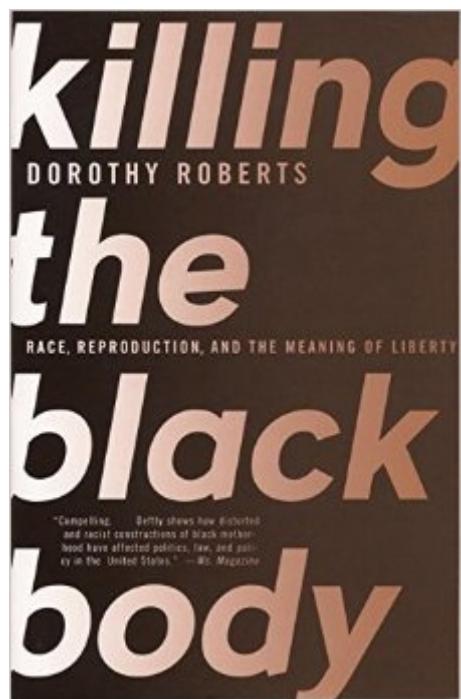


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Killing The Black Body: Race, Reproduction, And The Meaning Of Liberty



Synopsis

This is a no-holds-barred response to the liberal and conservative retreat from an assertive, activist, and socially transformative civil rights agenda of recent years--using a black feminist lens and the issue of the impact of recent legislation, social policy, and welfare "reform" on black women's--especially poor black women's--control over their bodies' autonomy and their freedom to bear and raise children with respect and dignity in a society whose white mainstream is determined to demonize, even criminalize their lives. It gives its readers a cogent legal and historical argument for a radically new, and socially transformative, definition of "liberty" and "equality" for the American polity from a black feminist perspective. The author is able to combine the most innovative and radical thinking on several fronts--racial theory, feminist, and legal--to produce a work that is at once history and political treatise. By using the history of how American law--beginning with slavery--has treated the issue of the state's right to interfere with the black woman's body, the author explosively and effectively makes the case for the legal redress to the racist implications of current policy with regards to 1) access to and coercive dispensing of birth control to poor black women 2) the criminalization of parenting by poor black women who have used drugs 3) the stigmatization and devaluation of poor black mothers under the new welfare provisions, and 4) the differential access to and disproportionate spending of social resources on the new reproductive technologies used by wealthy white couples to insure genetically related offspring. The legal redress of the racism inherent in current American law and policy in these matters, the author argues in her last chapter, demands and should lead us to adopt a new standard and definition of the liberal theory of "liberty" and "equality" based on the need for, and the positive role of government in fostering, social as well as individual justice.

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Customer Reviews

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.

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