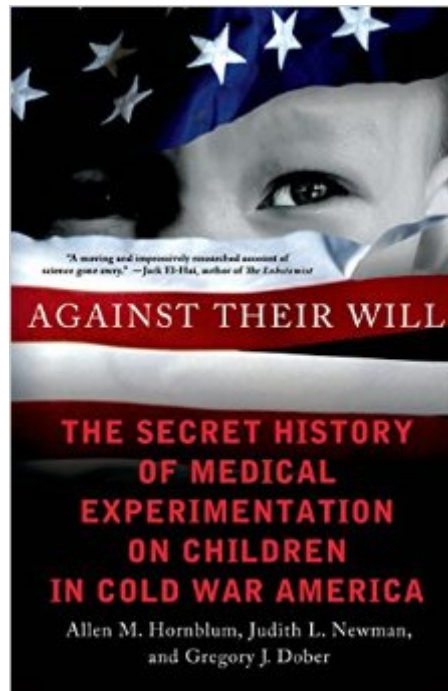


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# Against Their Will: The Secret History Of Medical Experimentation On Children In Cold War America



## Synopsis

During the Cold War, an alliance between American scientists, pharmaceutical companies, and the US military pushed the medical establishment into ethically fraught territory. *Against Their Will* reveals the little-known history of unethical and dangerous medical experimentation on children in the United States. Through rare interviews and the personal correspondence of renowned medical investigators, Hornblum, Newman, and Dober document how children from infants to teenagers, became human research subjects in terrifying experiments. They were drafted as "volunteers" to test vaccines, doused with ringworm, subjected to electric shock, given lobotomies, and exposed to chemical warfare agents. This groundbreaking book shows how institutional superintendents influenced by eugenics often turned these children over to scientific researchers without a second thought. Based on years of archival research, this is an important and disturbing look at the dark underbelly of American medical history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The name of Dr. Clemens Benda does not say much to many people. Benda emigrated from Germany during Hitler's rise to power in the 1930s and would become one of the most respected doctors in the United States. However, this respected physician was in fact a monster who was responsible for injecting radiation into children's bodies in order to see its effect on the very young. These experiments were conducted at the MIT with the help of other facilities and in this respect he was not alone. Some children aged between one and eleven years old, who were found at various

institutions, were given other lethal doses of radioactive iodine, while this time the project was being coordinated by researchers from Harvard Medical School and the Boston University School of Medicine. Some of these miserable children suffered from Down syndrome and other forms of mental retardation. All this happened during the forties when the Cold War was played out between the major powers. One of the sponsors of these experiments was the CIA. One of its physicians informed a class of recruits in the 1960, "Our guiding light is not the Hippocratic Oath but the victory of freedom". It was clear that the USA had fallen behind the Soviets with regard to its chemical warfare capability and the immediate need to come up to speed in preparation for some future enemy attack. It was also equally clear that research scientists "could not fulfill this mission by animal experiments alone. Human test subjects would be needed; fortunately, most experienced researchers already knew where to look for volunteers". Nearly seven dozen institutions took CIA money 'many of them for the purpose of plying American citizens with hallucinogenic cocktails and more'. One American neurologist, Walter Freeman, would become a leading figure and a specialist in carrying out lobotomies on children. He was a disciple of Egas Moniz, a Portuguese physician who proselytized the attributes of lobotomy in the fight against a variety of psychological disorders. Freeman once performed lobotomies on 25 women in one day. Ergo, if lobotomies could produce improvements in adults with serious mental problems, it could do the same for children. Hundreds of lobotomies were performed on a vast array of patients including "11 individuals whose schizophrenia developed before the age of ten". Other feebleminded children or idiots placed in American orphanages were also subject to various and hideous experiments-all conducted in the name of scientific progress. This was the extension of the eugenic movement ideology which ran wild during the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. This book demonstrates the huge hypocrisy of the American scientific establishment. On the one hand, it criticized heavily the atrocious deeds committed by the Nazis, as has been shown by the Nazi trials after the war. On the other hand, the same critics perpetrated almost the same crimes, but this time their motivation was the Cold War ideology. Some doctors wanted to conduct clinical trials and were motivated by noble causes, but others were motivated by greed and fame. By behaving in this way, they forgot or gave up their Hippocratic Oath and routinely trafficked in children to operationalize some bit of medical research. The guinea pigs were poor children who were given tests to see how vaccines worked; in what way radioactive foods had an influence on the body, and some were even injected with LSD. Others were subjected to lobotomies and electric shock treatments. If you thought that at the beginning of the 21st century things like the ones described before stopped, you are wrong. As the authors point out, American institutions have been replaced by China, India, Tunisia and Nigeria as

sites for Phase One drug studies. Drug firms now travel to "places where regulation is virtually nonexistent, the FDA does not reach, and the mistakes can end up in pauper's graves". To tell the truth, this book will make you sick. It becomes a burden on the reader and it shows to what extent the most noble and respected scientists and doctors became monsters. This book is about science gone absolutely mad and the authors have written an excellent book documenting for many years the horrible deeds committed in the name of scientific progress. This book can also serve as a severe warning of how a respected community of men and women can go mad when nobody controls them. It is about moral amnesia and ethical paralysis of those in the medical and psychological research professions who became totally perverted. Highly recommended!

I've been working in the field of Developmental Disabilities since we still had 'mentally retarded' people. I've been reading about the history of the field about as long. That is probably why I found this particular volume a bit thin. 'Inventing the Feeble-minded' is a more comprehensive history of the overall treatment of the population under study, and 'The War Against The Weak' is an infinitely better reading of eugenics. While this book does discuss a particular aspect of the mistreatment of 'my' people that needs to be recognized and acknowledged, this book seems to jump around a bit too much and spends a bit too much editorializing and wearing its heart on its sleeve when a more comprehensive account of the facts and data should be sufficient to engender the outrage that the authors seem to feel the need to let us know we should feel. Still, having said that - if you are not familiar with subjects like eugenics and treatment of mentally challenged people in large institutions, this would well be worth the read.

There's a lot of really interesting, important information in this book, and it's a history that should be more well known. The writing in general is good, but the organization is bad and the writing is sometimes repetitive. Each experiment is also covered quite briefly, so be prepared to look for other books if particular issues grab you. The title/cover is also a bit sensationalistic given how few experiments in the book actually had anything to do with the Cold War, and how much of it was devoted to other time periods entirely. It is more like the shortest book it was possible to write on the general history of child experimentation in the 20th century. In the later chapters many of the stories aren't actually experiments, just questionable practices doctors embraced with vigor regardless of how little research had been done. A frequent refrain is "Doctors in the US didn't pay any attention to the Nuremberg code at all." There's a chapter about WWII and the Nuremberg code but that line is still repeated frequently (numerous times in a single chapter) in reference to individual

doctors/experiments. There are some other specific ideas that are over-repeated as well (such as researchers specifically choosing devalued populations vs college prep schools). The individual sections on vaccine research, radiation research, etc... aren't organized chronologically and sometimes aren't organized in a logical way at all. There's also a slight tendency to leave out dates when something prior to 1945 is being talked about it, or sometimes the date is mentioned towards the end of the story that's being related, which is always frustrating, but especially so in a book that jumps around so much and mentions so many different experiments. Again, lots of interesting information here, but it could have been presented so much more effectively and with a less misleading title.

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