



Margaret Sanger, "Birth Control and Racial Betterment," Feb 1919.

Published article. Source: *Birth Control Review*, Feb. 1919. , Library of Congress Microfilm 131:0099B .

## Birth Control and Racial Betterment

By Margaret Sanger

Before eugenists and others who are laboring for racial betterment can succeed, they must first clear the way for Birth Control. Like the advocates of Birth Control, the eugenists, for instance, are seeking to assist the race toward the elimination of the unfit. Both are seeking a single end but they lay emphasis upon different methods.

Eugenists emphasize the mating of healthy couples for the conscious purpose of producing healthy children, the sterilization of the unfit to prevent their populating the world with their kind and they may, perhaps, agree with us that contraception is a necessary measure among the masses of the workers, where wages do not keep pace with the growth of the family and its necessities in the way of food, clothing, housing, medical attention, education and the like.

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. The eugenist also believes that a woman should bear as many healthy children as possible as a duty to the state. We hold that the world is already over-populated. Eugenists imply or insist that a woman's first duty is to the state; we contend that her duty to herself is her duty to the state.

We maintain that a woman possessing an adequate knowledge of her reproductive functions is the best judge of the time and conditions under which her child should be brought into the world. We further maintain that it is her right, regardless of all other considerations, to determine whether she shall bear children or not, and how many children she shall bear if she chooses to become a mother. To this end we insist that information in regard to scientific contraceptives be made open to all. We believe that if such information is placed within the reach of all, we will have made it possible to take the first, greatest step toward racial betterment and that this step, assisted in no small measure by the educational propaganda of eugenists and members of similar schools, will be taken.

One fundamental fact alone, however, indicates the necessity of Birth Control if eugenics is to accomplish its purpose. Unless contraceptives are used, a child is likely to be born within a year of the last one. Even when the mother is exceptionally robust this frequent child-bearing is a heavy drain upon her system and nine times in ten, it is a drain upon the offspring. The mother's system has not had time to replenish itself with those elements which have been so radically diminished in bringing the child to birth, and of course it has not had time to establish that reserve stock of these same elements which are necessary to the strength and well-being of the next child. The mother's health is more than likely to be wrecked and the later children are almost sure to fall short of that nervous and muscular health which might otherwise have been theirs. Thus we hold that the fruits of the most perfect eugenic marriage are likely to be bad health in the mother and in the later children, if Birth Control is not utilized for the purpose of properly spacing the progeny.

This principle asserts itself in all of the economic layers of society but its effects may be modified to a considerable extent by those women who have the means to provide adequate care of themselves during the ante-natal period and adequate care of the child after it is born. With the great masses of the people, however, such care is either exceedingly difficult or impossible. Among the great majority of wage-workers, the frequent arrival of children means not only the wrecking of the mother's health and the physical handicapping of the child, but often the disheartening and demoralization of the father, the stunting of the children through bad living conditions and early toil, and in that generation or the next, the contributing of morons, feeble-minded, insane and various criminal types to the already tremendous social burden constituted by these unfit.

While I personally believe in the sterilization of the feeble-minded, the insane and syphilitic, I have not been able to discover that these measures are more than superficial deterrents when applied to the constantly growing stream of the unfit. They are excellent means of meeting a certain phase of the situation, but I believe in regard to these, as in regard to other eugenic means, that they do not go to the bottom of the matter. Neither the mating of healthy couples nor the sterilization of certain recognized types of the unfit touches the great problem of unlimited reproduction of those whose housing, clothing, and food are all inadequate to physical and mental health. These measures do not touch those great masses, who through economic pressure populate the slums and there produce in their helplessness other helpless, diseased and incompetent masses, who overwhelm all that eugenics can do among those whose economic condition is better.

Birth Control, on the other hand, not only opens the way to the eugenicist, but it preserves his work. Furthermore, it not only prepares the ground in a natural fashion for the development of a higher standard of motherhood and of family life, but enables the child to be better born, better cared for in infancy and better educated.

Birth Control of itself, by freeing the reproductive instinct from its present chains, will make a better race. A family subsisting upon a certain wage will naturally give better care to one or two children upon that wage than it would do four or six or eight or ten, and the two children are much less likely to have to go into child labor factories and sweat-shops than are the eight or ten. The situation is too plain for argument.

Concrete examples of the eugenic effects of Birth Control are the most convincing evidence. In Holland, where Birth Control is taught in clinics conducted by nurses specially trained for that purpose, military statistics show that the average stature of men has increased four inches in thirty years. Ninety per cent. of the men were fit for army service, while in the United States, less than 50 per cent. were.

The fighting qualities of the French poilu, his endurance, and his fitness have been the amazement of military authorities in the Great War. The present generation of Frenchmen, as everyone knows who remembers the horror with which "anti-race suicidists" greeted the French tendency to Birth Control, is the product largely of Birth Control methods.

Eugenics without Birth Control seems to us a house builded upon the sands. It is at the mercy of the rising stream of the unfit. It cannot stand against the furious winds of economic pressure which have buffeted into partial or total helplessness a tremendous proportion of the human race. Only upon a free, self-determining motherhood can rest any unshakable structure of racial betterment.

#### Subject Terms:

- "unfit" to reproduce, descriptions of
- birth control, health benefits and risks
- birth control, socio-economic benefits of
- child spacing
- eugenics, birth control and
- eugenics, MS on
- eugenics, positive
- family size, men and
- family size, MS on
- sterilization, candidates for
- sterilization, MS on
- women, freedom and rights of
- women, health of
- women, reproductive choices and decisions

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