

A New York story: different worlds for the children of the rich and the poor

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Patricia Duff and her billionaire ex-husband Ronald Perelman have been carrying out a bitter child-support and custody battle over their four-year-old daughter for the last three years. Last week Ms. Duff told State Supreme Court Justice Franklin Weissberg how much she needs in child support from Revlon owner Perelman, whose net worth is an estimated \$6 billion. She presented a detailed budget which amounted to \$4,400 a day for the next 14 years.

The monthly living expenses for four year-old Caleigh include \$9,953 for travel for the child and her nanny, \$3,175 a month for clothing, and \$1,450 a month—about \$50 a day—for dining out. The cost of the little girl's personal domestic employees—nannies and maids—is \$30,098 a month.

Ms. Duff is also requesting that her ex-husband pay part of their daughter's housing costs. This would include such bedroom furnishings as a \$19,500 antique desk and chair, \$13,000 for upholstered walls, a \$6,500 painted ceiling, a \$6,500 bed and a \$1,560 toy chest.

On the same day that the *New York Times* reported on Ms. Duff's child support demands, it carried a front-page report headlined, "Squeezed by Debt and Time, Mothers Ship Babies to China." This article explained that hundreds of babies—and perhaps more—born in New York City each year to Chinese mothers are being sent back to China because their mothers have neither the money nor the time to care for them.

It tells the story of Xiu, a woman who was finally reunited with her husband eight years after he came to the US to work as a cook at a Chinese restaurant. She had been raising their daughter in southern China, but left the girl with her mother when she came to New York.

When she had a baby boy in the US, she named him Henry and nursed him for four months before finally

wrapping a tiny gold bracelet around his wrist and paying \$1,000 to a courier who would legally transport him back to China. For weeks after the baby was shipped off, Xiu would hear him cry at a night. "It's really killing her," said a social worker at the Chinatown clinic of St. Vincent's Hospital. "She said no words can express her sadness."

At the Chinatown Health Center, 10 to 20 percent of the 1,500 babies delivered last year were sent away, the *Times* reports. At St. Vincent's clinic, one-third to one-half of the women who seek prenatal care say they plan to send their babies to China.

Most of the mothers, who in some cases are undocumented immigrants, are married. They typically work six-day weeks in Chinatown garment sweatshops. Many owe up to \$20,000 to smugglers who enabled them to get into the US. They have no other family here and cannot afford daycare costs of at least \$20 a day on take-home wages of about \$300 a week. So they send their newborns, who are US citizens, home to be raised by their grandparents or other relatives, hoping to be reunited when the children reach school age—a situation which, even if it comes to pass, produces new complications and emotional and psychological problems.

This tragedy facing thousands of Chinese immigrants is a direct product of current economic conditions in New York. It is part and parcel of the boom which has been based on a steady supply of cheap immigrant labor. Garment sweatshops have emerged in different parts of the city in recent years. Wages have fallen, and immigrants are crammed into overcrowded apartments and work under conditions which leave them no time for themselves or their families.

Ms. Duff's daily child support expenses for her daughter would pay for daycare for 200 of the Chinese

babies being separated from their mothers. This statistic is one of countless New York stories which could be cited to illustrate contemporary social life in this capital of world capitalism.



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