



Written by [Lisa Shaw](#) on August 14, 2015

Margaret Sanger: Pioneering Advocate for Eugenics

As the unveiling of Planned Parenthood's latest practices continues to draw shock and outrage, its founder, Margaret Sanger (shown), has found her place in the spotlight as well. According to the Blaze and CNSNews.com, a group of black pastors has written the Smithsonian Institution asking that the bust of Mrs. Sanger be removed from the portrait gallery's "Struggle for Justice" exhibit, stating that she was "not a champion of justice." The pastors, who are part of an organization called Ministers Taking a Stand (a non-profit that promotes educational choice, family principles, and entrepreneurship), reveal that Sanger held racist, elitist views toward minorities and supported eugenics, the study of methods of improving genetic qualities by selective breeding (especially as applied to human mating).



Are they right? Did Margaret Sanger, founder of what is now the nation's largest birth control/abortion provider, indeed, have an agenda to limit the births of minorities and the genetically inferior, or was she simply a brave advocate and crusader for women's rights?

To answer these questions, a look at the woman herself is in order. Fortunately, her own words are helpful in making that determination.

Sanger was born in 1879 in Corning, New York to parents of Irish descent. Sixth of 11 children, she writes of the struggles her family and the others around her endured, primarily due, she believed, to the large number of children in the family. As she grew up, she related hardships to large families and happiness to small ones. In her autobiography, *Pioneering Advocate for Birth Control*, Sanger wrote, "Large families were associated with poverty, toil, unemployment, drunkenness, cruelty, fighting, jails; the small ones with cleanliness, leisure, freedom, light, space, sunshine." This limited perspective she gained as a child. Instead of expanding with adulthood to view life in all its truths and complexities, she remained indrawn and biased and grew the germs that only the stagnant mindset can offer.

Her marriage to William Sanger, an architect and socialist, would place Margaret amid the radicals of her day. "Our living room became a gathering place where liberals, anarchists, Socialists, and I.W.W.'s [Industrial Workers of the World] could meet," she wrote. This period of her life would prove to shape and more clearly define her beliefs and offer her the connections and encouragement necessary to begin putting her ideals into action. These experiences and connections, added with her view that "Any great concept must be present in the mass of consciousness before any one figure can tap it and set it free on its irresistible way," combined to create a force that would ultimately be foundational in the achievement of her goals.

Sanger worked tirelessly to fight against the "breeding" of too many children, which she considered "the most immoral practice of the day," according to her manifesto [Woman and the New Race](#). In this book, Sanger insists that "The immorality of large families lies not only in their injury to the members of those families but in their injury to society," asserting that not only is the large family the greatest evil



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of the day, but also the cause of other evils, including prostitution, oppressed labor, and war. Her bias, it seems, did not end with the number of children in society, but reached further to the *worth* of the child. “Birth control itself,” she insisted, “often denounced as a violation of natural law, is nothing more or less than the facilitation of the process of weeding out the unfit, of preventing the birth of defectives or of those who will become defectives.”

What criteria did Sanger consider in deciding who was either “unfit” or “defective”? Sickliness and poverty were certainly factors. Race was another. In *Woman, Morality and Birth Control*, Sanger wrote, “Birth control must lead ultimately to a cleaner race.” To bring about this “cleaner race,” Sanger sought a way to eliminate the races she considered inferior — especially blacks. In a letter to Clarence Gamble, president of the American Eugenics Research Association, Sanger addressed her fear that “the Negro population” was figuring out the plan “to exterminate” them. She wrote:

We should hire three or four colored ministers, preferably with social-service backgrounds, and with engaging personalities. The most successful educational approach to the Negro is through a religious appeal. We don’t want the word to go out that we want to exterminate the Negro population and the minister is the man who can straighten out that idea if it ever occurs to any of their more rebellious members.

It is noteworthy that today, the vast majority of Planned Parenthood’s abortion clinics are in neighborhoods that are predominantly black. The organization seems to still be following Sanger’s vision.

To bring these ideas to action, in 1923 Sanger began the Clinical Research Bureau, the first legal birth control clinic in America. A large portion of its funding came from John D. Rockefeller, Jr. — a strong advocate for population control — who also underwrote other causes for Sanger.

As Sanger continued to hammer her concepts into the conscience of the masses, birth control clinics became less appalling to the average mind. Sanger helped found the International Committee on Planned Parenthood in 1946, which evolved into the Planned Parenthood we know today.

Is it any wonder that an organization that disregards the sanctity of human life has, as its founder, a woman who viewed children as a burden to society and struggled against all odds to rid society of this “plague”?

It was, no doubt, this struggle that won Sanger her honorary place in the Smithsonian exhibit.

Photo of Margaret Sanger: AP Images



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