
Though many might consider Roe v. Wade to be the beginning of modern reproductive policies, the United States has a long history of debate over how to allow access for women and men to control reproduction. In her book, Simone Caron sets out to comprehensively discuss matters of sterilization, contraception, and abortion in American history since 1830. She succeeds by seamlessly fusing these three topics to describe the national discussion of reproductive rights throughout different eras that are largely defined by changes in the economic climate of the country.

Since 1830, the discourse on reproduction has evolved due to economics, religion, and advances in the medical sciences. The motives of those who have sought to affect reproductive legislation, however, have largely remained the same. These are to preserve an educated, Anglo-Saxon upper class by encouraging the "fit" to reproduce while limiting the reproduction of the "unfit." This goal has been fueled by classism, racism, and nativism: forces which are less apparent but not completely absent from today's debate on reproductive rights.

Caron gives readers an in depth survey of all sides of the debate, as it changes along with the country. From the mid-nineteenth century when xenophobia entered the conversation due to an influx of large immigrant families to the supporters of eugenics at the turn of the twentieth century and on to Roe v. Wade and beyond, Caron shows how population controllers supported or opposed contraception, sterilization, and abortion, and not always equally. For instance, while abortion remained illegal into World War II, contraceptives were suddenly endorsed by the government as a means to protect the health of the workforce in the nation while at war.

Today's debate over reproductive rights is primarily centered on abortion and, since Roe v. Wade, includes a new concept of fetal rights. While the government shortly funded abortion as a means to save money (because a child on welfare costs taxpayers more than an abortion) the political climate has changed so that federal funding now goes largely toward the sterilization of women. Caron argues that this removes women's right to choose if and when to reproduce. Recent cuts to the welfare program along with the high price of abortion, Caron argues, has created the effect on the reproduction of the "unfit" desired by population controllers of the early twentieth century. (254-256)

Caron tirelessly lays out all evidence of each time period to show the reader the trends of this national discussion. Very dense, but never dry Who Chooses? is a fascinating read to anyone who wants to know how policies on reproduction in America have morphed into what they are today.

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