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Rethinking Oliver Twist – Imagination and Contemporary Russian and American Adoption Practices

Abstract:

Between the years 1995-2005, thirteen Russian adopted children were murdered by their American adoptive parents. These cases became a trigger for the Russian government to set a moratorium ending foreign adoption in 2005. This led to the launching of a new domestic adoption program in Russia, which is supported by the Ministry of Education. Russian news coverage of the murder cases led the public to believe that Americans are bad parents and provide children a violent home in the United States. American parents and adoption advocates reacted to the negative news coverage and moratorium saying there was an adoption “crisis” at hand. Americans feared that Russian children will not have families in their future. The moratorium was dropped in 2007 with the re-establishment of 12 American adoption agencies as NGOs, but it negatively altered the way in which Russians and Americans perceive each other as parents and providers for orphaned children. As children become commodified bodies by American parents through the system of adoption, they are also seen as a loss of a national resource – youth – by the Russian government and public. This thesis presents how the media affects imagination, and how adoption practices are driven by them. The media’s portrayal of the murder cases has affected the imaginations that Russians and Americans have of each other and the way they envision “Oliver Twist.”