goal of stimulating negotiations. Then with Fulbright about to hold hearings on Vietnam, Johnson hurriedly called a meeting in Honolulu—unsurpassed, according to Newsweek, for “helter-skelter improvisation” (p. 717)—with U.S. military commanders and South Vietnamese leaders. Predictably, that well-publicized session had no effect on the war, which continued on its path toward a stalemate in Vietnam and mounting divisions at home. By the time the Tet Offensive confounded official assurances of progress, Johnson had already decided privately to withdraw from the 1968 presidential race, a decision he announced, along with a cessation of almost all bombing of North Vietnam, in his dramatic televised address on 31 March 1968. When discussing the disengagement decision, Woods, unlike some other scholars, sees Johnson moving in that direction even before he received the counsel of his key advisers and rewrote his speech.

Given the richness of the material, it is regrettable that Woods offers neither many judgments throughout the text nor a concluding chapter. Clearly sympathetic toward Johnson while acknowledging his many shortcomings, Woods has written a monumental biography of a president whose legacy influences U.S. politics to this day.


Reviewed by Peter W. Lee, Drew University

Allen Hornblum, Judith Newman, and Gregory Dober chronicle the U.S. medical profession’s experimentation on children from the 1950s to the 1970s. Doctors targeted children with low IQs, scientifically classifying them as “idiots,” “imbeciles,” and “morons,” occupying an intermediate point between animals and “normal” people. Long rendered invisible in mainstream U.S. society—figuratively in the press as well as literally confined in sanitariums—these children also existed on the margins of Cold War histories. Hornblum, Newman, and Dober seek to bring this shameful story into the larger historical narrative of the Cold War.

The first chapters contextualize eugenics in the twentieth century, showing how the field spread before and during the Second World War. Popular culture in the United States set doctors on a pedestal as heroes pushing the frontiers of medical knowledge. In contrast, the “Nazi doctors” received wide condemnation for their crimes against humanity, and the subsequent Nuremberg Code set forth a list of medical “thou shalt nots” to prevent a repeat of state-authorized human experimentation. However, many within the U.S. medical profession did not feel bound by those standards. The cultural hero-worship surrounding doctors, the precedence of wartime vaccinations, and new concerns about radioactive fallout allowed for a golden age of
experimentation on so-called retarded children in the name of patriotism during the Cold War.

The book’s account of this dismal era reflects Hornblum’s, Newman’s, and Dober’s backgrounds in medical journalism and human development. The authors use recently declassified government documents pertaining to the experiments; period medical journals detailing the procedures used and the findings; and interviews with surviving children from the experiments and the doctors who conducted them, notably Constantine Malteskos, a specialist in radiation. They effectively summarize the experiments, terminology, and medical context for non-specialists.

The controversial nature of the topic has hindered research, as the authors note. The Iowa state archive, for instance, refuses to allow journalists and “outside researchers” to see records concerning the notorious “Monster Study” (an experiment involving consistent negative criticism to make young people stutter). In detailing the negligence and abuse the children suffered in isolated institutions, the authors express outrage that the profession’s Cold War mentality still plagues the field. The book ends with a manifesto: “We, as a society, must be ever vigilant that such paternalistic and utilitarian practices never return, nor be outsourced abroad so that the burden of scientific advancement is relegated to vulnerable populations in lesser developed nations” (p. 228).

Most historians will probably wish the book had offered a deeper analysis of the Cold War context. The heightened American exceptionalism that underpinned the struggle against Communism permeates the text, but the authors seldom directly address the medical profession’s role as Cold Warriors. U.S. doctors ignored the Nuremberg Code, believing their work rested on a higher moral plane than Nazi barbarism, and they still adhered to this position decades later. When discussing the exposure of children to radioactive isotopes, Malteskos told the authors, “I feel just as good about it today as the day I did it” (p. 143). In many doctors’ view, medical shortcuts were justified if they led to vaccines for polio and other remedies, saving thousands of lives.

The authors could also have said more about the intersection between medicine and politics. As one physician for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency claimed, “Our guiding light is not the Hippocratic oath, but the victory of freedom” (p. 74). This victory culture, the arms race, and the rapid development of technology and medicine—lobotomy practices, electroshock therapy, and LSD, among others—demonstrate a renewed vigor of wartime mobilization, approaching the status of a garrison state, as various industries cooperated to wage the Cold War. How did medicine fit into this pattern? The authors also note the social connection between perceptions of childhood mental feebleness, criminality, and homosexuality but do not link these diagnoses to larger postwar concerns about juvenile delinquency; fears of sexual behavior; and changes in home life, construction of the family, and gender roles during this period.

The authors carefully point out a class distinction. Many of the children came from homes unable to support them. The absence of rich children at these institutions makes one wonder whether other social classifications affected experimentation, especially race. The authors point to the experiments with syphilis on Tuskegee
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Airmen during World War II as precedents, and race continued to play a decisive role in Cold War medicine. State welfare workers targeted African American and Native American girls for sterilization as an anti-poverty measure, but how did such abuses help to fuel the civil rights movements? Race itself as a scientific category also seems to be excluded from the authors’ thinking: radioactive experiments at one school involved “six negroes” and “one Caucasian” (p. 149), but did experiments contribute to discussions about identity formation? Similarly, the pervasiveness of popular culture in media also warrants greater discussion. The 1950s witnessed a surge of public interest in medical/psychology-oriented cultural products. Films such as The Snake Pit (1948), Suddenly, Last Summer (1959), and The Manchurian Candidate (1962) contributed to the Cold War atmosphere and themes of behavior-control. Incorporating recent scholarship such as Susan Carruthers’s Cold War Captives: Imprisonment, Escape, and Brainwashing (2009) would help place these isolated experiments within a larger public discussion concerning medical practices.

Although the experiments have rarely been discussed in traditional historical accounts, the effects continue to surface decades after the fact. A young Ted Kaczynski (the Unabomber) participated in these experiments, and the authors posit that his later one-man war against academic and industrial institutions may have stemmed at least in part from his victimhood as a child. On a less sensational level, the surviving children harbor a deep mistrust of doctors and the medical profession that left them and their families scarred. The gaps in the book’s account should serve as an enticing invitation for scholars to dig more deeply into Cold War medicine. Hornblum, Newman, and Dober provide an admirable first cut at a long-overdue examination of the Cold War’s impact on America’s most innocent victims.

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Reviewed by Alex Souchen, Royal Military College of Canada

Military Waste by Joshua O. Reno is a book that will appeal to anyone interested in the material traces of militarization and militarism in the United States, as well as the political, economic, environmental, and social legacies of the Cold War. Reno is an anthropologist by trade, so the book is based on a diverse range of theoretical and ethnographic approaches to the topic. Each of the book’s six chapters focuses on a type of military waste or a theoretical framework for understanding military waste as a byproduct of permanent war readiness.

The first three chapters are the book’s strongest elements because each is grounded firmly in the materiality of waste. Chapter 1 explores the waste generated in the military-industrial complex. Through interviews with current and former employees at defense contractors in Binghamton, New York, Reno shows the centrality of waste within the defense economy and how the scientists engaging in research