



Margaret Sanger: A Life of Passion

Jean H. Baker

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Undoubtedly the most influential advocate for birth control even before the term existed, Margaret Sanger ignited a movement that has shaped our society to this day. Her views on reproductive rights have made her a frequent target of conservatives and so-called family values activists. Yet lately even progressives have shied away from her, citing socialist leanings and a purported belief in eugenics as a blight on her accomplishments. In this captivating new biography, the renowned feminist historian Jean H. Baker rescues Sanger from such critiques and restores her to the vaunted place in history she once held.

Trained as a nurse and midwife in the gritty tenements of New York's Lower East Side, Sanger grew increasingly aware of the dangers of unplanned pregnancy—both physical and psychological. A botched abortion resulting in the death of a poor young mother catalyzed Sanger, and she quickly became one of the loudest voices in favor of sex education and contraception. The movement she started spread across the country, eventually becoming a vast international organization with her as its spokeswoman.

Sanger's staunch advocacy for women's privacy and freedom extended to her personal life as well. After becoming a wife and mother at a relatively early age, she abandoned the trappings of home and family for a globe-trotting life as a women's rights activist. Notorious for the sheer number of her romantic entanglements, Sanger epitomized the type of "free love" that would become mainstream only at the very end of her life. That she lived long enough to see the creation of the birth control pill—which finally made planned pregnancy a reality—is only fitting.

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