

Being truly aware during National Adoption Awareness Month

History of NAAM

In 1976, Governor Michel Dukakis of Massachusetts created National Adoption Week, to bring attention to the “plight of children in foster care” who, some believed, needed to be adopted.

In 1984, President Ronald Reagan created National Adoption Week, to “encourage a national effort to promote the adoption of children, and particularly children with special needs.”

Eleven years later, in 1995, President Bill Clinton devoted an entire month to adoption, saying in his proclamation that “adoption provides a means for building and strengthening families” and “Adoption also enables adults to experience the unique joys of parenthood.” Note President Clinton’s emphasis on the childless adults, rather than on the children who were separated from their families of origin. And while his desire to “strengthen families” is laudable, he didn’t mention strengthening the birth families of children in foster care. Somehow, those families did not count in the national conversation.



In 1998, President Clinton issued “a new directive to the Department of Health and Human Services to expand the use of the Internet as a tool to find homes for children waiting to be adopted from foster care.” This directive may have promoted the idea that children receiving foster care were actually “waiting to be adopted.”

President Barack Obama, himself the child of an absent father and often in the care of his maternal grandparents, proclaimed in November 2016

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/10/27/presidential-proclamation-national-adoption-month-2016>: “Each November, we recognize the important role that adoption has played in the lives of children and families in our country and around the world, and we rededicate ourselves to ensuring every child can find their forever family,” as if the child’s original family was merely temporary.

Not to be outdone, President Donald Trump manages to slip in thinly-veiled anti-abortion language in his 2018 proclamation <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-proclamation-national-adoption-month-2018/>: “Adoption affirms the

inherent value of human life and signals that every child -- born or unborn -- is wanted and loved.” One might ask how taking a child, changing her name, changing his birth certificate to erase the original family, and raising that child as one’s own “affirms the inherent value of human life.”

Today, some organizations now refer to this event as “National Adoption Month.” However it is referred to, this November event is an excellent opportunity to raise awareness about adoption – *real* awareness, that is.

Who Celebrates Adoption?



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC

Spence-Chapin, a large international adoption agency, offers a series of ideas about “how to celebrate National Adoption Month.”

<<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/553514fee4b0cb1542b03c54/t/581a0cf8ff7c5021847b83a2/1478102265292/National+Adoption+Month+2016+Statement.pdf>>

Their first idea? “Support a friend or family member who is adopting.” This is followed by suggestions to attend events about adoption and to “spread the word,” as if adoption were some new and joyful religion, and not, in fact, the painful separation of children from their families. Only the final item includes the possibility that adoptees or birthparents may be heard: “Write about your experience or connection to adoption. ... Spence-Chapin wants you to share your story on our blog!”

Bethany Christian Services, the largest adoption agency in the U.S., includes the “missing voice” of the adoptee on their webpage about National Adoption Month <<https://www.bethany.org/national-adoption-month>>. A pop-up asks if the visitor is an adoptive family member, a prospective adoptive family, a church staff member, a Bethany staff member, a member of the media, or other. Nowhere does Bethany ask if the visitor is an adoptee, or a birthparent – despite their claim of wanting the adoptee’s voice to be heard.

It seems safe to assume that for these two large adoption agencies, the people being celebrated are their clients, ie, adoptive parents or potential adoptive parents.

NAAM and the Adopted Person



In her article in the *Huffington Post* <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-this-adoptee-will-flipthescrpt-during-national_us_57e74005e4b09f67131e4657> in November 2016, adoptee activist Angela Barra wrote, “We have legions of people pledging to help children, a noble cause, who state they are committed to adoption and raising awareness about it. The persuasive phrases like ‘forever family’ are bandied around along with other heady expressions. All these people proclaim to be passionate about adoption but it seems that this commitment does not necessarily extend to adult adoptees. Indeed, those of us who challenge the happy adoptee narrative are seemingly discarded and ignored during this fervor.”

“those of us who challenge the happy adoptee narrative are seemingly discarded and ignored during this fervor.”

#flipthescrpt

In November 2014, Rosita González of *Lost Daughters* <<http://www.thelostdaughters.com/>> created the #flipthescrpt movement on Twitter. She wanted to ensure that especially during NAAM, the voices of adoptees were heard as well as the sermons of adoption agencies and the cries of congratulations and adulation to adopting parents. “The hashtag was used close to 18,000 times this month,” she wrote, and, as can be seen from the current Bethany website, the conversation began to change. Having started a movement for adoptees to be heard, González went on to help produce a book: *Flip the Script: Adult Adoptee Anthology*. <https://books.google.com/books/about/Flip_the_Script.html?id=MD34jgEACAAJ&source=kp_c_over>

Even with the passionate voices of these and many other writers with a history of ancestral disruption, National Adoption Awareness month continues to promote the notion that adoption is a wonderful thing; that adopting parents are heroes; that adopted children are gifts.

NAAM and the Birthparent



According to a blog called [American Adoption News](https://www.americanadoptions.com/blog/celebrating-birth-parents-during-national-adoption-month/), <
<https://www.americanadoptions.com/blog/celebrating-birth-parents-during-national-adoption-month/>> National Adoption Month is a special time to celebrate birthparents: “These courageous women and men made your adoption dreams come true and are an important part of your child’s identity.” They do note that, “For many women, the holidays are the hardest part of the year because it holds so many reminders of family togetherness.” The women to whom they refer are women who surrendered their children to adoption. Interesting that they regard the holidays to be hard only for birthmothers, and not for the fathers, aunts, uncles, sisters, grandparents, and cousins of the child – as well as the child herself – who have lost so much.

NAAM and Tomorrow

What would happen to National Adoption Awareness Month if people were truly aware of the enormous disruption and pain surrounding many adoptions? What would happen if a President, perhaps a female one, proclaimed November to be National Family Preservation Month? What would happen if adopted children could keep their original family name, and know the lineage of their original family, and even be allowed to have relationships with their original family? What would happen if childless people helped families to raise their children by being co-parents, or co-grandparents, or honorary aunts and uncles, rather than erasing the child’s history in order to be their “real” parents? How would National Adoption Awareness Month be celebrated then?

Before you join in the celebration of NAAM, take a moment to think about the times you’ve heard birthmothers congratulated for “doing the brave/right/generous thing.” Think about the adopted people you know, and the conversations you might have with them about how adoption feels to them. CUB requests that for National Adoption Awareness Month, all interested persons should work to become more truly *aware* when it comes to adoption.

Additional reading:

National Adoption Month 2018, In Their Own Words: Lifting Up Youth Voices
<<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/nam/about/history/>>

Proclamation 5280—National Adoption Week, 1984
<<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-5280-national-adoption-week-1984#axzz1xaglRRBI>>

Proclamation 6846—National Adoption Month, 1995
<<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-6846-national-adoption-month-1995>>

President Clinton Announces Expansion of the Internet to Increase Adoptions
<<http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/accessamerica/docs/adoption.html>>