



**Blue-Ribbon Babies and Labors of Love: Race,  
Class, and Gender in U.S. Adoption Practice  
(Louann Atkins Temple Women & Culture Series)**

*Christine Ward Gailey*

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Most Americans assume that shared genes or blood relationships provide the strongest basis for family. What can adoption tell us about this widespread belief and American kinship in general? *Blue-Ribbon Babies and Labors of Love* examines the ways class, gender, and race shape public and private adoption in the United States. Christine Ward Gailey analyzes the controversies surrounding international, public, and transracial adoption, and how the political and economic dynamics that shape adoption policies and practices affect the lives of people in the adoption nexus: adopters, adoptees, birth parents, and agents within and across borders. Interviews with white and African-American adopters, adoption social workers, and adoption lawyers, combined with her long-term participant-observation in adoptive communities, inform her analysis of how adopters' beliefs parallel or diverge from the dominant assumptions about kinship and family. Gailey demonstrates that the ways adoptive parents speak about their children vary across hierarchies of race, class, and gender. She shows that adopters' notions about their children's backgrounds and early experiences, as well as their own "family values," influence child rearing practices. Her extensive interviews with 131 adopters reveal profoundly different practices of kinship in the United States today.

Moving beyond the ideology of "blood is thicker than water," Gailey presents a new way of viewing kinship and family formation, suitable to times of rapid social and cultural change.

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