

WORLD YOUTH ALLIANCE BOOK LIST

Fatal Misconception

By Matthew Conelly

Has the first global movement to control populations redefined how people view their children and themselves? “Fatal Misconception” analyzes the problems that arise when humans undertake the quest to police the limits of population. Through this book, Connelly uncovers the problems of a humanitarian movement gone awry. Connelly presents an honest picture of the population control movement and critiques a worldview that values the human as a commoditized number instead of as a person.

Why Fatal Misconception

World Youth Alliance members can benefit from reading and discussing Fatal Misconception as a narrative rich in historical detail. However, Connelly’s conclusions deviate sharply from this narrative and do not reflect World Youth Alliance’s conclusions with regards to this issue. Throughout the book he recounts the way in which the population control movement began as an effort that was calculating and insidious but concludes that these dangerous underlying motives no longer exist. He takes a strong stance in favor of contraceptives and abortion, but by offering these solutions he ignores the economic and moral concerns of developing nations, thus contradicting the historical narrative that his account provides. To be fair, Connelly never claims to be a policy expert, and his book is primarily a historical outline meant to serve as a warning for the future. Furthermore, while Connelly’s conclusions differ, his historical narrative supports the World Youth Alliance conviction that health care initiatives and programs for the development of the poor must respect the dignity of every person, with policies that encourage overall economic and personal development of the poor, rather than their elimination.

Guide questions for discussion groups

- What global factors gave rise to the perceived need for population control? How did these global factors lead to a fear that growing populations would threaten the developed world?
- Why and how did developing nations come to accept and implement population control within their own borders?

- How did the implementation of population control escalate to coercive measures promoting widespread sterilization and abortion?
- Give three geographical examples of coercive population control measures.
- Describe the ways in which International Planned Parenthood Federation's strategy was effective in promoting the population control agenda at the local level in developing countries.
- What roles did elites from the developed world, such as Rockefeller and Ford, and global institutions, such as the United Nations and its agencies, have in making the ideas of population control acceptable and mainstream?
- What is Connelly's conclusion about the current state of the reproductive health movement? Why is this conclusion inconsistent with the history that he recounts throughout the book?
- What does the World Youth Alliance advocate as authentic solutions to poverty and lack of development?