

Margaret Sanger and a Woman's Right to Her Body

Margaret Sanger was born in New York State in 1883. She became a nurse and worked on the Lower East Side in New York City. She opened the first birth control clinic in the United States in 1916. Because of this, she was arrested and spent thirty days in jail. During the 1920s, she frequently wrote about a woman's right to use birth control and control her own body. She believed that this was an important step toward in women's struggle for equality for in the United States.

From Woman and the New Race (1920)

The problem of birth control has arisen directly from the effort of the feminine spirit to free itself from bondage.

No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her body. No woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother.

Some women call themselves free because they can earn their own living. She who earns her own living gains a sort of freedom that is not to be undervalued. She gains food and clothing and shelter.

But the earning of her own living does not give her the development of her inner sex urge. She is still in a position to be enslaved through her reproductive powers.

She knows that she will never receive her freedom until she takes it herself. Woman must not accept; she must challenge.

- 1) Why does Margaret Sanger consider the right to use birth control essential for a woman's freedom?
- 2) Do you agree with Margaret Sanger? Why?
- 3) Why do you think these ideas were considered so controversial in the 1920s?
- 4) What do you think Margaret Sanger would say about the right to an abortion? Why?
- 5) What do you think about a woman's right to an abortion? Why?