Icons of Life: A Cultural History of Human Embryos

Lynn Morgan
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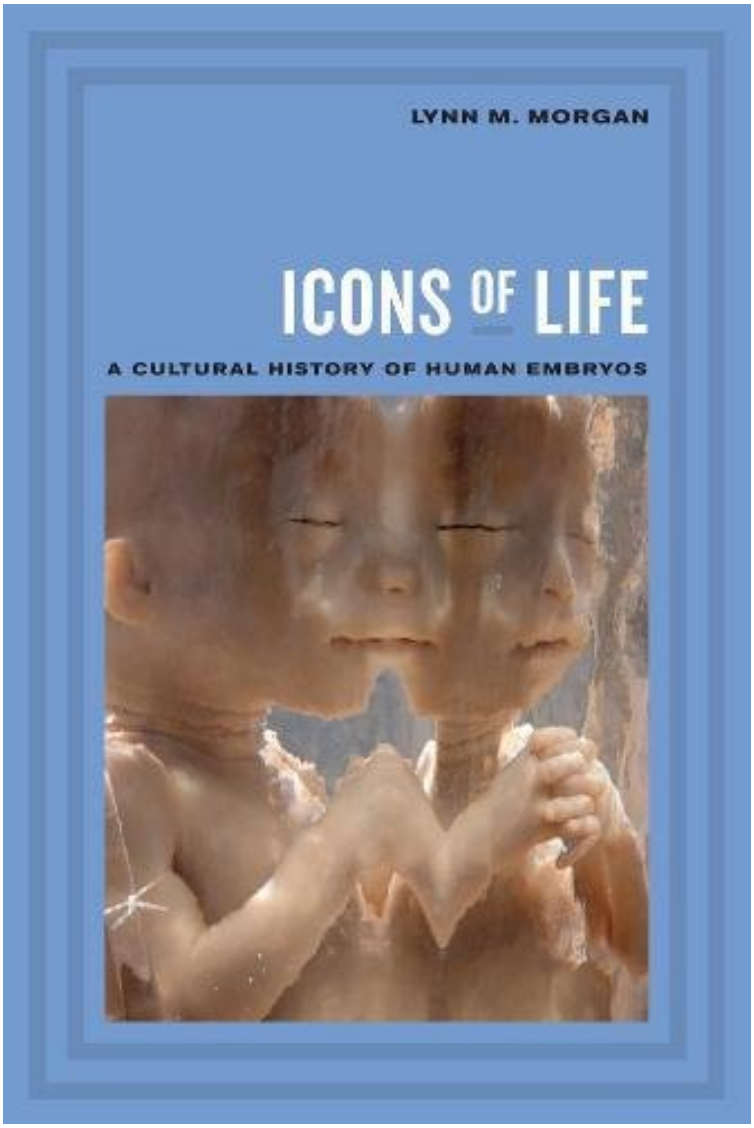

#2232953 in Books 2009-09-09Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.00 x .80 x 6.00l, 1.00 #File Name: 0520260449328 pages | File size: 34.Mb

Lynn Morgan : Icons of Life: A Cultural History of Human Embryos before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Icons of Life: A Cultural History of Human Embryos:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy CustomerA Fascinating Read!0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Interesting take on the life of the fetus.By Shannon K. SheffeyThis is a very interesting book on the history of fetile research and what we know about the fetus.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Creative, disorienting, compelling! Morgan exhumes important historyBy RCLynn Morgan creatively presents early 20th century embryo science and society in ways that invite us to see embryos, fetuses and their progenitors (women,

men, scientists alike) in new and productively disorienting ways. She cleverly builds on feminist social science literature and highlights exciting areas for explorations. For instance, she challenges scholars to explore the "hidden sources" of embryo production, asking how they came to exist and were materialized. This, in itself, is a compelling directive, though the details of her historical ethnography makes the best argument for how to do this and why it is so important. The stories of Mrs. R and Carnegie no. 836 so strikingly and smartly show how invisibilized women's labor and contributions to embryo collecting were. Illustrating this through documenting the multiple dead-ends in Mrs. R's history - like facing the sad fact that Morgan could not find her gravestone in the hills of West Virginia - helps to re-entangle Mrs. R with Carnegie no. 836's long and well-documented story.Icons of Life is solid and intriguing scholarship that gives readers a lot to think about in our contemporary "embryo-centric political climate." Also, as a teacher, I look forward to using this book to help complicate and put into relief some deeply entrenched assumptions about fetuses, women, life/death, and science. The clarity of Morgan's argument and the abundance of engaging examples makes this text well-suited for the classroom.

Icons of Life tells the engrossing and provocative story of an early twentieth-century undertaking, the Carnegie Institution of Washington's project to collect thousands of embryos for scientific study. Lynn M. Morgan blends social analysis, sleuthing, and humor to trace the history of specimen collecting. In the process, she illuminates how a hundred-year-old scientific endeavor continues to be felt in today's fraught arena of maternal and fetal politics. Until the embryo collecting project-which she follows from the Johns Hopkins anatomy department, through Baltimore foundling homes, and all the way to China-most people had no idea what human embryos looked like. But by the 1950s, modern citizens saw in embryos an image of ourselves unborn, and embryology had developed a biologically based story about how we came to be. Morgan explains how dead specimens paradoxically became icons of life, how embryos were generated as social artifacts separate from pregnant women, and how a fetus thwarted Gertrude Stein's medical career. By resurrecting a nearly forgotten scientific project, Morgan sheds light on the roots of a modern origin story and raises the still controversial issue of how we decide what embryos mean.

A remarkable work that seems destined to have a significant impact both within and well beyond anthropology.