

## Jean Paton and the Struggle to Reform American Adoption

Adoption activist Jean Paton (1908-2002) fought tirelessly to reform American adoption, dedicating her life to overcoming American society's prejudices against adult adoptees and women who give birth out of wedlock. From the 1950s until the time of her death, Paton wrote widely and passionately about the adoption experience, corresponded with policymakers as well as individual adoptees, promoted the psychological well-being of adoptees, and facilitated reunions between adoptees and their birth parents.

E. Wayne Carp's masterful biography of [Jean Paton](#) brings this neglected civil-rights pioneer and her accomplishments into the light. Paton's ceaseless activity created the preconditions for the explosive emergence of the adoption reform movement in the 1970s. She founded the Life History Study Center and Orphan Voyage and was also instrumental in forming two of the movement's most vital organizations, Concerned United Birthparents and the American Adoption Congress. Her unflagging efforts over five decades helped reverse social workers' harmful policy and practice concerning adoption and sealed adoption records and change lawmakers' enactment of laws prejudicial to adult adoptees and birth mothers, struggles that continue to this day.

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E. Wayne Carp

"A re-writing of the history of adoption in the twentieth century [and the] enormously poignant, moving story of a difficult human being who, like an earthquake, succeeded in shifting the cultural landscape. And more than that, it's an inside account of a social movement, complete with all the infighting, backbiting, and profiteering that such movements contain. One of the best books ever written on a reform movement."  
-Steven Mintz, University of Texas

**E. Wayne Carp** is Benson Family Chair in History and Professor of History at Pacific Lutheran University. His other books include *Adoption Politics: Bastard Nation and Ballot Initiative 58*; *Adoption in America: Historical Perspectives*; and *Family Matters: Secrecy and Disclosure in the History of Adoption*.

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