

FOREWORD

This issue of the *Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy* originated with the vision and commitment of Dr. Joseph Puma, an adoptive parent and member of the Duke Medical School community. His desire to increase awareness about adoption law and to stimulate creative ideas for its improvement led to the *Defining Family: Adoption Law & Policy* Conference and the publication of this special issue. The *Journal* thanks Dr. Puma for his generous support.

On April 8-9, 1994, the *Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy* invited a group of distinguished scholars, practitioners, adoptive parents, adoptees, and social scientists to participate in the nation's first conference devoted to adoption law and policy. At the *Defining Family: Adoption Law & Policy* Conference, panelists debated the legal, political, and social forces shaping adoption in the United States. Those discussions continue in this special issue. These articles and essays, written by conference participants and other scholars and practitioners involved in adoption law and policy, focus on three topics: adoption rights, transracial adoption, and lesbian and gay adoption. The purpose of the conference and this publication is to explore diverse perspectives on adoption in our society.

In the early 1990s, media portrayals of "Baby Jessica" and other adopted children led to public debate about adoption rights. Volunteer organizations like the DeBoer Committee for Children's Rights, now called Hear My Voice: Protecting Our Nation's Children, began working to mobilize practitioners, courts, and state legislatures to act for children's rights. Formed in August 1993, Hear My Voice currently includes fifty-six chapters in thirty-seven states. In addition to this public action, the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws passed the Uniform Adoption Act in August 1994, creating another impetus for states to evaluate their adoption laws. Federal legislation also has taken steps to revise adoption policy. The recently enacted Multiethnic Placement Act, which is discussed in this issue, addresses the extent to which race may be considered a factor when state-funded agencies place children in adoptive homes.

The articles and essays in the Adoption Rights section of this issue analyze the parameters of the ongoing debate about the rights of biological parents, adoptive parents, and children. The Transracial Adoption section contains articles reflecting diverse viewpoints about the significance of race for children, families, and communities. Finally, articles in the Lesbian and Gay Adoption section consider the implications of social science research on adoptions by lesbian and gay parents.

As identified during the conference and in this special issue, adoption reform requires us to consider the ways in which we define family. The discussions that began at Duke Law School last April and continue in these pages will play an important role in shaping the future of adoption law and policy.

ADOPTION RIGHTS

