

## **Wunsch Kinder. Eine transnationale Geschichte der Familienplanung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland**

**By Claudia Roesch. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022. Pp. vi + 323. Hardcover €70.00. ISBN: 978-3525356975.**

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Claudia Roesch's fabulous new monograph examines the goal of family planning activists in the twentieth century in the United States and West Germany: to ensure that parents could make informed decisions about when to have children. The family planning movement originated with organizations such as Planned Parenthood in the United States, Pro Familia in West Germany, and the International Planned Parenthood Federation. At different points in time, they campaigned for the wider use of birth control pills and abortions to encourage couples to have children on their own terms, rather than viewing these practices as ways of halting the birth of unwanted babies. Sometimes, activists endorsed family planning for eugenic reasons. At other times, activists saw it as liberating and necessary for women's emancipation. Roesch shows how the international family planning movement was shaped by the complex interactions between West Germans and Americans from the 1920s through the 1990s.

Chapter 1 analyzes the longstanding links between the American and German birth control movements dating back to the 1920s. Frustrated at seeing a patient die after a botched illegal abortion, Margaret Sanger vowed to educate others on contraception, even risking prosecution under American law. She then founded the American Birth Control League in the 1930s. Sanger's movement coincided with the heyday of the international eugenics movement, which has long raised questions about her exact position. Roesch argues that the two movements clashed. Eugenicists wanted White women to reproduce; Sanger wanted them to have options and therefore rejected positive eugenics. Meanwhile, German reformers were having similar discussions, inspiring the ideas of a young Hans Harmsen, the founder of Pro Familia. While never a Nazi Party member, his ideas about population control and sterilization aligned with some of the tenets of National Socialism, leaving him with a legacy as contested as Sanger's.

Chapter 2 picks up in the 1940s, with the founding of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America and its exportation of its key principles abroad. At this point, family planning began changing in meaning—indeed, even the most prominent birth control organization changed names from the Birth Control Federation of America to the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. The semantics reflected important changes in the movement's mission. For one thing, the movement was trying to shift away from its association with eugenics. For another, in the 1940s and 1950s, family planning began targeting White middle-class families instead of working-class women. Family planning's new goal was to encourage social and economic stability and mobility and discourage unplanned children.

Chapter 3 follows the family planning debates as they moved across the Atlantic to Germany. Planned Parenthood activists were eager to work with Germans to extend their mission abroad. In West Germany, the aftermath of the Nazis' destructive, racist population policies loomed large. In 1952, activists founded Pro Familia, the West German version of Planned Parenthood. The general population expressed concern that Pro Familia wanted to limit population growth in the postwar era. Women, meanwhile, were interested in the prospect of birth control as an alternative to illegal (and dangerous) abortions. Pro Familia therefore emerged in a context marked by a desire to "return" to the traditional

family while also rejecting the sexual mores of the Weimar era and Nazi population policies.

On the other side of the Atlantic, as chapter 4 shows, the family planning movement had turned its attention to aiding the growth of White, middle-class families while stigmatizing Black and Latinx families. Here, Roesch observes the lingering effects of the Moynihan Report, which argued that Black poverty stemmed from matriarchal family structures and would dissipate if Black families adopted male breadwinner family models à la White families. Moynihan's report became the basis of Lyndon Baines Johnson's "War on Poverty." In an important addition, Roesch examines the plight of Latinx families. Both Black and Latinx families were encouraged to limit their family sizes, but for racist reasons, which was a stark contrast to the family planning movement's encouragement of White families. Meanwhile, in West Germany, family planning activists promoted the right of poorer and/or disabled Germans to choose voluntary sterilization.

Chapter 5 covers the dissemination of information about the birth control pill in the United States and West Germany in the 1960s. Americans and West Germans often approached the pill differently. For example, American Planned Parenthood tended to conceal the risks of the pill, while West German experts were more open about potential health problems, such as deep-vein thrombosis. Another obstacle facing West German family planning activists was Pope Paul VI, who controversially reinstated the Catholic Church's opposition to contraception. Chapter 6 explores the debates in the late 1960s and early 1970s over the extent to which patients should be privy to information regarding the pill's side-effects—a discussion in which feminists intervened heavily. The debates eventually worked their way up to Congress, culminating in the Nelson Hearings, which led to inserts including information about side-effects in every pill pack.

Finally, chapters 7 and 8 cover another critical angle: the debates among family planning advocates over legalizing abortion. Family planning activists had based their movement on the idea of "wanted children" and initially opposed legalizing abortion until it became evident that women would seek illegal (and dangerous) procedures regardless. The notion of women having rights to their bodies and reproduction then prompted the emergence of an anti-abortion movement and the rise of pregnancy counseling in the 1980s, according to chapter 8. These activists assumed—and propagated through brochures and misinformation campaigns—that all women wanted to be mothers and could be convinced through therapy to bring a fetus to term.

Claudia Roesch's impressive monograph demonstrates that key shifts in the family planning movement resulted from ongoing dialogues between Americans and West Germans. Moreover, while the United States and the Federal Republic are her main case studies, she often highlights links to the movements in Sweden and East Germany. Going beyond comparison, she provides a model for how to write compelling transnational history. At the same time, the book occasionally relies too heavily on existing historiography, sometimes masking some of Roesch's more pointed and fascinating arguments. Still, the study offers important insights for many audiences on both sides of the Atlantic—historians of gender, medicine, religion, and race, among others—which is one of its major strengths. If one chooses to learn more about this topic, then plan to read Roesch's book.

doi:10.1017/S0008938923001486