it possible for sperm and ovum to meet without heterosexual intercourse and for women to carry babies that they did not conceive; the spread and normalization of divorce; the rise of women's labor-force participation and, for some women, delayed childbearing; the wars and worldwide economic inequalities that orphaned some children and left some parents without the means to provide for their children; the globalization of communication, commerce, and travel; the rise of reproduction-related entrepreneurship and social service professions, whose members have created organizations and programs devoted to easing alternative forms of family creation.

That's a lot. Each of these developments has been controversial, and each entails its own complex power struggles. The result, though, has been a gradual, forceful shattering of the ideology that the only real, natural, legitimate way for people to become a family is for a married man and woman to conceive a child through sexual intercourse and then raise it together in their home. It probably shouldn't be surprising to find people picking through the shards of that myth, not really meaning to be rude, trying to piece together the details of how, if not in the old-fashioned way, these new families came to be. The old origin stories no longer hold.



The view of unconventional family creation you get from this book is necessarily incomplete. As a collection, the stories in this book have quirks and limitations that reflect the boundaries of my own social networks. As a review of the sociological research on social networks put

it simply, “contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people.”¹¹ The social worlds I inhabit, like most, tend to be made up of people whose social class, educational background, political sensibilities, and work positions are not that distant from my own. Even as atypical family-making stories go, then, the stories here are neither exhaustive nor fully representative.

On a deeper level, though, the very fact that unconventional family creation is not all that uncommon among the people to whom I’m most connected is itself a revealing and important starting point. The kinds of paths to having children described in the pages that follow are—at least for now, at least in this country—taking place disproportionately within relatively privileged sectors of society, for whom family making has become increasingly a matter of choice, mostly for the obvious reason that neither private adoption nor assisted reproduction is cheap. They are also more commonly found in communities that embrace or at least tolerate “alternative” families, which tends to mean liberal enclaves, especially liberal enclaves with a critical mass of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people. Where I live, for instance, geographically and culturally, unusual families are not all that unusual. Toss a stick around here, and it’s pretty likely to land on a lesbian mother, a woman who chose to conceive or adopt on her own, or a middle-aged couple whose babies were created with some medical assistance; you might have to toss a handful, but you’d hit gay men raising kids after not too long.

This is not to say that nontraditional families are found only among the relatively liberal fractions of the middle and upper-middle classes; single mothers, multigenerational families, foster families, and stepfamilies have long been widespread and cut across ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, and political boundaries, if unevenly so.¹² But the people who are setting out to have children solo or who lack one or another element they’d need to reproduce biologically (a uterus, sperm, or eggs, for instance) on the whole have more money and education than others do. For instance, according to the U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services, adopted children—especially internationally adopted children—are “less likely than are children in the general population to live in households with incomes below the poverty threshold.”¹³ Demographic information about the incomes of families made via assisted reproduction is harder to come by, but the costs of making a family via in vitro fertilization and surrogacy are not, and they run between \$40,000 and \$120,000, according to the Council for Responsible Genetics.¹⁴ The rates of unmarried women giving birth remain much higher among African American and Hispanic women than white and Asian women, among younger than older women, and among low-income than high-income women,¹⁵ but the active *pursuit* of single motherhood as a lifestyle choice has emerged almost exclusively among older, professional, middle-class, mostly white women.¹⁶ As new ways of making families have become available, not everyone has been equally positioned—or equally motivated—to make use of them.

The social and geographic locations of unusual family-making forms can and will expand and change over time, I expect. The spread of new practices, ideas, and technologies often begins among “innovators” and “early adopters”—who are positioned by their social, educational, and financial resources—to take risks and absorb failures—and becomes more widespread only later.¹⁷ Many policies and social changes could shape the future possibilities for family-making choices—surrogacy laws, reduced costs and increased insurance coverage of assisted reproduction, tighter or looser adoption regulations, legal recognition of same-sex marriages, poverty-reduction policies, child-care and family-leave policies, support for poor families and single parents all shape choices about having and raising children. We shall see.

For now, the reminder is here again at the very start: there is no separation between the ways we make our families and the various social hierarchies in which we all find ourselves. There never has been, and there isn't now.



When I started thinking about this book, I figured I was well positioned to tell some unconventional family creation stories, plopped as I am somewhere near the epicenter of the phenomenon. My friends were upbeat about it, but they also seemed apprehensive, as if uncertain how to tell the stories and sometimes also whether to tell them at all. A few close friends declined, citing the need to keep a hard-won peace inside their family or concerns about the impact on the child later in life. When they did agree to talk, they were generous with their time and honesty, yet almost all of the participants outside my family (and even a couple within our own story) opted to have me use pseudonyms rather than to identify them or their family members by name. Later, I sent chapter drafts to all the central participants for both practical and ethical reasons—to make sure things were accurate and that people could consent anew to what was being disclosed about their lives—and this often generated new anxieties and new things-left-unsaid.

I get that. It's one of the things these family origin stories share with more typical ones: every family story has silences and secrets. More to the point, the farther away you get from the conventional, the less you can fit your story into a familiar script of family creation and the more you're likely to face disapproval. For those of us who grew up in a culture of disclosure—in which, for instance, coming out is an act of empowerment and Facebook is a verb—becoming parents has posed the jarring challenge of figuring out what not to tell. It's difficult to figure out how to be both honest and not damaging, how to narrate one's kids' atypical beginnings in a way that both celebrates and protects them, and how to do so in a way that cannot be easily hijacked by haters or pitiers. Knowing that creation stories become passed along as family legend can make it that much harder to decide how much of the less pretty detail to tell. Maybe some of us also harbor a teeny bit of shame or fear of being looked down on or are more committed to emphasizing the things that make us blend in than the things that mark our kids and family as different. These stories are hard to tell for the same reasons they are compelling: they are part of relatively new, not fully apprehended social

changes; they are politically and ethically charged; they involve stigma, power, longing, defiance, fear, and the will to love; they involve complex relationships to normalcy; they feature children.

Looking at how others have told such stories can throw you off kilter, too. On the one hand, you can fill a large bookshelf with the memoirs of people who, like the folks in this book, really wanted to become parents and had to fight to get there. Your shelf would include books like Carey Goldberg, Beth Jones, and Pamela Ferdinand's single-women-and-sperm-donor memoir *Three Wishes* ("worried that somewhere between hot leads and hot dates they missed their chance for children," three journalists "decide to take matters into their own hands—with a little help from a local sperm bank")¹⁸ and gay adoption memoirs like Dan Savage's snarky-sweet *The Kid*, in which on one page Savage is holding a new baby, looking "down at his tiny face, his head tucked into his little knit cap," watching "his eyes open and close," and on the next is "back at the Eagle, watching porn and playing pinball."¹⁹ You'd have Scott Simon's adoption memoir *Baby, We Were Meant for Each Other* (about how Simon and his wife "found true love with two tiny strangers from the other side of the world" and about the "anxieties and tears along with hugs and smiles and the unparalleled joy of this blessed and special way of making a family")²⁰ and Rachel Lehman-Haupt's *In Her Own Sweet Time*, a single-career-woman-exploring-fertility-technology memoir ("the story of a young woman who wants it all" and who travels the world "to explore the many new choices available to women—egg freezing, single motherhood, and instant families—while grappling with her own ambitions, anxieties, and values").²¹ And that's before you even get to the books about parenting itself.

The writer Anne Glusker, reviewing Peggy Orenstein's *Waiting for Daisy*,²² a smart, unflinching account of Orenstein's road to motherhood—infertility, miscarriages, marital stress, almost-adoptions, almost-surrogacy—dubbed this genre Repro Lit.²³ Repro Lit narratives, which also often do double duty as how-to resources, are personal, moving, and celebratory. To the degree that institutional structures figure

into these narratives, they tend to be either as obstacles to be overcome or as mechanisms for overcoming obstacles on the individuals' heroic journeys to parenthood.

On the other hand, reading academic writing on similar topics—assisted reproduction, adoption, surrogacy—you would be hard-pressed to find heroic-yet-anxious parents-to-be, true love, or tiny faces under little knit caps. Many scholars have described the emergence of what the sociologist Judith Stacey called “brave new families” as the cutting-edge of progressive social change,²⁴ or at least as potentially providing, in the words of the sociologist Suzanna Walters, “a template for imagining kinship in the future tense.”²⁵ But when it comes to how those families are made, scholars tend to be much less enthusiastic. Feminists have long debated, for instance, whether surrogacy extends women's control over their bodies or takes the exploitation of women's bodies to horrific new lengths.²⁶ Back in the mid-1980s, the writer Gena Corea decried the “industrialization of reproduction” and the “reproductive supermarket,”²⁷ and the critical analysis of “reproductive labor,” “reproductive tourism,” and “commercial pregnancy” continues, for instance, in the sociologist France Winddance Twine's recent *Outsourcing the Womb*.²⁸ Drawing on the anthropologist Shellee Colen's framework of “stratified reproduction,”²⁹ Twine notes that surrogacy is “embedded in a transnational capitalist market that is structured by racial, ethnic, and class inequalities and by competing nation-state regulatory regimes,” in which poorer women become “reproductive service workers” for wealthier people.³⁰ Others, like the anthropologist Diana Marre and the women's studies professor Laura Briggs, caution against the outsourcing of “pregnancy, childbirth, and sometimes the first years of babies' lives to less expensive places and/or mothers—literally, laborers,”³¹ an aspect of what Arlie Hochschild has called, not admiringly, the larger-scale “outsourcing of intimacy.”³²

Adoption doesn't fare well either. Marre and Briggs, among many others, emphasize how international adoption is rooted in “inequalities between rich and poor nations, the history of race and racializa-

tion since the end of slavery in Europe's colonies and the United States, and relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous groups in the Americas and Australia"; emerged out of war; and remains "marked by the geographies of unequal power, as children move from poorer countries and families to wealthier ones."³³ E. J. Graff, from Brandeis University's Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, has convincingly demonstrated that the worldwide adoption industry—an extremely lucrative international business—is poorly regulated, often corrupt, and based on "the myth of a world orphan crisis."³⁴ Considering the long-standing debates over transracial adoption in the United States—basically, whether it's okay for African American children to be adopted into white families—the feminist law-and-society scholar Dorothy Roberts argues that adoption isn't just a means to providing children a loving home and parents an opportunity to parent but is also "a political institution reflecting social inequities, including race, class, and gender hierarchies, and serving powerful ideologies and interests. Most children awaiting adoption in the nation's foster care system are African American or Latino. Black children's 'need' for adoption results from biased decision-making and policies, including adoption policies, that systematically disadvantage Black families."³⁵ These are hardly the triumphant, poignant narratives of parenthood against the odds.

You might call the academic genre *Repro Crit*. *Repro Crit* narratives are intellectually challenging, politically charged, and quite discouraging. They focus mainly on institutional structures and the circulation of power in and through them; to the degree that individual parents-to-be figure into the analysis, they take their place mainly as illustrations of subordinate, dominant, or contradictory positions in an unequal social structure, which is, in these accounts, the more important story.

Such critical perspectives might be a buzz kill, placed against the happy endings of their *Repro Lit* counterparts, but they are also not wrong. The stories of the families in this book cannot be understood apart from the structural context that has made family creation a choice for people who would earlier have been excluded, the institutions that

regulate reproduction and family creation, and the social inequalities of race, class, gender, sexuality, body, and nation that shape them. Yet neither are the personal memoirs of hard, rewarding journeys to parenthood just naive Pollyannaism. The stories of the families in this book cannot be understood apart from the ferocious, stubborn, creative drive that some people have to give and get this particular kind of intense love, which is also the insistence on leaving something behind. There are righteous battles fought here, real happy endings, actual children, and deep love. We have done beautiful things.

These two sorts of narratives—of rough, rewarding individual parenthood quests and of the troubling structural inequalities that shape family making—rarely even talk to each other. This book, though, is their love child. Together, they force us to take account of fortunes intertwined with misfortunes, of the inequalities that haunt the most intensely loving acts, of institutional obstinacies that spawn ferocious creativity, of family equality in a radically unequal world, of miracles linked to horrors, profits tied to love, bureaucracy and intimacy combined, the hard silences, contradictions, and raging beauties of it all. So here I am, with my bastard stories to deliver and impertinent questions and dazzling children to celebrate.