



The Sterilization Movement and Global Fertility in the Twentieth Century

Ian R. Dowbiggin

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Many would be surprised to learn that the preferred method of birth control in the United States today is actually surgical sterilization. This book takes an historical look at the sterilization movement in post-World War II America, a revolution in modern contraceptive behavior. Focusing on leaders of the sterilization movement from the 1930's through the turn of the century, this book explores the historic linkages between environment, civil liberties, eugenics, population control, sex education, marriage counseling, and birth control movements in the 20th-century United States. Sterilization has been variously advocated as a medical procedure for defusing the "population bomb," expanding individual rights, liberating women from the fear of pregnancy, strengthening marriage, improving the quality of life of the mentally disabled, or reducing the incidence of hereditary disorders. From an historical standpoint, support for free and unfettered access to sterilization services has aroused opposition in some circles, and was considered a "liberal cause" in post-World War II America. This story demonstrates how a small group of reformers helped to alter traditional notions of gender and sexuality.

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