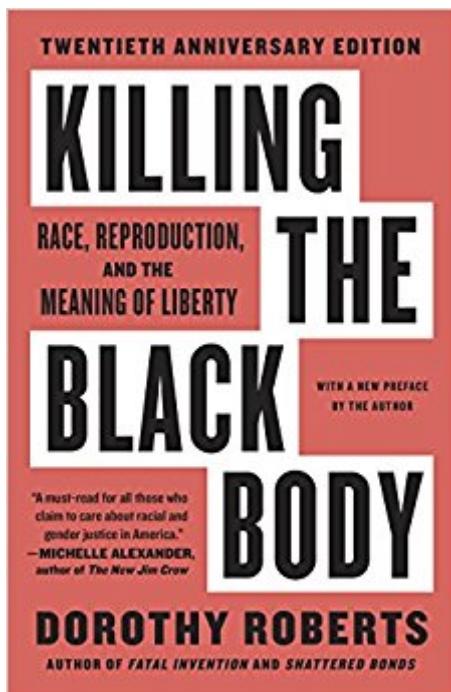


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# Killing The Black Body: Race, Reproduction, And The Meaning Of Liberty



## **Synopsis**

The image of the "Welfare Queen" still dominates white America's perceptions of Black women. It is an image that also continues to shape our government's policies concerning Black women's reproductive decisions. Proposed legislation to alleviate poverty focuses on plans to deny benefits to children born to welfare mothers and to require insertion of birth control implants as a condition of receiving aid. Meanwhile a booming fertility industry serves primarily infertile white couples. In *Killing the Black Body*, Northwestern University professor Dorothy Roberts exposes America's systemic abuse of Black women's bodies, from slave masters' economic stake in bonded women's fertility to government programs that coerced thousands of poor Black women into being sterilized as late as the 1970s. These abuses, Roberts argues, point not only to the degradation of Black motherhood but to the exclusion of Black women's reproductive needs from the feminist agenda. Groundbreaking, authoritative, and timely, *Killing the Black Body* is both a powerful legal argument and a valuable aid for teachers, activists, and policy makers in creating a vision of reproductive freedom that respects each and every American.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 400 pages

Publisher: Vintage; 64864th edition (December 29, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0679758690

ISBN-13: 978-0679758693

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 32 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #18,283 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #1 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Women's Studies > Abortion & Birth Control #48 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Women's Studies > Feminist Theory #134 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > African-American Studies

## **Customer Reviews**

Dorothy Roberts' passionate and well-documented book looks at a less-talked about side of the battle for reproductive rights: the history of the social and governmental control of African American women's bodies. Roberts, a law professor at Rutgers University, asserts that African American women have been engaged from the start in an ongoing fight to gain control of their reproductive

choice. First, in the early days of American slavery, from control by white "masters" who forced slaves to produce children to work for them, and now, from government "solutions" to African American child-bearing like the distribution of the long-term contraceptive Norplant in African American communities. Roberts also takes the mainstream feminist movement to task for working mostly for the "negative right" of liberty, that is, the right of women to not have the government involved in their reproductive decision-making. To Roberts this debate, focused mainly on government non-interference, ignores issues especially important to African American women such as access to contraception or reproduction technologies. "Reproductive freedom is a matter of social justice," she says, stating further that it is social inequality, more than any legal interference, that severely limits African American women's ability to choose how and whether to have children. "We need a way of rethinking the meaning of liberty so that it protects all citizens equally," Roberts writes. "I propose that focusing on the connection between reproductive rights and racial equality is the place to start." --Maria Dolan --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Rutgers law professor Roberts examines "the history of social policies used by the dominant power structure to control black women's reproductive freedom." Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This book is a must. The history of black women's reproductive health is a subject that is rarely taught in schools. This book is very well researched and very accessible. It's a must read for anyone involved in reproductive justice activism, social justice activism and anyone living in America. Roberts traces how past events shape our present lives, particularly the lives of black women. Learn about the racist and classist origins of policies like eugenics, welfare and birth control. The topics are heavy but you will be better for it.

This is such a great book. It challenged my assumptions and educated me. It is also very well-written. Although the content is sobering, her style pulls you gracefully through the book. Highly recommended to anyone who wants their feminism to have a comprehensive understanding of what reproductive justice would look like in action.

Roberts, a Rutgers law professor, examines the sociopolitical reproductive history of black women--concluding this group did and still faces disparate treatment in public policy. The combined impact of race/ethnicity, sex and economic status govern black women's relation to their own

bodies--and treatment from policymakers and medical personnel. While this premise has been previously examined by other scholars, Robert's contribution differs in legal analysis of the state/women relationship specifically as it applies to black women. She also faults fellow feminists for their ignorance, silence, and apathy towards black women's unique reproductive rights. Beginning with a critique of the predominantly white pro-choice movement for preoccupation with white middle class women and the assumption reproductive access means the same thing for all groups, Roberts holds black women's fertility is only valued if a predominantly white society can find ways to benefit from it. She also notes that illegal abortion took the highest tolls on low-income black women who were unlikely to have the financial and political clout of rich white women to convince doctors to perform therapeutic abortions in secret. At the same time, abortion should not be the sole issue of a truly progressive reproductive rights movement because coercive sterilization and contraceptive programs are also painful incidents in black women's reproductive history. The pro-choice movement should oppose recent 'welfare reform victories' because of the destruction such punitive measures have on black communities. Although most recipients were and continue to be white, policy debates were flooded with inferred images of the black "welfare queen" to foster and exacerbate racial and class tensions within the most conservative industrialized nation in the world. Because anything else repeats the very conditions she is seeking to eliminate, a truly progressive reproductive policy supports the rights of all women to control their own bodies. Not enough to perform "multicultural" outreach, all feminist reproductive rights groups must fully integrate a multi-pronged, class conscious approach into their mission statement and policy objectives. This book is an indispensable text for a social science course on reproductive rights, law, and/or social policy, but should be read by all who are concerned about securing freedom for all.

Reading this for my social justice book club. Slow read because it is so thought provoking.

A policy of Genocide is in play against black People !

Excellent written and very informative. I would recommend this book to all minorities of the world.

I used this book as part of a large research paper I am doing for my undergraduate degree. It was more than I hoped for when it came to history on reproductive rights and current issues involving these rights. The book was also very easy to read and follow, and I was able to refer back to it easily by the different section titles. I would highly recommend this book to everyone because it truly

sheds new light on the African American woman's constant struggles when it came/comes to reproductive anonymity.

Excellent documentation !

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