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Put a stop to surrogate parenting now

By Jeremy Rifkin and Andrew Kimbrell
Guest columnists

WASHINGTON — Last week, the USA heard the story of Anna Johnson, the newest victim of surrogate parenting. Anna, who is 7½ months pregnant, brought suit in a California court to retain custody of her child after birth. She is the first "gestational" mother, one paid to carry an embryo provided by the client couple and implanted in her womb, to challenge a surrogate contract. She is also poor and black, harbinger of a new and disturbing trend.

Minority women increasingly will be sought to serve as "mother machines" for embryos of middle- and upper-class clients. It's a new, virulent form of racial and class discrimination. Within a decade, thousands of poor and minority women will likely be used as a "breeder class" for those who can afford \$30,000 to \$40,000 to avoid the inconvenience and danger of pregnancy.

Once women, enticed by a fee, sign these contracts to produce babies, they become commercial slaves 24 hours a day for 270 days. These agreements generally require that the mother submit to hormone injections, amniocentesis and an array of genetic probes and tests, at the discretion of the client. Many contracts stipulate that the mother abort the fetus if and when the client desires to terminate the "service." The mother is liable for all "risks," including death.



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Mary Beth Whitehead and dozens of other women have found their maternal bond with the children was far stronger than the commercial bond of the contract and have fought successfully to void surrogacy contracts and gain access to their children. Many others, too poor or frightened to challenge their contracts legally, have reported that surrogacy destroyed their lives and families.

The lives of the children produced by surrogacy are negotiated, pre-designed and contracted at conception. The child is viewed as

a product indistinguishable from other manufactured goods and grows up knowing that the only bond between the father and birth mother is a financial arrangement.

Eleven states have passed laws voiding surrogate contracts; three have made the brokering of surrogate contracts a criminal offense. Surrogacy has been outlawed in virtually all of Europe and in Israel, Australia and Japan. Unfortunately, surrogate brokers in the USA continue to rent wombs and barter babies. Exploiting the wombs of minority women for profit is unconscionable in a civilized society and must be stopped now.