

History

Margaret Sanger and Her Fight for Advocating Birth Control

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Margaret Sanger knew what she had to do with her life from an early age. Her motivation for birth control advocacy started in 1912, when she realized that she could do more to help the lives of women. Sanger worked to help nurse a woman back to life after she went through labor and delivery with her child. Mrs. Sadie Sachs had already had problems with earlier children, but this child almost killed her. She asked for help from a doctor, but the physician was not allowed to disclose any information, since it was against the law to tell women how to stop having children. Sachs then turned to Sanger in desperate need of an answer, but Sanger could not give her the information she needed. Sanger promised to come back and give the valuable information to Sachs, but that never happened.¹ The next visit to the Sachs' house is one that Sanger would never forget. Mrs. Sachs was having complications with yet another pregnancy, and Sanger realized she had not carried out her promise to her fellow friend. As Sachs died, Sanger remembers what she did after the death, "I folded her still hands across her breast, remembering how they had pleaded with me, begging so humbly for the knowledge which was her right."² This was the beginning of Margaret Sanger's relentless fight for the advocacy of birth control in the United States.

Margaret Sanger was the leader of the birth control movement in America and paved the way for the legalization of birth control use in the United States. Margaret Sanger was a hard worker and never stopped at "no" when she did not get the answers that she set out for. She saw it as her duty to help women of all economic statuses to get the rights to their body and to give them the knowledge they needed in order to make informed decisions on the use of birth control. Throughout the nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries, birth control was a topic that was highly controversial. There were tight limitations on the amount of information that could be handed out about the concept to the public. This is the issue that Margaret Sanger saw in the United States and knew that it had to be resolved.

Sanger realized that there was not enough information being given to women about the usage of birth control. She thought that every woman had the right to know about birth control and use it, if she wanted to. Sanger believed that this could put an end to a lot of problems that women faced and would be a good tool for every woman to have in case she ever needed it. Sanger fought for the legalization of birth control and used many different strategies in order to get the word out and gain support from the public. This is how Margaret Sanger became a controversial topic herself.

Sanger has been criticized for how she gained support for the birth control movement. Some say that she was not only an advocate for the birth control movement, but for the eugenics movement as well, which was popular in the early twentieth century. Scholars say that she was only advocating for birth control because she was a firm believer in the eugenics movement, and they believed she really was not fighting for women's and mothers' rights. While Margaret Sanger might have used eugenic ideas to help support her case and to gain more support from certain areas of the public sphere, she was not an advocate for eugenics and did not support the idea. She did, however, take advantage of different groups of people in the United States in order to help gain support for the birth control movement. Sanger used different tactics in her fight for birth control, and though they might have been controversial, she had one goal and one plan in mind the entire time; she wanted every woman to have the freedom to her own body, and she took every direction in order to get there.

Margaret Sanger is a figure that has caused a lot of controversy because of her different ideas about birth control. Not only did she cause a stir in the Catholic Church community, but also in the general public because of her "eugenic" ways. Sanger has a lot of different primary sources that help shape the thoughts of the historians. There have also been countless secondary sources written on Margaret Sanger as an individual, her controversial stances, and her goals in the birth control movement.

Some of the literature focuses on what Margaret Sanger was trying to accomplish with her movement. In *Margaret Sanger: Pioneer of the Future*, Emily Douglas emphasizes that women need to be in control of their maternity, and Sanger was advocating for birth control because of issues that she had experienced and seen in the world revolving around women and children. Her advocacy for children and the need for them to be born into loving families was emphasized in the work of *From Megaphones to Microphones: Speeches of American Women, 1920-1960*. This source provides examples of Sanger's work and her ideas behind the birth control movement. More reasoning behind why

she wanted to start the birth control movement are in a primary source located in *Population, Evolution, and Birth Control: A Collage of Controversial Ideas* by Garrett Hardin. A personal account of Sanger explaining why she wanted to make a change shows how important the movement was to her and why she was doing it. Other sources that include primary sources from Sanger also help describe her motives in the movement. *The Feminist Papers: From Adams to de Beauvoir* and also three volumes of *The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger* give insight to Sanger's motivations for starting the movement, despite not having the approval from a lot of the general public.

Sanger faced a lot of outrage from different groups of people and historians that have studied her and the birth control movement. Marshall explains in *Catholics, Marriage, and Contraception* that the Catholic Church was one of the main critics of Sanger's work. The Catholic Church did not agree with the use of any kind of contraception, so Sanger received major backlash from this group. Sanger also received criticism from the public because of her alleged ties to the eugenics community. Historians like Angela Franks argues that Sanger was an advocate for the eugenics community. In *Margaret Sanger's Eugenic Legacy: The Control of Female Fertility*, Franks explains how Sanger was a member of the eugenics community, and she was advocating for birth control because she wanted population control, an idea of the eugenics movement. *Abortion in the American Imagination: Before Life and Choice, 1880-1940* also touches on ideas about the eugenics movement and how Sanger was an advocate for that community.

Literature has also been written to show how Sanger was successful in transforming her campaign from a total women's movement to a movement that was centered on motherhood. *Rhetorics of Motherhood* explains how Sanger started advocating for mothers to have the right to birth control instead of all women. She made the birth control movement more appealing and gained more support by doing this. These ideas were also expressed in *Choice and Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare* along with ideas of how Sanger wanted to promote all mothers, not just a certain few; this shows that the eugenics ideas of Sanger are not true.

There are other sources like *Defining Moments: Roe v. Wade and The Politics of Fertility Control* that explain different cases and situations that America has gone through with contraception and abortions. These sources also touch on Margaret Sanger and her accomplishments that she achieved by advocating for birth control. There is a plethora of primary and secondary sources on Margaret Sanger. There are sources not only on who she was as a person but what she fought for during her advocacy of birth control. Sanger's true feelings and

ideas are seen through primary sources. Viewpoints of critics of Sanger are seen in secondary sources, as well as evidence of Sanger's accomplishments with the birth control movement.

By analyzing several primary and secondary sources involving all aspects of Margaret Sanger, it is concluded that Sanger was passionate for birth control and truly believed that it should be made available to every woman in America who wanted it. She was concerned with the well-being of women and wanted women to have full rights to their bodies. It is also concluded that full rights for the woman was the only of birth control that she was advocating. Sanger did not accept the ideas of eugenics, nor did she believe that birth control should only be for mothers; instead Sanger saw that a door could be opened for her campaign through these two windows, so she took full advantage of the opportunity that was in front of her.

From an early age, Margaret Sanger knew how harmful childbirth could be to a woman. She was one of eleven children and watched her mother suffer from an early death in her life.³ Her mother had tuberculosis and was very sick during childbirth, which made her very weak and fragile. Not only did Sanger's mother die at an early age, but Margaret also battled with a case of tuberculosis later in life.⁴ Margaret had seen firsthand the dangers of childbirth and the harm it can do to a pregnant woman. Even though it has not been directly stated, this was an early factor in why Sanger advocated for birth control later in her life. She had seen the struggles of her mother and knew that conditions could be better for women who were having children.

Sanger went to school through 1902 in order to become a nurse. She had to quit nursing school though when she married her husband in that same year. She had her first child in 1903 and suffered from tuberculosis just like her mother had when she was pregnant.⁵ Through her own struggles with childbirth and bearing witness to other women and their childbirth struggles, Sanger decided to start advocating for a change. She started her radical ideas on birth control and push for a change in America.

One of the first movements that Sanger found herself with was a radical group that she joined in 1910 when her and her husband moved to New York. This group was also part of Socialist party politics. This was how Sanger learned that she could take a stand on what she wanted to advocate for. Later she joined the Women's Committee of the New York Socialist party.⁶ With the knowledge that she earned from these groups, she started her first run at standing up for women's rights with birth control. In 1912, Sanger published her first piece of work on birth control in the *New York Call*. The article was entitled, "What Every

Girl Should Know.”⁷ This was be the beginning to a birth control column in the *New York Call* that Sanger continued to write for.⁸

She continued to write in order to keep women informed about birth control, so she started to publish her works under *The Woman Rebel*. This publication was used to “free women from the tyranny of uncontrolled childbirth.”⁹ In *The Woman Rebel* was where the term “birth control” was coined and became the official name of her movement. The message that Sanger wanted to get out with her publication were issues that dealt with child labor, health, social hygiene, and the results of having too many children. She also stated that the woman was the one who should determine her maternity.¹⁰ One article in *The Woman Rebel* Sanger asked, “Is there any reason why women should not receive clean, harmless, scientific knowledge on how to prevent conception?”¹¹ This was one of her main ideas of her campaign and her messages through this publication. She ends this same article stating, “As is well known, a law exists forbidding the imparting of information on this subject, the penalty being several years’ imprisonment. Is it not the time to defy this law? And what fitter place could be found than in the pages of WOMAN REBEL?”¹² Sanger started with a good step forward in getting the word out about birth control, but this proved to be harder than she thought.

Margaret Sanger ran into some trouble though with her advocacy because of the *Comstock Law* (1873). This was a law that suppressed the trade and circulation of obscene literature for immoral use. This included information about sex, sexually transmitted diseases, contraception, and abortion.¹³ The idea was that all of these topics were considered to be immoral, and thus it was against the law to inform any of the public about these subjects. This is what held Sanger back from being able to help Mrs. Sachs, and this proved to cause more problems for Sanger as well when she started her writings on birth control. The law and public agreed that the discussion of these topics were encouraging Americans to do immoral things, and that the discussion of these topics posed a “serious threat to the moral and social foundations of American life.”¹⁴ Sanger had a different idea though.

Because of the Comstock Law, Sanger faced indictment charges because of her works in *The Woman Rebel* and her article in *The Call* entitled, “What Every Mother Should Know.” These publications by Sanger were deemed too inappropriate, and she faced charges that imprisoned her for up to forty-five years. Before going to prison though, in 1914, she fled the country, so that she would not be put in jail. However, when she left, a pamphlet was left behind entitled, “Family Limitation”, which was circulated around before her arrival back to the United States. While she was in Europe, she gained even more knowledge

about birth control and realized that it had to be made available for all women in America.¹⁵ Even though Sanger had to flee the country, she was not stopping the move towards giving women the right to her body. It had become her passion to help all women in the United States.

Sanger did not let imprisonment scare her away from her advocacy for birth control because in 1916 she opened the first birth control clinic in the United States. This was later known as Planned Parenthood. This establishment was raided only nine days after opening, and Sanger was arrested again.¹⁶ Sanger later went to court because of these charges. In 1917, the court case *People vs. Sanger* started because of the New York Penal Code. It was considered a misdemeanor for anyone to dispense contraceptives to the public, and this is exactly what Sanger was doing with the opening of the clinic.¹⁷ This would not be the last time that Sanger ran into trouble. These instances only pushed her forward though in trying to gain more support for her campaign for women's rights.

Margaret Sanger continued to make strides in hopes of achieving equality for all women. She published even more works in hopes that she would educate more women in the United States, as well as gain more support for her cause. In 1917, she started another publication, *Birth Control Review*, as an attempt to promote birth control as a "medical and socioeconomic issue."¹⁸ Other works that Sanger published during her fight were *Women and the New Race* (1920), *The Pivot of Civilization* (1922), and *My Fight for Birth Control* (1931). Sanger also established a few organizations that helped publicize the birth control movement and provide an opportunity for women to join a cause to make a change for all women. Sanger established the American Birth Control League in 1921, the Birth Control Clinical Research Bureau in 1923, and the National Committee on Federal Legislation for Birth Control in 1929. All of these establishments and publications were used in order to help spread the word of birth control and to help gain support, but Sanger did more than just rely on these. Sanger used specific tactics and arguments in order to gain support for her advocacy for birth control for all women. There were many differing views about birth control and despite all of the opposition from a lot of the public, she pushed forward with special techniques in order to gain support.

It is important to understand the different positions the public in the United States had on birth control. Birth control has been a very controversial topic throughout history and is still a hot topic being discussed and analyzed in the United States today. There are certain groups of people that do not see the use of birth control as necessary and oppose the use in any way. One of the main groups that opposed the ideas of Sanger and actively went against her voice was the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church has always implemented the ideals that they seem fit to the people of their church. It is a well-known fact that the Catholic Church condemns the use of contraception for several reasons. The church believes that it is an immoral way of regulating births. This is the thought, because the Catholic Church sees marriage as the reason for procreation, and with this thinking in mind, contraception is seen as wrong.¹⁹ Because the church had deemed birth control and all forms of contraceptives “wrong,” this caused a lot of trouble for Margaret Sanger and her fight. She even commented on this subject in an article that was entitled “The Pope’s Position on Birth Control.” The article was issued after the encyclical written by Pope Pius XI. In the encyclical, the Pope said that the holiness of the marriage was being conflicted because the church had just endorsed birth control. Sanger explained that many of the women that came into one of her clinics were members of the Catholic Church. She wrote this piece in order to keep those women coming since she sensed that they would not continue because the church was again deciding what the women should do.²⁰

The Catholic Church probably realized that there was not a biological reason for not using birth control, but if the church said that it was not okay to utilize, then the women of the church would not use it. This is all because of the notion that what the church says is what Christ says, and so if Christ says birth control is not right, then the women should not use it.²¹ Sanger acknowledged this problem and explains that women of the Catholic Church have been visiting her clinics for years, but “the official teaching of the Catholic Church, even though ignored by many of its members, is sometimes an obstacle to general approval of the birth control movement by political leaders unwilling to oppose the authorities of that church.”²² Sanger knew she was fighting an uphill battle not only with the Catholic Church but with a lot of people in society because of the idea that it was already illegal to distribute and talk about. This gave the impression to some that it did not need to be legalized; it was illegal for some reason. To persuade people to change their minds and outlooks about birth control was going to be a task that not just anyone could accomplish.

When Margaret Sanger started her campaign, she approached the birth control movement in a way that said all women should be able to access contraception. This was the message that she portrayed in her publication of *Woman and the New Race* in 1920. She explained that all women needed to have the control of their own body, and that they should be able to control whether or not they were going to be pregnant or not.²³ She had feminist ideas that all women had the right to their body because she thought there was a double standard of sexual behavior between men and women. The thought that men could participate in extramarital sex and women could not was something that

she focused on in her argument early in the campaign.²⁴ Birth control was a very radical idea even for married women, but for single women it was almost out of the question. Sanger thought that she made a strong case though because she was fighting for all women, and she believed that she would gain more support.

Sanger's ideas also only revolved around birth control. Abortions were very popular during her advocacy and many women had to endure these because they either wanted to terminate the fetus or because the health of the woman was too poor and going through childbirth was out of the question. In the past, "Puritan mentality blended contraception, abortion, sterilization, obscenity, and vice and unequivocally condemned them all."²⁵ Sanger made her case that abortion and birth control were not the same, and she was the first to separate the two concepts in order for them to stand alone and not become grouped together as one flawed concept.²⁶ By doing this, she thought that she could reach out to more of the public.

In order to give an "abortion-bad, contraception-good" concept, Sanger used the dangers of abortion to her advantage.²⁷ Sanger used claims not only to fight against abortion, but she believed if she could point out the flaws in abortion, then she would have more public support of her birth control ideas. First, Sanger made claims that birth control was better than abortions because she listed the flaws and the dangers that came with the use of abortions.²⁸ In her article "My Fight for Birth Control," she offers a detailed account of how an abortion was carried out, "A quick examination, a probe inserted into the uterus and turned a few times to disturb the fertilized ovum, and the woman was sent home."²⁹ She also provided how painful and unsanitary the abortion process was and how dangerous it was for all women.

She also made the case that with abortions, doctors had complete control over what the woman was to do with her body. She said that doctors were put in the driver's seat of the rights to the female body; it was his choice whether or not the woman should have an abortion. She said that physicians only made abortion choices solely based on medical factors and not economic.³⁰ She did not think that abortions should be used at all, but she used economics as a main factor in why women should have the availability to use birth control. Economics was something she utilized later in her strategies when searching for support for birth control.

Sanger saw that trying to go for a total woman's movement was not making the gains like she would have liked. She needed to find a way in order to gain more support from the public. This came at a price, but she was willing to pay it.

Sanger used some of the ideas of the eugenics movement in order to gain support from the public. The eugenics movement, much like Sanger's own movement, was highly controversial in the United States, but there was one aspect about it that Sanger desperately needed—money. The eugenicist community consisted of wealthy politicians and other high officials that could provide the funds that Sanger needed for her advocacy. She utilized the support that they could give her by making the birth control movement one that could identify with the eugenics movement in some aspects. This proved to be very important to her efforts, yet it caused her a lot of strife as well.

Eugenics was considered to be a well-respected and very influential field.³¹ Sanger saw that a door could open for her, and her movement could swing into full force in order for legislation to be passed for her cause to legalize birth control. Funding money for her project was going to be a huge factor for Sanger because her only financial help came from a private sector, so finding wealthy individuals that supported her was necessary.³² One of these men being John D. Rockefeller, a very well-known wealthy individual.³³ Rockefeller was an advocate for the eugenics movement, but his staff noted, "While these three agencies [Birth Control Federation of America, the National Committee on Maternal Health, and the American Eugenics Society] are separate and distinct organizations, their programs are of such a complementary nature as to warrant some measure of consideration of Mr. Rockefeller Jr.'s interest."³⁴ Getting support from a political point of view was necessary as well, in order to show that those of higher status supported her visions for birth control in America. Sanger had Eleanor Roosevelt as a supporter of family planning, which gave her a boost as well.³⁵ By acknowledging the ideas of eugenicists and people of higher status, she was able to gain financial and moral support for the birth control movement.

Sanger acknowledged the eugenic movement by reaching out to the people involved in the movement in her *Birth Control Review*. In an essay by Blount in the *Birth Control Review*, it was made clear that Sanger was trying to appeal to a larger community of people in order to show that birth control was going to be a positive for the entire country and not a negative. Even though, "the *Review* was invested in a eugenics-like policy that would 'improve' the conditions of all Americans and eventually eliminate 'undesirable' citizens through preventing or reducing their ability to reproduce," it was also made clear that "Sanger also distanced herself from eugenicists who argued that woman's first duty is to reproduce for the state."³⁶ Sanger definitely gave reference to some eugenic ideas, but she was never an advocate for what the group of eugenicists wanted to promote. She only used the ideas in order to appeal to a larger crowd. She knew that she could add to her campaign by engaging the eugenics community in order for her to gain more support.

Not only did Sanger use eugenic ideas in order to gain support for her movement, she used a notion of a motherhood movement. This meant that she made this movement specifically about mothers instead of all women. She related contraception with motherhood, so this was a less radical idea; thus it attracted more supporters. She used motherhood as a prized possession of women and something that should not be determined by the state or anyone else except for the mother herself.³⁷ In her speech, "Woman and the Future" she explains that, "For up to now, woman has been a victim of her own powers of reproduction," meaning that mothers should have the rights to her own body, yet they are denied that right without birth control.³⁸ By changing her view of a woman's movement to a mother's movement, Sanger gained even more support. Birth control was a subject that should not be talked about at all, but after changing it to affect just mothers, it suddenly became a topic that was not as toxic to the public and something that was considered more acceptable.

By using the motherhood perspective of the campaign, Sanger could also attract mothers from all economic standpoints in life. She played on the fact that there were aspirations to only have enough children that the mother could afford.³⁹ She identified with all classes of women because she was under the impression that women only wanted to have a number of children that they could afford. Sanger argued that if birth control was implemented, then the mother could determine the size of her family. Sanger knew that all women wanted to give birth to healthy children that would live long and productive lives.⁴⁰ She also acknowledged the fact that the working-class mother was at a disadvantage because they were denied access to information about birth control and contraception devices themselves. This meant that these women were only subject to abortions. Sanger had expressed her concerns of abortions in her selections of publications, and she wanted "working-class women" to have "freedom from abortion because they need the protection of law" because these women "expose themselves to the evils of abortion because the law gives them no choice."⁴¹ Sanger recognized that this movement was to help all mothers of all social classes. Her main objective at this point was to rid mothers of the awful effects of abortions and emphasize that, "Birth control was not intended to offer an alternative to motherhood. Rather, it promoted healthy mothers."⁴² Birth control was to help not only physically but economically as well.

Because of Sanger's different tactics, she was able to appeal to a wide variety of the public who supported her campaign. Even though Sanger used her resources effectively, she was criticized for her different tactics. Sanger used two different actions to her advantage in order to advocate for birth control, so her movement could gain as much steam as possible. There was backlash in her use of tactics though because some criticized her for being an advocate of the

eugenics movement. This was not the case however, since her ultimate goal was not even to gain the access of birth control to all mothers but to all women in general. Sanger made her movement one that was attractive through multiple sets of lenses that the public might put on, however her overall goal of the movement was never lost and her focus never changed; Sanger believed all women had the right to control her own body, and that is what she was fighting for and nothing less.

The eugenics movement was focused on the ideas of Francis Galton who coined the word eugenics in order "to express a scientific endeavor to improve the human stock, and he combined the prefix 'eu,' meaning 'well' in Greek, with the root meaning 'born.'"⁴³ This word was used to describe the people of society that preferred to be born over others. This idea of eugenics was used not only in the United States but all around the world. The idea of making a perfect society of all "well-born" individuals was the main goal of this group and the movement. Characteristics such as "intelligence, thriftiness, a predisposition to physical health, and sound morality," were all considered to be hereditary, so it was thought that "society ought to conform its breeding patterns to increase the amount of 'good stock' in the human gene pool."⁴⁴ The eugenics movement was obsessed with making sure that only the best race and most efficient individuals were the ones that were reproducing.

The eugenics movement had specific motives for their group and wanted to control the population through different means. One of the ways that the eugenic community suggested to help the population was to control immigration in the United States and to sterilize unfit mothers without choice.⁴⁵ This way of thinking was part of the "negative" eugenics movement. It was focused on suppressing unfit individuals from having children. There was also a "positive" eugenics outlook that encouraged the fit to have children.⁴⁶ Both of these ideas were used by the eugenics movement, since the main goal was to only have "fit" individuals in society. Both of these views could be used in favor of Sanger's advocacy though. Sanger's views leaned more toward the negative eugenics movement since she was trying to suppress the number of pregnancies, but her goal was not for race control. She simply was fighting for the rights of women. Even though Sanger might have used some of the ideas of the eugenics movement, it does not imply at all that she was a member and advocate for the eugenics movement.

It is important to assess the words of Sanger and how she was not a eugenicist, even though she has been portrayed and criticized as one. She was seen as a eugenicist because some of the ideas might have overlapped, and it has even been said that eugenics would have failed without birth control.⁴⁷ The ideas

of birth control and eugenics might have been similar in some capacity, but Sanger was never an advocate for eugenics. She was using a dominant ideology of the time in order to transform her movement that she cared so deeply for. Her movement was described as, "Motherhood, freely chosen, is eugenics," so a lot of Sanger's ideas were perceived and skewed in a certain direction to make it seem as though she was a eugenicist herself. Those who criticized Sanger manipulated her ideas to make them fit perfectly with the eugenics movement, thus making her a eugenicist as well.

By looking at the work of Margaret Sanger and her actions, it is easy to see that she used the ideas of different movements in order to gain support. She did not believe in eugenics, nor did she believe that birth control should only be accessible to just mothers. She campaigned around these ideas however, because she knew that she could gain support and eventually obtain the rights for women that they had always deserved.

There are different works of Sanger's that have been used against her and used to "prove" that she was a eugenicist. Her works can be analyzed, and it can be concluded that she was not part of the eugenics movement. Some question her words like, "Women of the working class, especially wage workers, should not have more than two children at most," and her arguments that birth control "is also the one most direct method for you working women to help yourself today."⁴⁸ Sanger is trying to give knowledge to the public here. She has the best interest of the woman in mind, and she knows that both physically and economically, children are expensive. She is focused on allowing women to be free from burdens that children carry sometimes, and she thinks that it is a very useful tool for women to control their family sizes.

Family size control is seen as a eugenics way of thinking if it is limiting and targeting a specific group of families. Sanger was not supporting eugenics when she spoke on family size, instead she was speaking to better help women that have entered difficult situations because of pregnancy. Sanger argues that the human race controls all other aspects of life, so "it is simple common sense to control the number of children in a family, in order that they may be cherished and loved, cared for properly and raised to become useful and happy citizens."⁴⁹ Again, her statements are seen as questionable and used to support the idea that Sanger was an advocate for the eugenics movement. Sanger is not doing such a thing here though. She understands that some women have children just because they get pregnant without trying to. She sees a difference in women who want to become mothers and those who accidentally become pregnant.

Sanger also acknowledged the fact that women who become pregnant not meaning to would turn to abortion more often, because birth control was not available for them. She suggests that, "Wherever people speak of bettering the lives of women, of bring[ing] forth a better, stronger, happier, and healthier race, they speak of birth control."⁵⁰ Sanger is not trying to control population in order to have a better "race" of people, but she just wants children growing up in the right situations. It was stated, "Controlling one's fertility was for her [Sanger] a metaphor for individual initiative and responsibility, respect not only for oneself but for the future generations as well."⁵¹ If people were having children because they want children, then they are going to be loved unconditionally; however, those who become pregnant without intentions of having children might not be able to give the same nurturing environment that the other parents are able to provide for the child. Sanger was looking to better the entire community, so there was a choice for those who wanted to have children and for those who did not. She was not trying to discourage women from having children, but she was trying to give the option of choice to all women.

When Margaret Sanger used the language that she did, it was not intended to be malicious or to be seen as one race is better than another. She speaks with intentions of making a better living situation for all newborns and their mothers. She wanted women to be safe from economic turmoil that was caused by unplanned pregnancies, and physically she knew that abortions were detrimental to a woman. She knew that pregnancies were a lot more dangerous than the birth control pill that women could be using instead of getting abortions.⁵² She even quotes herself, "Possibly drastic and Spartan methods may be forced upon society if it continues complacently to encourage the chance and chaotic breeding."⁵³ Sanger is criticized for this statement because it is used to show that she was encouraging and advocating the eugenics movement through her own. Sanger did not have these intentions at all though; she wanted a better society with willing parents. Abortions were used for the women who had gotten pregnant by "chance" and this was a "drastic" method that had been "forced upon society." Sanger wanted to end abortions and end these pregnancies that were not wanted. With birth control, she could advocate for a better society because she was promoting better parents and happier women; she was not promoting a eugenic society.

Esther Katz, the editor of the publications of Sanger's papers, suggested that, "The textual evidence reveals that Sanger did not rationalize her support for birth control on racist grounds, that she never advocated genocidal policies aimed at racial, ethnic, or religious groups, and that in fact she believed that access to birth control would benefit, not eliminate, minority populations."⁵⁴ Katz is considered an expert at what she does with historical documents. She is

able to analyze the original works and determine intentions. As someone who has spent countless hours on analyzing Sanger, she concluded that Sanger was never part of the eugenic campaign or never wanted a certain population of people to decrease or be controlled.

Sanger did not even consider using the eugenics movement for her campaign because she knew that she would receive backlash from a large portion of the public. To begin with, the eugenics community did not support the legalization of birth control. Sanger was even going to attack the view of the eugenics movement, but she was told that she would need them in her campaign. When focused on Sanger, "She was neither an apologist for marriage nor a eugenicist, but her relationship to both feminism and the eugenics movement was complex...cooperation [with eugenicists] did not reach beyond additional justifications for spreading contraceptive practice."⁵⁵ Sanger's name is only attached to the eugenics movement by association. She was never a eugenicist, only a woman fighting for women's rights.

Though Sanger was criticized for upholding eugenic ideals, she clearly expressed her concerns for all mothers and women, not just women of a certain race. Sanger recognized that, for the most part, black women were poorer, which meant that they did not have access to birth control. She saw that these women had more health issues, because of so many pregnancies with no medical help for them.⁵⁶ Sanger knew that all women were at risk by not having access to birth control, so she wanted all women to have the opportunity to use birth control if they wanted. Sanger was not concerned with promoting one race over another one. Sanger commented on a case in *The Pittsburgh Courier* of an African American couple who adopted the husband's interracial child. She explained how America was flawed by the way that blacks were treated; "As for the child's future in America, all of us who have lived in European countries know that there is less racial prejudice and more equality for negroes, but the love of parents will compensate the child for our national failure."⁵⁷ Margaret Sanger recognized that African Americans were discriminated against, and here she advocated for them to be treated as equals. She knew the flaws of the United States and did not uphold the prejudices held against blacks. Sanger did not uphold the ideals of the eugenics community.

Margaret Sanger did not just use eugenics language in an effort to gather support, but she also used motherhood as a driving point for her campaign. Sanger wanted birth control to be available to all women in the United States, but in order to get that point, she first held a stance on birth control becoming available to mothers. Birth control was viewed by the public as a topic that should not be discussed or even considered. Sanger knew that she could get

more support, however, if she made the movement about mothers instead of the use of birth control. As Buchanan points out, "By carefully cultivating a maternal framework for her cause, she severed contraception from its radical, illegal, immoral connotations and transformed it into a serious, compelling, and respectable issue for public debate and advocacy."⁵⁸ When Sanger changed the outlook of the campaign, she also helped her image as a radical as well, which improved her efforts and the movement.⁵⁹ Sanger transformed her movement to make it something that could be considered.

Up until the point of making the movement about mothers, Sanger had not gained a lot of support because the topic was taboo. In her article "Birth Control- A Parents' Problem or Woman's?" Sanger suggests that, "No woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother," and that, "Birth control is woman's problem. The quicker she accepts it as hers and hers alone, the quicker will society respect motherhood."⁶⁰ Sanger did not want to make birth control available just to mothers, but when she used motherhood as being associated with birth control, she was able to advocate for birth control without so much backlash.

Sanger was able to say the right things in order to gain support from a wide variety of groups in the United States. She appealed to a wealthy eugenics community, as well as a community of mothers, along with the individuals who respected the work of mothers as well. Even though Sanger was fighting a woman's movement solely, she knew that she could not just campaign on that idea. Birth control was such a controversial topic. Half of Sanger's battle was just making birth control something that could be talked about.

Sanger was able to persuade the public on birth control, but this did not mean that her goals for her movement ever changed. Sanger always thought that women deserved the same sexual freedoms as men enjoyed. She wanted to help women achieve equal opportunities.⁶¹ Equality for women was her main objective. Sanger believed that men and women were held to different standards sexually, and she did not agree with those views. She argued that women should have the same sexual freedom as men without being scared of becoming pregnant.

Margaret Sanger knew the consequences of her campaign before she even started. She wanted to do something to make a difference in order for women to gain total control of their body. She wanted to be an advocate and make a change. In a speech she said, "We read too much. We listen too much. We live too little. We act too little... I have been gagged, I have been suppressed, I have been arrested, I have been hauled off to jail. Yet every time, more people have

listen to me, more have protested, more have lifted their own voices, more have responded with courage and bravery.”⁶² Sanger made a difference in her fight for birth control. She was not scared of the criticisms she faced, nor the assumptions that were made against her. She was willing to face these oppositions because she was able to move people into action.⁶³ Sanger said herself, “It silences me, but it makes millions of others talk about me, and the cause in which I live.”⁶⁴

Sanger changed the lives of women with her advocacy for birth control. She made great progress in the United States in order to help get birth control legalized. In 1936, a United States appeals court case, *U.S. v. One Package* ruled in favor of helping Sanger’s efforts. The case was centered on ideas that contraception was imported from Japan to the United States and a physician, Dr. Hannah Stone, was distributing the birth control in one of Sanger’s clinics. The decision of the case made it legal for doctors to prescribe and hand out birth control. During this decision, the court was focused more on women’s health rather than morals that had been running the country.⁶⁵ McFarlane says that if, “those who enacted the Comstock law known of the dangers of pregnancy and the usefulness of contraception that was available sixty years later, they might not have outlawed all contraception as obscene.”⁶⁶

Sanger had really impacted the United States and modifications to the thoughts on birth control were steadily changing in favor of Sanger’s outlooks. Sanger continued to see success in her campaign because by 1937, statistics showed that seventy-one percent of Americans were in favor of the use of birth control for married couples.⁶⁷ Even though this was specific to married women, it was still a giant step in the right direction for Sanger. She was able to educate the public on an issue that plagued the country in the past. Birth control was not only being talked about but was actually being accepted by many Americans on some level.

By 1942 the Planned Parenthood Federation of America was founded which was another one of Sanger’s successes.⁶⁸ Sanger also saw her advocacy for birth control working in a case in 1965 *Griswold v. Connecticut*. This case overturned law that prohibited the use of birth control by any woman, married or not. This was the first time that a federal grant was made for family planning.⁶⁹ Sanger witnessed huge breakthroughs in America by fighting for what she believed in. Slowly, her goals for the birth control movement were achieved. Sanger died the following year in 1966, but she left behind a lasting and powerful legacy.

Margaret Sanger was a fighter and an advocate for women’s rights. She wanted women to be in control of their bodies with all aspects of life. She thought

that women did not have the same rights to their bodies as men had. Sanger believed that birth control would have a lasting impact on America and would be a useful tool that every woman should have access to. She was willing to be criticized by the public and despised by many. She advocated for birth control by appealing to different interest groups; even though her campaign was not about eugenics or mothers, she still used these ideas in order for her women's rights campaign to take off. She never took "no" for an answer or let critics get in her way; she was on a mission to legalize birth control for all women and was not going to let anything stop her.

Without appealing to the eugenics community, Sanger would not have been successful in her efforts to legalize birth control. Though Sanger never believed in eugenic ideals, she did use their community in order to gain support for her own cause. Sanger never wanted to advocate for the eugenics movement, and she never did. All of her efforts were specifically focused on birth control. Sanger never got discouraged or strayed away from her ultimate goal, despite negative

views she received from the public. Rossi says it best when she says, "Millions of us [women] live fuller and more rewarding lives because of her [Sanger's] work, as have two generations of women in this century."⁷⁰ Thanks to Margaret Sanger's dedication, desire, determination, and hard work, women's lives have been forever changed.

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