

## UNLEARNING EUGENICS

History–Europe / Disability / Sexuality & Gender

“What would it mean to unlearn eugenics? In this brilliant, unsettling, indispensable book, Dagmar Herzog traces the trajectories that have given disability activism a prominent role in the current campaign in Europe against reproductive rights. This is an essay on the contrapuntal character of history: it shows how historical moments ricochet into one another, with unexpected and sometimes pernicious effects. It is a study of the staying power of hatred: it reveals how the hostility to disability that inspired the Nazis remained a taken-for-granted element of the cultural landscape into the 1960s and beyond, becoming entwined in arguments for legalizing abortion. Above all, it’s an exercise in the ethical imagination. By looking backwards, Herzog shows us the way forward. The defense of sexual self-determination and the struggle for disability rights can share a common vision. To unlearn eugenics is to create the conditions that enable those who live otherwise to flourish, in a world with room for different desires, bodies, and minds.”

– Danilyn Rutherford, President, The Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research

“A brilliant thinker and beautiful writer, Dagmar Herzog traces a century of debate and legislation on abortion and disability that has been dominated by eugenic ideas. The breathtaking combination of erudition, passion, and mastery of original material makes this a must-read for anyone interested in the history of human rights.”

– Wendy Lower, Director, Mgrublian Center for Human Rights, John K. Roth Professor of History, Claremont McKenna College

Since the defeat of the Nazi Third Reich and the end of its horrific eugenics policies, battles over the politics of life, sex, and death have continued and evolved. Dagmar Herzog documents how reproductive rights and disability rights, both latecomers to the postwar human rights canon, came to be seen as competing—with unexpected consequences.

Bringing together the latest findings in Holocaust studies, the history of religion, and the history of sexuality in postwar—and now also postcommunist—Europe, *Unlearning Eugenics* shows how central the controversies over sexuality, reproduction, and disability have been to broader processes of secularization and religious renewal. Herzog also restores to the historical record a revelatory array of activists: from Catholic and Protestant theologians who defended abortion rights in the 1960s–70s to historians in the 1980s–90s who uncovered the long-suppressed connections between the mass murder of the disabled and the Holocaust of European Jewry; from feminists involved in the militant “cripple movement” of the 1980s to lawyers working for right-wing NGOs in the 2000s; and from a handful of pioneers in the 1940s–60s committed to living in intentional community with individuals with cognitive disability to present-day disability self-advocates.