

2016

Review of *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World*,
by Margaret Jacobs

Catherine E. Rymph
University of Missouri

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/historyfacpub>

 Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Indigenous Studies Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), [United States History Commons](#), and the [Women's History Commons](#)

Rymph, Catherine E., "Review of *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World*, by Margaret Jacobs" (2016). *Faculty Publications, Department of History*. 190.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/historyfacpub/190>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the History, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications, Department of History by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World.

By Margaret D. Jacobs.

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014. xxxv + 360 pp. Cloth \$29.95.

The story of indigenous child removal is a devastating one. The well-known Indian boarding schools of the late nineteenth century United States separated children from their families, communities, language, and culture and thus served as a radical assimilation project. Less familiar may be the ongoing removal of native children from their families deep into the twentieth century. In this fascinating book, Jacobs shows how post-World War II policy changes that scaled back governments' existing obligations to indigenous peoples coincided with "purportedly color-blind liberalism" in the United States, Canada, and Australia to make indigenous placement in nonindigenous homes seem not only a practical but a humane way to promote the welfare of indigenous children (259).

The book's first two sections focus on Indian child removal in the United States and the grassroots activism that would come to oppose it. The third

section explores parallel histories in Canada and Australia. Although the particular legal and jurisdictional contexts were somewhat different in each country, there were remarkably similar patterns of reform and reaction in what Jacobs identifies as a global phenomenon.

In the United States, beginning in the late 1950s, the Indian Adoption Project sought white parents to adopt Indian children and worked to persuade Indian mothers to relinquish newborns. The IAP was intended to address a host of perceived problems. For Jacobs, many of the “problems” that the experts were trying to solve through foster care and adoption were in fact “invented” by those same experts. By constructing children as “unwanted” and their families and communities as hopelessly impoverished and deviant, they helped create a powerful desire among liberal Americans to “rescue” these children as a way to address the “plight” of the Indian (39). Bureaucrats, Jacobs argues, too often turned to draconian solutions like child removal because they could not see the strengths that already existed in Indian families and because they were unable to imagine solutions for Indian children that involved shoring up Indian families and promoting economic and educational opportunity close to home.

Native American activists, often initially motivated by the pain of their own experiences of child removal, argued that Indian children were not just members of nuclear families, but also of “extended families, clans, and tribes” (77). Thus the placement of a child outside the tribe affected the collective interests of a much larger group than just the child’s parents and could be seen as a form of cultural genocide. Jacobs details the remarkable stories of Native American activists (mostly women) and their white allies as they struggled to convey the harm done by the IAP. Their efforts culminated in the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act in 1978, which aimed to curb the placement of Indian children outside of tribal communities by giving tribes sovereignty over child welfare.

In the third section, Jacobs turns to the strikingly similar stories of Canada and Australia. The transnational approach allows us to see that Indigenous child welfare crises were “part of a pattern among settler colonial nations” (248). The grassroots movements against such policies were also international ones, strengthened by personal connections between activists in different countries that were stimulated by travel, speaking engagements, correspondence, and sharing of resources.

Although indigenous child removal is indeed unique, there are also a number of fascinating parallels in the broader history of race, nationality, and poverty within adoption and foster care, which Jacobs might have done more

to acknowledge and address. That her book invites such comparisons, however, is a tribute to her thorough and complex treatment of a challenging subject. Scholars from a variety of fields will welcome this work.

Catherine E. Rymph
University of Missouri