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THE USE OF THE BIRTH CONTROL MOVEMENT AS A EUGENIC'S WEAPON
1920's-1960's

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THE USE OF THE BIRTH CONTROL MOVEMENT AS A EUGENIC'S WEAPON, 1920's-1960's

While Margaret Sanger made great strides in the crusade for legalization and open access to birth control for women, groups paired her work with ideologies such as Social Darwinism to arm the eugenics movement throughout the Twentieth-century. The eugenics movement was a culmination of racism and newly found scientific theories which led a crusade to purify the American population through reproductive cherry-picking on the basis of race. One of the primary ways that this group attempted to weed out “undesirable” races within the American population was through birth control as well as sterilization. These two movements - birth control and eugenics - while originally separate, collided between the 1920's and the 1960's and resulted in the use of birth control to reduce the reproduction of African Americans as well as the poor working class within the United States.¹

Margaret Sanger jumped onto the scene as a prominent birth control activist in the 1910's, writing for various publications at the beginning of the decade. For a publication named *Call*, Sanger wrote a series of articles titled “What Every Girl Should Know,” which discussed

¹ Ian Dowbiggin, ““A Rational Coalition”: Euthanasia, Eugenics, and Birth Control in America, 1940–1970,” *Journal of Policy History*, 14: 3 (2002), 224.

sexually transmitted diseases as well as topics concerning feminine hygiene.² This series attracted much attention to the fledgling radical activist as it regarded topics that were taboo. While Sanger's editorials had much to do with contraception information and women's knowledge and access to reproductive healthcare, her surroundings influenced her writing on other "radical" topics in support of several other activists who later helped maintain the movement while she was overseas. Her first husband, William Sanger, connected Margaret to prominent activists or radicals who she befriended such as Emma Goldman and Eugene V. Debs. Goldman and Debs became prominent figures in nurturing the movement throughout the middle of the decade, along with various IWW leaders.³

With the launch of her own publication, *Woman Rebel*, in 1914, Sanger explained that women ought "to look the whole world in the face with a go-to-hell look in the eyes; to speak and act in defiance of convention... It will also be the aim of the *Woman Rebel* to advocate the prevention of contraception and to impart such knowledge in the columns of this paper."⁴ Due to Sanger's creation and distribution of her publication via postal services, Sanger violated the 1873 Comstock Law, which prohibited the mailing, transportation, or importation of obscenities with a specific focus on information "preventing contraception."⁵ While the prosecution prepared a case

² David M. Kennedy, *Birth Control in America : The Career of Margaret Sanger* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 16.

³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴ Margaret Sanger, *Woman Rebel*, 1:1 (March 1914), 10.

⁵ 18 U.S. Code § 1461: Mailing obscene or crime-inciting matter; 18 U.S. Code § 1462: Importation or transportation of obscene matters; 19 U.S. Code § 1305: Immoral articles; importation prohibited.

against Sanger for the charges concerning *Woman Rebel*, Sanger secretly printed 100,000 copies of a pamphlet titled “Family Limitations” which revealed contraception information that Sanger had obtained in France. Sanger was indicted under various statutes of the Comstock Law and fled to the United Kingdom to evade the charges and continue her research and work which decades later culminated into the oral contraceptive.⁶ During this period of time, the American birth control movement persevered, but continued at a slower rate. Many of the radicals that Sanger befriended like Goldman and Debs as well as others like Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, an IWW organizer, sympathized and contributed to the movement.⁷ These political figures maintained correspondance with Margaret Sanger and spread information on the topic to their followers which kept the movement alive in the United States until Sanger returned.⁸ While these radical leaders kept the political movement alive, it became increasingly obvious that the birth control movement was not going to be a movement of radicalism nor could the working class be primary support for Margaret Sanger’s work. Caroline Nelson, an IWW organizer, precisely discussed that, “it is almost impossible to interest the workers... They are the people who don’t need the information and never did, and how we are going to get it to the workers is the problem I constantly harp on.”⁹ This embodied the future of the birth control movement and the class that held the true power to have made change. Despite “all the support the radicals gave to birth

⁶ Kennedy, 26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Caroline Nelson to Margaret Sanger*, Margaret Sanger Papers - Library of Congress, June 12, 1915 found in Kennedy, 75.

control, the movement was not destined to serve their ambitions... The reluctance of the working class and the eagerness of the middle class to take up the cause of birth control became clearer as the movement progressed.”¹⁰ Instead, in New York, 1915, The Birth Control League of America was established by a culmination of upper-middle class women. While Margaret Sanger did not support the organization directly, she recognized that it publicized the lack of access to contraception and the prosecution for those who advertised such information. Additionally, she did commend the institutions use of the term “birth control” that Margaret Sanger coined during her time overseas. However, the Birth Control League of America “purposely excluded from their ranks the extreme radicals associated with birth control, notably Emma Goldman. They directed their appeal to the wealthy and conservative...”¹¹ This provisional coalition of women (and a handful of men) set a precedent of which class of women held power within the movement. This created a dangerous power structure between disadvantaged women (immigrants, lower socioeconomic classes, people of color) and white upper-middle class men and women. While the radicals made many great strides, the Birth Control League of America cemented the power of the movement in the hands of the white upper middle class which outlined a connection to the eugenics movement.

Once the charges against Sanger were dropped and she returned to the United States in October 1915, Sanger decided to produce a contraception propaganda campaign that aimed to convince the public why birth control was practical, desirable, and solved other societal issues that plagued the nation. Sanger argued that “birth control would eradicate poverty and its

¹⁰ Kennedy, 75-76.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

consequences. If the individual family and the nation achieved abundance by restricting their numbers... all manners of social evils--insanity, crime, unemployment, slums, and prostitution--would disappear.”¹² In the name of this campaign, Sanger veered away from her more radical, socialist roots and those who helped support the movement while she had fled. This is seen when Sanger wrote in 1918: “all our problems are the result of overbreeding among the working class.”¹³ By scapegoating the working class for symptoms of poverty, Sanger appealed to those who were bothered by this growing “radical” class. This updated perspective ensured that “the artificial restriction of fertility was seen as an instrument with which the dominant class could check threatened social disruption... in order [for] any social reform, to be successful, [it] had to be administered by and for the ‘fashionable’ middle class.”¹⁴ Sanger turned to the frustrated upper middle class at the end of the decade as support for the birth control movement while subsequently, another movement was on the rise amongst this strata of American society.

While Sanger launched her birth control campaign, there was a changing mindset across American society by the twenties. Due to an increase in scientific theory preceding the decade, and social erosion of strict and hard-handed religion, people began to test new ideas and compare them with the existing ones. While the theory of evolution and social darwinism were being questioned by dedicated religious followers, the viability and security of religion was being

¹² *Margaret Sanger speech to Fabian Society Meeting*, Margaret Sanger Papers - Library of Congress, July 5, 1915 found in Kennedy, 109-110.

¹³ Margaret Sanger, “Morality and Birth Control,” *Birth Control Review* 2:2 (February-March 1918), 14.

¹⁴ Kennedy, 113.

questioned by new scientific findings. This newfound scientific explosion of the early twentieth century led many people to “believe that science, especially Darwinist biology, trumped all orthodox religious creeds, promising to reveal progressively new truths about the natural world that rendered all established theological doctrines questionable.”¹⁵ This was coupled with doctrines of “rugged individualism” that culminated a group of primarily secular scientists who believed, “birth control, and eugenic sterilization were causes that seemed to offer this form of self-fulfillment and ensure genuine social progress in an age that many American liberals thought was wracked with crisis.”¹⁶ This line of thinking continued to permeate throughout the twentieth-century and was much of the reasoning to why eugenicists looked towards Margaret Sanger and the birth control movement as an enforcement mechanism.

As Sanger noted in the February, 1919 issue of *Birth Control Review*,

Before eugenicists and others who are laboring for racial betterment can succeed, they must first clear the way for Birth Control. Like advocates of Birth Control, the eugenicists, for instance, are seeking to assist the race towards the elimination of the unfit. Both are seeking a single end but they lay emphasis upon different methods ... We who advocate Birth Control, on the other hand, lay all our emphasis upon stopping not only the reproduction of the unfit but upon stopping all reproduction when there is not economic means of providing proper care for those who are born in health... Eugenists imply or insist that a woman's first duty is to the state; we contend that her duty to herself is her first duty...¹⁷

¹⁵ Dowbiggin, 225; Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (New York, 1997), 33-34, 116-21; Paul K. Conkin, *When All the Gods Trembled: Darwinism, Scopes, and American Intellectuals* (Lanham, Md., 1998).

¹⁶ Dowbiggin, 226.

¹⁷ Alexander Sanger, “Eugenics, Race, and Margaret Sanger Revisited: Reproductive Freedom for All?” *Hypatia*, 22:2 (2007), 213-214.

While Sanger outlined the differences of the two movements, she also highlighted two important aspects of the birth control movement and the eugenics movement. First, she clearly stated that, “Before eugenists and others who are laboring for racial betterment can succeed, they must first clear the way for Birth Control.” Her blatant recognition that birth control was foundational to eugenics and that both movements seek “to assist the race towards the elimination of the unfit,” beckons the question of how invested Sanger personally was in eugenics and how her movement impacted the secondary movement¹⁸.

While this question of Sanger’s personal motives for the unionization of the two movements are still debated, it is widely accepted that, “Sanger adopted eugenics more out of political expediency than personal belief--although her beliefs undoubtedly did lean that way.”¹⁹ While “Sanger marketed herself and her movement as, at times, liberal, leftist, Socialist, and progressive... she supported and made use of the increasingly elitist views of the eugenicists working in the United States and England.”²⁰ Along with Sanger’s support of these views, she personally participated in these ideologies as a member of the Association for Voluntary Sterilization and the American Eugenics Society.²¹ In consideration of the various perspectives, this left Sanger’s personal motives somewhat unclear and difficult to pin down. However, it is

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹Aimee Armande Wilson, "Modernism, Monsters, and Margaret Sanger," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 59:2 (2013), 245.

²⁰ Claire M. Roche, “Reproducing the Working Class: Tillie Olsen, Margaret Sanger, and American Eugenics,” *Evolution and Eugenics in American Literature and Culture, 1880–1940: Essays on Ideological Conflict and Complicity*. Ed. Lois A. Cuddy and Claire M. Roche. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003), 262.

²¹Wilson, 246.

clear that Sanger recognized that there were underlying similarities in the birth control and eugenics movement as well as the fact that eugenicists understood that birth control was necessary for the success of the eugenics movement, which could be capitalized upon by Sanger.

As one movement progressed, so did the other. In 1921, Margaret Sanger established the American Birth Control League which picked up where the Birth Control League of America left off. Sanger continued to spread her birth control campaign through this institution via pamphlets, speaking tours, and connections with other birth control activists. During this same time period, eugenicists caught interest in the movement. In a January 1921 article from the *Eugenics Review*, which covered and discussed the prior October 19, 1920 Eugenics Education Society meeting, an anonymous attendant and member expressed that,

The alternative is to accept birth control and encourage its spread downwards with a view to reducing the fertility of the less efficient classes. I wish to urge, with all the earnestness of which I am capable, that this is the right course for the eugenicist to take. The arguments in its favour appear to me to be overwhelming.

1. I believe it to be practicable.
2. It is a continuation and natural development of the present movement; i.e., it is a going forward and not turning back; progress instead of re-action.²²

Not only was the birth control movement noticed by a prominent pro-eugenic publication, but the author advocated for the combination of the two movements in order to secure the goals of eugenics. Additionally, the member wrote,

In conclusion I wish to submit that in the birth control movement, if wisely directed, and if properly used... we have a most valuable eugenic instrument, probably the most valuable at our disposal. It will indeed be a misfortune if eugenicists fail to recognize its value... so long as the less efficient neglect it--to the detriment (from the eugenic point of view) of the race... The possibility of being able to control his fertility is one of the most momentous discoveries made by human being.²³

²² "Birth Control: A Discussion," *Eugenics Review*, 12:4 (January 1921), 293.

²³ *Ibid.*, 294.

The obvious connection between the two movements was solidified and expressly benefitted the eugenics movement if the tool was used and exploited correctly. While eugenicists recognized that they had a powerful enforcement mechanism for their movement, they needed to gain numbers or influential members in order for their initiatives to be successful or more broadly addressed. Therefore, in 1922, the American Eugenics Society was founded due to high demand following the Second International Conference on Eugenics which was held in New York.²⁴ The founders included Madison Grant, Harry H. Laughlin, Irving Fisher, Henry Fairfield Osborn, and Henry Crampton, but the organization gained great popularity through notable figures such as J.P. Morgan, Jr., Mrs. Mary Duke Biddle, Margaret Sanger, and John H. Kellogg.²⁵ With Margaret Sanger as a member of this organization, the relationship between the birth control movement and the eugenics movement was cemented.

By 1923, Sanger had gained enough public support around the topic of birth control so that she was then able to open the first legal birth control clinic. The clinic was named the Birth Control Clinical Research Bureau and it provided information as well as access to contraception to women of all social stratas. After she successfully opened her birth control clinic in New York, she participated in various speaking tours and organized a handful of conferences to discuss the future of the birth control movement. The Sixth International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference of 1925 was one of her more successful stops on her speaking tours.

²⁴ Curators of the University of Missouri, "American Eugenics Society," *Controlling Heredity: The American Eugenics Crusade 1870-1940* (Columbia: University of Missouri Library, 2012), 18.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

This conference was a stand-out because “Sanger deliberately encouraged the participation of eugenics experts... [it] was well attended and received heavy press coverage, but also demonstrated Sanger’s inability to control her own creation.”²⁶ Ultimately, “the narrative got away from Sanger before she had a chance to realize what was happening. Thus, [the] claim that Sanger ‘was either unable or unwilling to recognize the complicated nature of the association’ between eugenics and birth control is at least partly true.”²⁷ Simultaneously, eugenists were invigorated by the 1925 Scopes Trial. This trial in which science directly combatted religion, William Bryan’s hard-line defense using the Bible made the zealous religious followers and the idea of fundamentalism look simple and fallible. The trial embodied the tension between zealous religious Americans and the more secularized scientific community, in which each side clutched closer to their ideas.²⁸ The participation of prominent eugenics experts at Margaret Sanger’s Sixth International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference, pointed to evidence eugenists revitalizing the movement by continuing it through the vehicle of birth control.

Shortly after, in 1928, Margaret Sanger became the president of the American Birth Control League which she established almost a decade earlier. Additionally, by 1930, the American Eugenics Society had gained a significant following and had over 1,000 members.²⁹ This status allowed her to launch her newest campaign which, as critics claimed, dangerously crossed over into the eugenics movement. Starting in 1930, once Sanger had gained more power

²⁶ Wilson, 445.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 446.

²⁸ Dowbiggin, 233.

²⁹ *Controlling Heredity*, 18.

in the organization, she was able to direct attention to the growing crisis in the South in which African Americans were entrenched in poverty with evermore increasing birth rates but continued poor quality of life. She began by sending “field workers into the rural South to establish birth control services in poor communities and conduct research. She sought to test various contraceptive jellies and foam powders to see if they could effectively be used without a diaphragm, which would be cheaper and easier for poor women to use.”³⁰ Birth control activists saw an ideal opportunity to incorporate their movement into the bustling and widely popular New Deal programs in which they could then get local, state, or federal funding. Therefore, “[these] initiatives were designed, in part, to demonstrate to government bureaucrats... that contraceptive clinics were essential in impoverished Southern communities and could be successfully duplicated in other regions.”³¹ Sanger’s efforts proved to be successful as by 1937, North Carolina was the first of the southern states to incorporate contraception services into their public healthcare program. Shortly after, six other southern states followed North Carolina’s lead. While these new state initiatives were a success for the birth control movement, issues of segregated healthcare in the South remained an issue of concern in which Sanger still saw a need for continued contraception education and distribution.³²

In 1939, Sanger officially launched a campaign, along with Mary Woodward Reinhart, a secretary from the Birth Control League of America, to educate African-Americans in the South

³⁰ Peter C. Engelman, "Birth Control or Race Control? Sanger and the Negro Project," *Margaret Sanger Papers Project Newsletter*, 16:28 (2001), 30.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

on birth control. The project was known as the “Negro Project,” and together they created a report titled “Birth Control and the Negro.” While this project may have started with the best of intentions, the addition of Reinhart on this campaign ensured that much of the report was carefully drafted so that the program could appeal to both eugenisists and progressive thinkers alike. Consequently, the report stated that

‘[N]egroes present the great problem of the South,’ as they are the group with ‘the greatest economic, health and social problems,’ and outlined a practical birth control program geared toward a population characterized as largely illiterate and that ‘still breed carelessly and disastrously,’ a line borrowed from a June 1932 *Birth Control Review* article by W.E.B. DuBois.³³

While the report caught the attention of investors and beneficiaries, after the program received \$20,000 from Albert Lasker, investors took control out of Sanger’s hands in which the project took a turn. While Sanger avidly argued that, “I do not believe... that this project should be directed or run by white medical men. The Federation should direct it with the guidance and assistance of the colored group; perhaps, particularly and specifically formed for the purpose.”³⁴ With this perspective, the project even gained support from portions of the African American community as seen by a letter written by John W. Mitchell, an African American Farm Security Administration worker in North Carolina. Mitchell wrote to Sanger that “None of us want ‘Race Suicide’ but ‘Planned Parent-Hood’ I think is the logical thing to do. I should appreciate you

³³ *Ibid.*, Albert Lasker, "Birth Control and the Negro," *Lasker Papers* (New York: University of Columbia Libraries, July 1939) found in Engelman, 30.

³⁴ *Margaret Sanger to Gamble*, Margaret Sanger Papers - Library of Congress, 17:514, Nov. 26, 1939 found in Johanna Schoen, *Choice & Coercion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 51; *Margaret Sanger to Robert Seibels*, Margaret Sanger Papers - Library of Congress, 17:891, Feb. 12, 1940 found in Schoen, 51.

sending me a list of Negro physicians in North Carolina.”³⁵ However, “Sanger's plan for an educational campaign to precede the demonstration project lost out to the white medical and public relations men.”³⁶ Continually, the new leadership for the program under the donation of Albert Lasker

... saw no need for prerequisite education and propaganda and advised incorporating birth control services for blacks into a general public health program. The Birth Control Federation of America then dismissed the notion of building a community-based, black-staffed demonstration clinic that could become permanent, and instead set in motion a plan that closely resembled the vaccination caravans that swept in and out of the region.³⁷

As the program spiraled out of control various figures commented on the trajectory of the project. From a modern perspective, Hayden Ludwig, a researcher at the Capital Research Center in Washington D.C. explained, “If Progressives held Sanger to their own standards, they’d have to denounce her antiquated views—so why do they continue to applaud her? Because the Left believes that Sanger’s contributions to the pro-choice movement outweigh her racist views.”³⁸ Linda Gordon, an American feminist historian, argued that it was a “microcosm of the elitist birth-control programs whose design eliminated the possibility of popular, grassroots involvement in birth control as a cause.”³⁹ This perspective was supported by the rhetoric of the

³⁵ *John W. Mitchell to Sanger*, Margaret Sanger Papers - Sophia Smith Collection, reel S19, July 18, 1941 found in Schoen, 51.

³⁶Engelman, 30.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Hayden Ludwig, “Margaret Sanger Is a Hero to the Left. Here’s Her History of Ugly Views,” *The Daily Signal*, 6:1 (24 January 2020) 1.

³⁹ Linda Gordon, *Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right: The History of Birth Control in America* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976), 332.

various administrators of the program as well as their choices of where to expand. For instance, a local Raleigh, North Carolina newspaper article observed, “The South... is teaching birth control on tobacco road and [in] mill village alley.”⁴⁰ In response, another article cited a county health officer explaining that he did not believe his county needed birth control.⁴¹ However, the article continued that “He was asked to check his vital statistics. When he discovered that Negroes were accounting for 85 percent of the births he quickly changed his mind.”⁴² This line of thinking was echoed by Clarence Gamble, a prominent eugenicist and birth control advocate, except he took it one step further. Gamble, on the subject of teaching African Americans about birth control, said, “It impresses me as being almost like trying to get sheer animals to conform.”⁴³ Continually, Gamble explained, “The mass of Negroes, particularly in the South, still breed carelessly and disastrously, with the result that the increase among Negroes, even more than among whites, is from that population least intelligent and fit.”⁴⁴ This was the primary perspective of the white administrators and managers of the project.

From the African American viewpoint, the program was more of a mixed bag. For instance, Dorothy Ferebee, an African American physician explained that “The Negro is saddled

⁴⁰ Frank B. Gilbreth, “State Takes Lead in Birth Control Clinic of South,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 1:6 (30 June 1940), 4.

⁴¹ Don Wharton, “Birth Control: The Case for the State,” *The Atlantic*, 164 (October 1939), 465.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Gamble to Wulkop*, Clarence J. Gamble Papers - Countway Medical Library, box 7, folder 135, 26 September 1936 found in Schoen, 44.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Gordon, 332.

with problems of disease, poverty, and discrimination which menace not only his welfare, but the welfare of America. The existing medical and socio-economic problems of the Negro race are, therefore, problems of the nation.”⁴⁵ However, despite this, Dr. Midian O. Bousfield, another African American physician concluded that, “again and again white people, competent in every other particular get confused in the face of interracial endeavor. Lack of deep-seated interest usually accounts for this.”⁴⁶ The combination of the need for a nation-wide effort yet a lack of interest in the welfare of black patients resulted in what an African American social worker of the project recalled, “The expectation that black people were not able to take care of themselves. They were all illiterate, retarded.”⁴⁷ In support of this perspective, a Pittsburgh black physician saw the Negro Project as “an organized plot to cut down the Negro birthrate.”⁴⁸ While this was the prevailing viewpoint that the African American community took on the Negro Project, there were the outliers that believed that the goal of the program was not “to limit the number of Negro births in this country, but to assure the birth of more healthy babies who [would] live to grow up.”⁴⁹ While this take was within the minority in terms of African American response to the project, it was still a reaction from the community on Sanger’s program.

⁴⁵ *Ferebee Project Reports*, Margaret Sanger Papers - Sophia Smith Collection found in Schoen, 45.

⁴⁶ Midian Othello Bousfield to Michael Marks Davis, Margaret Sanger Papers - Library of Congress, 31:199, April 9 1932 found in Cathy Moran Hajo, *Birth Control on Main Street* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 119.

⁴⁷ Davis, Interview.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Simone M. Caron, “Birth Control and the Black Community in the 1960’s: Genocide or Power Politics?” *Journal of Social History*, 31: 3 (Spring 1998), 554.

⁴⁹ E. Franklin Frazier, “Birth Control for More Negro Babies,” *Negro Digest*, 3:9 (July 1945), 41.

Importantly, the original education and contraceptive campaign took on a new role with the new manager of the project under Lasker's funding. While African American women were not told very much about birth control options or the details of the contraceptive device they were to use, the project began to market sterilization as the proper mode of contraception for the community. The Negro Project and Sanger's work allowed eugenists to push sterilization amongst the poor and the racial minority under the guise of birth control.⁵⁰ This became extremely problematic when these "women in North Carolina are given contraceptive service... and then are never rechecked if even followed outside the clinic. For many there is no information about their continued use of contraception or even about the occurrence of complications or dissatisfaction."⁵¹ This program left African American women uninformed and cornered into sterilization as a method of birth control. One particular victim of this program, Mabel Scott, had been sterilized without being informed, let alone having consented under the North Carolina birth control and eugenic sterilization program. After she attempted to sue the North Carolina Eugenics Board, and lost she explained, "I wanted to do something about it... I felt like, you know, it was wrong. What they were doing was inhuman...I was powerless. I was powerless over my own body, my mind. I was powerless over everything and I still am powerless."⁵² While Sanger's project had good intentions and influenced birth control expansion

⁵⁰ Hearing Case 1, Eugenics Board - North Carolina State Archives, 28 June 1966 found in Schoen, 76.

⁵¹ "North Carolina Public Health Department Family Planning Program: Historical Background," Ellen Black Winston Papers - Jackson Library, University of North Carolina of Greensboro, box 9 (1968) 12 found in Schoen, 68.

⁵² "Mabel Scott" Interview found in Schoen, 15.

in the South, the changing hands of control over the program allowed for little long-term progress, if any, for the African American community.

After World War II had ended, and it had been discovered that Nazi Germany had passed a 1933 eugenics law that included coercive sterilization, the American eugenics movement became much more subtle.⁵³ Instead of eugenicists outright advocating for sterilization laws and projects, they depended on the guise of contraception even more than before, in order to succeed in their goals. As Sanger explained in 1951, “birth control and eugenics were part of a single project designed to bring the entrance into life and the exit of life . . . under control of reason.”⁵⁴ Additionally, Sanger expressed this sentiment in which these two movements were conjoined in 1953:

Eugenic principles . . . are basically sound in constructing a decent civilization. I speak of the unbalanced birth rate which certainly exists in this country as well as most of the English-speaking countries. It should be one of our aims to help in this regard by taking our educational work and the practice of birth control into these groups where it is most needed.⁵⁵

While this rhetoric was important to note coming from the leading birth control activist, these same ideas were shared across various organizations. For example, the Association for Voluntary Sterilization (AVS), a renowned eugenics institution, professed wide support and success for contraception as a eugenicist tool. In 1959, the executive director of the AVS said,

⁵³ Dowbiggin, 228-229.

⁵⁴ *Margaret Sanger quoted by Eleanor Dwight Jones to Mr. Churchill*, Euthanasia Society of America, Partnership for Caring Records, Box C-1, (Baltimore: April 24 1951) found in Dowbiggin, 224.

⁵⁵ *Margaret Sanger to Charles Galton Darwin*, Euthanasia Society of America, Partnership for Caring Records, Box C-22 and C-304, (Baltimore: May 19 1953) in *Ibid.*, 239.

“[C]ontraception solves the problem for those who need fertility control the most—the morons, the ignorant, the irresponsible.”⁵⁶ Due to the skepticism that Hitler’s use of eugenics in World War II brought to the post-war American public on the topic, the fervent eugenicists doubled down on their commitment to their ideals via their support for the birth control movement.

However, the eugenics movement was not able to sustain itself as the civil rights movement and various social changes shifted support away from those practices. Namely, the support of a woman’s right to choose with an emphasis on her own empowerment, a decline in faith amongst this group of scientists, as well as an advancement in scientific knowledge on hereditary genetics that disconnected race, religion, social status and the negative traits that eugenicists would assign with them, resulted in this sharp decline.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Ruth Proskauer Smith to Harry Emerson Fosdick*, Association for Voluntary Sterilization Records, Box 23, (Princeton: April 28 1959) in *Ibid.*, 229.

⁵⁷ Dowbiggin, 243.

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