



Menace to the Future

A Disability and Queer History of Carceral Eugenics

JESS WHATCOTT

In *Menace to the Future*, Jess Whatcott traces the link between US disability institutions and early twentieth-century eugenicist ideology, demonstrating how the legacy of those ideas continues to shape incarceration and detention today. Whatcott focuses on California, examining records from state institutions and reform organizations, newspapers, and state hospital museum exhibits. They reveal state confinement, coercive treatment, care neglect, and forced sterilization was done out of the belief that the perceived unfitness of disabled, mad, and neurodivergent people was hereditary, and thus posed a biological threat—a so-called “menace to the future.” Whatcott uncovers a history of disabled resistance to these institutions that predates disability rights movements, builds a genealogy of resistance, and tells a history of eugenics from below. Theorizing how what they call “carceral eugenics” informed state treatment of disabled, mad, and neurodivergent people a century ago, Whatcott shows not only how that same logic still exists in secure treatment facilities, state prisons, and immigration detention centers, but also why it must continue to be resisted.

“Menace to the Future clearly and accessibly shows that Institutionalization is (racialized and gendered/queered) disablement, detention is eugenics, and reproductive justice and abolition are key to liberation. Constructing an original anti-eugenic archive, Jess Whatcott provides an indispensable intersectional analysis of carceral eugenics that cannot be unthought once read. To truly understand why reproductive justice means abolishing confinement and/as carceral eugenics (as Whatcott calls, segregation based on biological traits), you need this book in your activist and scholarly toolbox.” —
Liat Ben-Moshe, author of *Decarcerating Disability: Deinstitutionalization and Prison Abolition*

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September 2024 | 248 pages, 6 illustrations

978-1-4780-3075-1 | \$26.95 paperback **\$18.87 with discount**

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