

## Birth Control in America: The Career of Margaret Sanger

*David M. Kennedy*

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**David M. Kennedy : Birth Control in America: The Career of Margaret Sanger** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Birth Control in America: The Career of Margaret Sanger:

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Three StarsBy Drew Whitakerfair condition2 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Everyone Needs to ReadBy Shelly StrohmNot many people know who Margaret Sanger is! This wonderful book introduces us to a woman who dedicated herself to giving women rights that we now take for granted. A must read!!!!26 of 42 people found the following review helpful. Hero for Women's RightsBy Chef RachelBirth Control in America: The Career of Margaret Sanger. By David M. Kennedy. 320 pp. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1970. \$30.David Kennedy is the McLachlan Professor of History at Stanford University and a Pulitzer Prize-winning author. Reflecting his interdisciplinary training in American Studies, which combined the fields of history, literature, and economics, Professor Kennedy's scholarship is notable for its integration of economic and cultural analysis with social and political history.Professor Kennedy teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses in the history of the twentieth-century United States, American political and social thought, American foreign policy,American literature, and the comparative development of democracy in Europe and America.He has had ten books published to date and written over twenty articles with two on Margaret Sanger. He has received numerous awards including the John Gilmary Shea Prize (for Birth Control in America: The Career of Margaret Sanger, 1970 and the Bancroft Prize (for Birth Control in America), 1971.His 1970 book, Birth Control in America: The Career of Margaret Sanger, embraced the medical, legal, political, and religious dimensions of the subject and helped to pioneer the emerging field of women's history. It is a highly critical study of Sanger's pre-World

War II career that can still be appreciated by readers in today's society. It is not a true autobiography of Margaret Sanger but a chronological listing and explanation of the events that occurred involving the American birth control movement which she was a crusader for. To fully understand Sanger's involvement in the birth control movement the author lets us know who Margaret Sanger was and the events that caused her to become a leading birth control advocate, feminist, and activist. Margaret Sanger was born in 1879 in Corning, New York, one of eleven children of Irish-American parents. Her mother was Catholic, her father a radical follower of the freethinker Robert Ingersoll and single-taxer Henry George. Sanger later attributed the family's lack of prosperity and her mother's death at forty-nine to her parents' having had so many children. The inequality she observed between them stimulated her lifelong social activism. Margaret, with help from her sisters, attended Claverack College, after which she went to nursing school. She did not immediately use her medical training because, she later wrote, William Sanger "pressured" her into marrying and leaving school in 1902. William Sanger, an artist and architect, moved the family (soon to include three children) to suburban Westchester. While he commuted to New York, Margaret grew restless as a result of her isolation and full-time housekeeping. In 1910 the Sangers moved back to Manhattan, and Margaret began working as a visiting nurse on the Lower East Side. She became active in radical politics, joining the Socialist party and working with the Industrial Workers of the World in supporting several militant strikes. From this network she absorbed feminist ideas and came to agree with Emma Goldman that women had a right to control their sexual and reproductive lives. Her work as a nurse with the poor further convinced her that birth control was vital to women's health and freedom. In 1912 she began to write and speak on sexual and health issues under socialist auspices and was encouraged by her enthusiastic reception. The censorship of one of her columns by the U.S. Post Office in 1913 brought her more publicity. In 1914 she published several issues of the *Woman Rebel*, a radical feminist newspaper, and *Family Limitation*, a pamphlet intended for mass distribution and containing explicit instructions for contraception. A warrant was issued for her arrest, and she fled to Europe, where she studied with Havelock Ellis a sexual psychologist. She returned to the United States in 1915 to find a nationwide birth-control movement under way; the charges against her were dropped. In 1916 she and her sister Mrs. Evelyn Byrne, who was also a trained nurse, and a third woman, Fania Mindell established a birth-control clinic in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn as an act of civil disobedience, since providing birth control remained illegal. Clinics were now opening throughout the country, in defiance of the laws against them, and attracted many clients. Sanger became increasingly angered by the Left-wing party's refusal to make birth control a priority and decided on a strategy of making legalization of contraception a single-issue campaign. Distancing herself from her left-wing friends, she now sought support from physicians and academic eugenicists. Their influence replaced that of the feminist and socialist movements, then in retreat, and Sanger sometimes used eugenic arguments for birth control that it could help reduce the birth rate of "inferiors." In 1921 she established the American Birth Control League, a national lobbying group, which became Planned Parenthood in 1942. Very much needing personal recognition, Sanger thought of birth control as her own invention and her leadership as irreplaceable. Her aggressive campaigning, however, did play a large part in the legalization of contraception by many states between the 1920s and 1960s. This movement was not the true success she had fought for, because contraception became understood, not as a woman's right, but as a medical matter requiring a doctor's prescription. This book was extremely well written, well researched, and well organized. The book was fair to the material it was interpreting. The author points out that "despite all her defects of posture and policy, Margaret Sanger, it could be argued, had been indispensable to the ultimate success of her cause. Mrs. Sanger then slipped quietly from the position of leadership after twenty-five years. So effectively had she educated society that it seemed no longer to need her." This book held my interest all the way to the end. It reinforces my belief that Margaret Sanger should be considered a hero for women's rights. This book is a real contribution to the subject of birth control and to Sanger and helped me understand Margaret Sanger more as a person and a female. Rachel Dvorkin Roosevelt University Schaumburg, IL