

Scientific Racism: The Evolution of Birth Control into Eugenics

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“In this country, the problem of having more children than are wanted or can be adequately supported is largely confined to persons of one social group—a fact immortalized in the hyperbolic phrase, ‘The rich get richer and the poor get children.’ Traditionally and in reality it is the poor people—the working class, the lower class,—who have too many children.”¹

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century implementations of family limitation originated through the legalization of contraceptives. Claims about the necessity of limiting families and only having *wanted* children were used to justify and carry out various discriminatory and racist acts. In order to have a complete understanding of the origination of these beliefs and their justifications a history of contraceptive use is necessary; for it is the legalization of this method that leads to the popularization of such a discriminatory mentality.

Originally, the rationale of legalizing birth control was not to keep any particular class from bearing what society felt was too many children. In fact, prior to the legalization of birth control the United States focused on the idea of positive eugenics where primary interest was placed in breeding the best of humanity (e.g. intelligent, culturally talented, physical strength and skills) to constantly improve the quality of succeeding generations. The idea of too many children was non-existent and eugenicists pushed women of the “fit” class to have numerous children.² In spite of such promotions an increased use of contraceptives became evident after the Civil War and many individuals in the U.S. began to advocate for birth control to become illegal.

The crusade to abolish the use of contraceptives began in 1870 and was promoted on the grounds of immorality and obscenity by the famous New York Reformer and Vice Crusader, Anthony Comstock (1844–1915). The growing use of contraceptives was marked by issues that

¹ Rainwater, Lee. *And the Poor Get Children*. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1960), 2.

² Shapiro, Thomas M. *Population Control Politics: Women, Sterilization and Reproduction Choice*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 9.

surfaced after the Civil War; it was not until then that much of the social changes took place. Unlike before, soldiers were not content with the restraints imposed by the supervision of their family, church and community. They had experienced freedom and in an attempt to escape these constraints they began to move into the “cities, where they encountered new kinds of literature, strange new environments, and new experiences accompanied by the easy availability of alcohol and members of the opposite sex.”³ Women also contributed to such changes, they increasingly became sexually expressive and wanted to discuss and practice contraception. In addition, prostitution became a growing issue and an increasing amount of literature encouraged greater sexual freedom. These various events began to disquiet the “disapproving family members, preachers, business leaders and politicians compelling them to build a protective barrier against these obscene behaviors.”⁴

As an attempt to restrain the corrupt behaviors of society Comstock concentrated on eliminating the distribution of material containing references to either birth control or sexuality. He declared “that lust, pure and simple, was the goal of these publications, and that his mission was to stop their dissemination.”⁵ In conjunction with the beliefs expressed by Comstock were those of the Catholic Church. It felt that the use of contraceptives was an unnatural way to prevent conception leading to care free sexual relations, while self-discipline to restrain from sexual intercourse was the correct way to control conception. For this reason the church felt contraceptives should not be referred to as birth control but birth prevention which captured the

³ Blanchard, Margaret A. and John E. Semonche. (2006) “Anthony Comstock and His Adversaries: The Mixed Legacy of this Battle For Free Speech.” (11 Comm. L. & Pol’y: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc., Vol. 11 Issue 3, p317-366), 318.

⁴ Blanchard, Margaret A. and John E. Semonche. (2006) “Anthony Comstock and His Adversaries: The Mixed Legacy of this Battle For Free Speech.” (11 Comm. L. & Pol’y: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc., Vol. 11 Issue 3, p317-366), 318.

⁵ Blanchard, Margaret A. and John E. Semonche.” (2006) “Anthony Comstock and His Adversaries: The Mixed Legacy of this Battle For Free Speech. (11 Comm. L. & Pol’y: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc., Vol. 11 Issue 3, p317-366), 322.

true purpose of such methods, encouragement of lustful behavior.⁶ The Catholic Church and Comstock were very influential leaders and through their persistent and the support of the community congress passed a federal law, known as the Comstock Law (Federal Penal Code, Sec 211), in 1873. It declared that individuals were not only prohibited the use of contraceptive methods but they were not allowed to have or distribute (i.e., mail, transport or import) any book or information relating to the prevention of conception, the enforcement and punishments of this law varied by state.

Even though the movement to outlaw the use of contraceptives proved successful, it only progressed into the invigoration of counter movements. The process of making birth control unlawful had manifested awareness in birth control advocates of their rights to freedom of speech and freedom of the press. They openly argued their views on this basis resulting in the segmented alternations of the Comstock law over an extensive period. Feminists in particular had grown restless and increasingly spoke out against the laws that appeared to be keeping them prisoners. Given that birth control had officially been banned women were forced to go back to the practice of positive eugenics, which compelled them to extensive child bearing. Thomas M. Shapiro, author of the book *Population Control Politics: Women Sterilization and Reproductive Choice*, defines the intentions of such groups as these eugenicists as follows, “Male-dominated elites [who] define[d] the problem and typically [would] seek to impose the solution on women.”⁷ In many respects, the campaign for cleansing society had also been devoted to keeping women in their proper place, at home as wives and mothers.⁸ Nonetheless the efforts of

⁶ “Text of Sermon by Cardinal Hayes Denouncing Birth Control Advocates,” *The New York Times*, December 9, 1935.

⁷ Shapiro, Thomas M. *Population Control Politics: Women, Sterilization and Reproduction Choice*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 9.

⁸ Blanchard, Margaret A. and John E. Semonche. (2006) “Anthony Comstock and His Adversaries: The Mixed Legacy of this Battle For Free Speech.” (11 *Comm. L. & Pol’y: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.*, Vol. 11 Issue 3, p317-366), 350.

these individuals would not endure as women began to seek greater freedom to do as they pleased.

The many women who desired access to birth control, in spite of the law, found solutions in a number of ways; however, most simply requested contraceptive information with disregard to its illegality. This created a difficult situation for physicians who favored providing birth control information and devices. Often, for fear of arrest, “doctors were increasingly reticent to talk about birth control with anyone but long-time, trusted patients.”⁹ However, as time passed the Comstock law continued to be challenged and by the early 1900s physicians were granted the right to provide contraceptives strictly for medical reasons. “This resulted in the appearance of numerous menstrual clinics throughout the United States, which treated young women for dysmenorrheal and irregular bleeding.”¹⁰ The alternations that were occurring in the federal law increasingly allowed room for loop holes such as these. As a result, many of the issues that the illegalization of contraceptive practice originally attempted to seize continued to take place, including the practice of prostitution.

While many women relied on loop holes in the system to receive information from their physicians, others directly challenged the laws imposed by the state and its supporters. Margaret Sanger, a leading advocate of birth control in the twentieth century, openly criticized the federal law and made various bold statements. In one instance, completely aware of the consequences, she established an illegal birth control clinic in Brooklyn as a statement of her position on the issues of birth control. As a result she received a thirty day jail sentence. In spite of such occurrences Sanger continued to voice her opinions and attempted to alter much of the present

⁹ Blanchard, Margaret A. and John E. Semonche. (2006) “Anthony Comstock and His Adversaries: The Mixed Legacy of this Battle For Free Speech.” (11 Comm. L. & Pol’y: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc., Vol. 11 Issue 3, p317-3660), 350.

¹⁰ Connell, Elizabeth B. (1999) “Contraception in the Prepill Era,” *Journal of Contraception*. (Atlanta Georgia: New York, NY: Elsevier Science Inc., Vol. 59), 8S.

mentality of birth control. She strove to minimize the sexual aspects of contraception imposed by Comstock through an expression of genuine concern for women. Her interest in the health of women resulted from her experiences, “in 1911 Sanger moved to New York city, and in her capacity as a nurse began to discover the plight of poor women burdened by series of unwanted pregnancies.”¹¹ She was also aware of the upper and middle class women who suffered from enduring the standards of positive eugenics. It had become apparent that the responsibility of childbearing grew strenuous on all women, often resulting in the harm of their health or even death when child spacing was inappropriately handled. As a result, Sanger placed great emphasis on the idea that women had the right to choose not to bear children, and in 1916 turned “the defense of birth control into a free speech issue.”¹²

Even though the basis of the women’s movement begun with the idea of health and child spacing “throughout most phases, it stood for birth control and reproductive freedom as a social precondition for sexual equality.”¹³ This occurred as feminists increasingly emphasized birth control as a route to careers and higher education, which would create the opportunity of gender equality. This idea derived from the ability of child spacing, where women who held off on childbearing could also have the option to establishing a career. Sanger often addressed the importance of such issues, “I believe no nation can be free until its women have control over the power that is peculiarly theirs, I mean the power of procreation.”¹⁴ It was this ideal that struck a responsive cord among the many women who had previously been told it was their job to procreate. As wives, women had been defined by there responsibilities as a mate and a mother,

¹¹ McLaren, Angus. *A History of Contraception: From Antiquity to the Present Day*. (Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1990), 216.

¹² McLaren, Angus. *A History of Contraception: From Antiquity to the Present Day*. (Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1990), 216-217.

¹³ Shapiro, Thomas M. *Population Control Politics: Women, Sterilization and Reproduction Choice*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 12.

¹⁴ “Gandhi and Mrs. Sanger,” (November 1936) *Asia*. (698-702), 702.

and the possibility of legalizing birth control now presented a window of opportunity not previously present.

The idea of women's rights and gender equality was accompanied by the opportunities of healthier marriages. Feminists voiced that the legalization of contraceptives also provided a solution to the concerns of wives over the growing red light district. Many women who did not want to bear children would deny their husbands sexual intercourse; in turn the husband would resort to prostitutes. This became an increasing problem in many relationships. Through the use of birth control the inseparable aspects of sex and child bearing would be two distinct actions resolving the problems imposed by such issues. "This new definition—quite different from that of voluntary motherhood—understood sexual activity and reproduction as two separately justified human activities."¹⁵ Even though many, would remain apposed to such ideas, such as the Catholic Church, other leaders would modify there views. For example, the Anglican Church would endorse birth control in 1931 under specific circumstances.¹⁶ Meanwhile, Protestants and the Jews openly welcomed it.

By the mid nineteenth century, after Comstock's death, evidence of the birth control movement's success shown through. An example of the many signs that birth control was around to stay was the publicity given to various court cases in which judges argued that there was a need to spread birth control information among the poor. In the book, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America*, Linda Gordon makes specific references to two court cases in 1916. One case took place in New York and the other in Cleveland, in both cases the women had been accused of theft. However, both defendants argued that they had stolen to feed their children and were released by sympathetic judges. "The first got a suspended

¹⁵ Gordon, Linda. "The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America." (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974. Reprint, Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 128.

¹⁶ "Birth Control Given Limited O.K. of Church," *Cleveland News*, August 14, 1931.

sentence and the second was acquitted; both judges argued in their opinions, delivered from the bench, for spreading birth control information among the poor.”¹⁷ The more that birth control use became public the more it became acceptable, by 1965 the U.S. Supreme Court would legalize the use of birth control for married people and in 1970 the last of the laws were repealed.

While success was indeed at hand, once again a new series of problems presented themselves. In the past Sanger had engaged in a friendly argument with Gandhi in which she admitted that the legalization of birth control could be manipulated into wrongful use, “Everything good can be misused with out control and thus become harmful.” In a sense the good intentions of the women rights movement shifted when signs of eugenic involvement became evident once again. At first evidence of such involvement occurred in what appeared to be harmless occasions. For example, in November 1921 the American Birth Control League (ABCL), founded by Margaret Sanger, added to the masthead “Birth Control: To Create a Race of Thoroughbreds” which reflected the increased focus on eugenics as an aspect of family planning.¹⁸ However, the increased attention on such articles resulted in the evolution from the use of contraceptives as a means for regulating birth, into an attempt to keep the basic genetic stock from being corrupted. This redirection of birth control placed primary interest in controlling the birth rates of the working class and the idea of women rights exited the picture.

The articles being published by such organizations as ABCL aimed at communicating to women that the use of contraceptives would not solely lead to the gender equality, but what became known as race suicide, a phrase referring to the declining birth rate of the high class

¹⁷ Gordon, Linda. *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America.* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974. Reprint, Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 127.

¹⁸Engs, Ruth Clifford. *The Eugenics Movement: An Encyclopedia.* (Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 2005), 4.

population and steady increases in the working???? I wasn't sure what I needed to do. As the feminist altered their concentration from procreation to education the birth rates of the upper and middle class women began to decrease. Without access to these contraceptive methods the working class continued to procreate at the same rate, evidently conceiving a greater number of children than the upper and middle class women. Soon after, around the mid-twentieth century, some eugenicists began to see birth control as a measure to reduce high birthrate among paupers, immigrants, and the unfit; a phrase used to evoke an image of physically and morally weak people.¹⁹ As a result, they seized the opportunity to use contraceptives as a tool to control what they referred to as a degenerate population.

Eugenicists used census and statistical data to show the public that the steadily growing number of the poor was indeed a reason for alarm, and to prove that it was not merely an opinion but a fact proven by statistics. The first comprehensive statistical case against race suicide was made in 1891 by Francis Amasa Walker, a noted academic economist. As superintendent of the “1870 and 1880 U.S. censuses, she observed a declining birth rate among white native-born Americans and a steadily high birth rate among the foreign-born.”²⁰ However, it wasn't until decades later that such information was given explicit attention and used to inform the public “about alleged social disorganization spread by the rapid growth of racial and ethnic minorities.”²¹ In addition, the cases which had previously been posed by judges to spread contraceptives to the poor population continued to add to such views imposed by statistical reports. In 1928 a judge simply stated to the defendant, “You will have to learn not to have any

¹⁹ Engs, Ruth Clifford. *The Eugenics Movement: An Encyclopedia*. (Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 2005), 4.

²⁰ Gordon, Linda. “*The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America*.” (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974. Reprint, Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 88.

²¹ Shapiro, Thomas M. *Population Control Politics: Women, Sterilization and Reproduction Choice*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 12-13.

more children until you can provide for them.”²² He continued by declaring that if the lady remained on the path of swindling, he was certain that when her child grew up he would go to the penitentiary. Such events insisted on the attention of the public and on the need to find resolutions for the growing working class and its criminals.

As the feminists became increasingly aware of the situation expressed by the eugenicists and other professionals they took matters into their own hands. They “began to popularize the idea that poor people had a moral obligation to restrict the size of their families, because large families created a drain on the taxes and charity expenditures of the wealthy and because poor children were less likely to be superior.”²³ To take this idea a step further negative eugenics was posed as the solution to the problem; “emphasizing restrictions both on breeding for particular “unfit” types and on immigration from certain countries.”²⁴ It is at this time that eugenics and birth control became interrelated as an increasing number of professionals suggested the use of contraceptives as the solution to the problem of population degeneracy. Doone and Greer Williams share in their book, *Every Child a wanted Child*, that “the birth controllers—including upper middle-class educated women, social workers, nurses, some sociologists and biological scientists, some clergymen, and a few physicians—liked to think that with the various methods of contraception at hand or others still to be discovered could limit family size among the poor, improve maternal and child health, wed out the physically and mentally unfit, and control the size of selected populations.”²⁵

²² “No More Children, Judge tells Mother,” *The Press*, May 28, 1928.

²³ Gordon, Linda. “*The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America.*” (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974. Reprint, Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 103.

²⁴ Shapiro, Thomas M. *Population Control Politics: Women, Sterilization and Reproduction Choice.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 29.

²⁵ Williams, Doone and Greer Williams. *Every Child a Wanted Child: Clarence James Gamble M.D. and his work in the Birth Control Movement.* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1978), 83.

Prior to these beliefs existed a type of sympathy for the condition of these individuals in the working class, it was once a civic as well as religious virtue to look after the less fortunate [Carlson,²⁶ *New York Times*,²⁷ Gordon,²⁸ Williams²⁹] However, as time passed working families abandoned the idea of generosity as they were increasingly reminded of the individuals who remained impoverished due to addictions or the intent to live off such programs as welfare. With the popularization of such mentalities the few in the working class who were honestly in need were to suffer as a result of the individuals who chose to abuse the system. Many began to feel that “the poor, ultimately, were to blame for their own condition and that if they seized to look for someone to blame they could join the ranks of the responsible.”³⁰

In reality, however, it was a vicious circle that contributed to the condition of the working class. Often, much of the poor population resorted to stealing, as evident by many of the court cases, due to their circumstances and the wealthy condemned them for such actions. Often the upper class found the poor responsible for their own misery due to the preconceived notion that the unfit were useless. They generally felt that the poor would only contaminate and bring down society. In fact, many eugenicists, politicians, and feminists began to promote the idea that the working class was not only a burden on society but a result of a defective biology; an inheritable trait that could only be stopped by the restriction of procreation. The continuous degrading natures of the upper classes served as a growing weight discouraging poor individuals who did wish and attempted to succeed. As a result, few have the opportunity and keep the much needed

²⁶ Carlson, Elof Axel. *The Unfit: A History of a Bad Idea*. (New York: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 2001), 77.

²⁷ “Text of Sermon by Cardinal Hayes Denouncing Birth Control Advocates,” *The New York Times*, December 9, 1935.

²⁸ Gordon, Linda. “*The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America*.” (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974. Reprint, Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 103.

²⁹ Williams, Doone and Greer Williams. *Every Child a Wanted Child: Clarence James Gamble M.D. and his work in the Birth Control Movement*. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1978), 162.

³⁰ Carlson, Elof Axel. *The Unfit: A History of a Bad Idea*. (New York: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 2001), 103.

energy to fight for a higher place in society. “Its an essential argument—that the “unfit,” the criminal, and the poor were the products of congenital “deformities”—suited the desire of upper-class eugenics supporters to justify their own monopoly on power, privilege, and wealth.”³¹

The strength of the eugenicists had grown extensively and they no longer had the need to fight for the approval of society. They took a different approach to conquer their goals, and increasingly concentrated on the idea of the poor being a defective biology. They put much effort into passing legislations against specific hereditary disorders as a way to control the degenerate population. One case in particular was aimed at ending hereditary blindness by “banning marriages of individuals who were blind, or anyone with even a single case of blindness in his or her family.”³² The idea was that by having the power to deny marriage to individuals with such problems they would have considerable control over the poor population. Later they would petition to deny marriage not only to the blind but “to a wide group of undesirables, from the feebleminded and epileptic paupers and the socially inadequate.”³³ It was around this time that an increased use of sterilization, in spite of its illegality, was used as a method of contraception for the poor. In his book Shapiro refers to a specific case in which a woman received sterilization unknowingly: Doris Buck was sterilized in 1928, “she thought the scar on her stomach was the result of an appendectomy and rupture, the explanation she was given for surgery at age sixteen.”³⁴ Several years later, after numerous attempts to conceiving a child with her husband, she was informed by a doctor of the procedure which had actually been performed. In reality

³¹ Gordon, Linda. *“The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America.”* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974. Reprint, Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 190.

³²Black, Edwin. *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America’s Campaign to Create a Master Race.* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003), 145.

³³ Black, Edwin. *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America’s Campaign to Create a Master Race.* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003), 145.

³⁴Shapiro, Thomas M. *Population Control Politics: Women, Sterilization and Reproduction Choice.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 4.

Doris had been sterilized after being mistakenly thought to be the “feebleminded” daughter of an “antisocial” prostitute.³⁵

In spite of the success which eugenicists had in approvingly imposing contraceptive methods on the poor population, society abruptly put an end to negative eugenics. This occurred after the discovery of the actions of Nazi troops. “Eugenics was seriously transmitted by Nazi eugenic policies, which identified eugenics with fascist ideology and practice.”³⁶ In a great upset Americans began to appose eugenic practices as they discovered the evils associated with such beliefs. With lack of support in their profession eugenicists were forced out of jobs in the 1930s and resorted to birth control clinics for employment. Since “birth control had become a movement that could do much of the eugenicist’s work for them.”³⁷

The idea to continue their work through birth control clinics was clever on the eugenicists’ part. Even though their profession had been weeded out, the birth control clinics were able to stand. In reality the “birth control cause no longer needed eugenics, as small families and reproduction control became normalized.” By the late 1920s America had adopted the idea of family limitation and most saw no harm with these clinics. Even though there was a continuation of giving specific attention to the areas populated with high minority, most disregarded it as suspicious. Most clinics claimed that they simply wanted to provide equal rights and offer the poor the same services that were available to upper and middle class women. However, the actions and intentions of the organizations became highly questionable to the working class and much of the minorities.

³⁵Shapiro, Thomas M. *Population Control Politics: Women, Sterilization and Reproduction Choice*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 4.

³⁶Gordon, Linda. “*The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America*.” (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974. Reprint, Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), Gordon 202

³⁷ Gordon, Linda. “*The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America*.” (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974. Reprint, Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 202.

Even though much of the physicians who claimed they wanted to help the poor actually wanted to use fertility control to preserve their institutional interest, there were individuals who had a broadly different set of motives. These persons wanted to make reproductive services available as a right, a matter of health, and a necessary condition for sexual equality.³⁸ For example, Alice Hamilton, M.D. shared that she lived among the poor and that the reasons which she had for providing contraceptives to them were not the same which seemed most urgent to others: “We are not for instance, moved much by the plea that the upper classes were being submerged by the lower and that the welfare of society demanded a redressing of the balance. We know that ability and character are not a matter of class and that the difference comes from the unfair handicaps which the children of the poor are handed.”³⁹ Even though there were individuals who believed in helping the poor it was hard if not at times impossible to distinguish them from those who still believed in controlling the working class.

The intentions of the individuals trying to provide contraceptive to the lower class became highly questionable because of the extensive differences in the notions of the two groups. Due to the similar interests but different goals those individuals who began to put primary interest in the poor sections of cities, regardless of their claims, were distrusted. One of the programs which became highly controversial was the emergence of the mobile units. For example Planned Parenthood, a birth control clinic focusing on family planning, purchased a mobile unit in 1963 and the intent of the organization was highly questioned in spite of their claims. They had arranged a three year plan (1964-1967) for the inner city of Cleveland with the purpose of making contraceptives readily available to the poor: “This would make it possible to

³⁸Shapiro, Thomas M. *Population Control Politics: Women, Sterilization and Reproduction Choice*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 12-13.

³⁹ Hamilton, Alice. *Poverty and Birth Control*. (New York: American Birth Control League, Inc. No Date), pamphlet.

offer medical advice in child spacing to the segment of population that finds it difficult to get to our established centers, either because of lack of motivation or problems of transportation.”⁴⁰

Even though they expressed a genuine concern for the working class, soon after its establishment reports were written by physicians, which were highly questionable. These reports claimed that the patients they received were incapable of using the birth control methods properly. As a solution, many physicians began to *suggest* sterilization, which raised doubts about the programs credibility.

Research on the intelligence of the working class population was commissioned by Planned Parenthood and published in the book *And the Poor Get Children*. The title of the book by its self is explanatory of the findings which express highly negative aspects of these “upper-lower class” and “lower-lower class” individuals, as they referred to them. The researcher first categorized the contraceptive users under the following categories: Early Planners, “Do-Nothing” group, Sporadic or Careless Users, and the Late Desperate Limiters. According to the results, these groups are either unable to use contraceptive in a manner which guarantees optimum results or do not use them at all. The early planners are labeled the upper-lower class and even so are described in a manner which suggests a low comprehension level, they are only “distinguished from the other groups by the fact that they have managed to be *reasonably* effective at contraception before they feel they must act in desperation.”⁴¹ The author goes on to state that even through the use of contraceptives some how a portion of the group managed to use it improperly, resulting in pregnancy. The “Do Nothing” group consisted of the individuals who did not yet have an urgency to restrict the number of children. The remaining two groups described in the book were classified as the lower-lower class all of which used contraceptives

⁴⁰ Byron E. Jackson. Letter to William E. Forsythe, December 24, 1963.

⁴¹ Rainwater, Lee. *And the Poor Get Children*. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1960), 29.

improperly. For example, the following statement was used to describe the Sporadic Careless Users, “they have used contraceptives, often several different kinds, but they are not able to use them in any satisfactory and consistent way.”⁴²

The fact that physicians found it difficult to teach the lower class how to use birth control correctly is not hard to believe. Gordon points out in her book that eugenicists had originally expressed an interest in more children for the rich rather than less children from the poor. However, because of the pressure this placed on the upper and middle-class women, feminists which were now the leaders of birth control clinics insisted on shifting the emphasis to stopping the multiplication of the unfit. “With such an attitude toward the poor, it is not surprising that clinics encountered difficulties in teaching working-class women to use birth control properly.”⁴³ There is a good chance that these women were unable to use contraceptives correctly because there was no great interest on the physicians part to teach them. In addition, the claims of an ignorant population also put the physicians at an advantage point in which they could suggest methods under their complete control, such as sterilization which at the time was irreversible.

When the movement to control the poor population was gaining momentum and more people had become aware of the circumstances the events went from discriminatory on the basis of class to an issue of racism. “In the early twentieth century black radicals had supported the birth control movement because they saw it as a tool for self-determination of black Americans.”⁴⁴ However as the influence of eugenicists became evident blacks became wary of the birth control programs. They felt it “had been robbed of its progressive potential, advocating for people of color not the individual right to *birth control*, but rather the racist strategy of

⁴² Rainwater, Lee. *And the Poor Get Children*. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1960), 36.

⁴³ Gordon, Linda. “*The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America*.” (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974. Reprint, Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 201.

⁴⁴ Shapiro, Thomas M. *Population Control Politics: Women, Sterilization and Reproduction Choice*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 44.

population control.”⁴⁵ As individuals from the minorities began to speak up about their suspicions the working class grew conscious of their decisions in contraceptive practice. In addition, “a growing suspicion from this community resulted as birth control programs virtually gave away birth control services to communities of high minority population.”⁴⁶

African Americans as well as other minorities and those of the working class all had true reason to have suspicion of such programs that practically gave away contraceptives. For the reason that, the birth control clinics were able to provide their services through the charities of the wealthy families. For example the Planned Parenthoods mobile unit was not funded by the government, but various company contributions. The majority of individuals, if not all, who donated to these programs and clinics did so in the hopes of contributing to lower welfare rates in the future. It is evident that these individuals did not make contributions out of kindness for these were the same people who were concerned with the drain that the working class put on their earnings. A physician by the name of Clarence Gamble argued just this point, “Money spent on birth control clinics could be seen as investments resulting in predictable savings for tax payers.”[Williams,⁴⁷ Gordon,⁴⁸ Carlson,⁴⁹ Shapiro⁵⁰] Many of the contributors had been convinced by an ongoing argument by eugenicists that “this particular charity was very much in their own interest, that without population limitation the poor and uneducated would become a

⁴⁵ Shapiro, Thomas M. *Population Control Politics: Women, Sterilization and Reproduction Choice*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 44.

⁴⁶ Shapiro, Thomas M. *Population Control Politics: Women, Sterilization and Reproduction Choice*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 45.

⁴⁷ Williams, Doone and Greer Williams. *Every Child a Wanted Child: Clarence James Gamble M.D. and his work in the Birth Control Movement*. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1978), 98.

⁴⁸ Gordon, Linda. “*The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America*.” (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974. Reprint, Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 201.

⁴⁹ Carlson, Elof Axel. *The Unfit: A History of a Bad Idea*. (New York: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 2001), 52.

⁵⁰ Shapiro, Thomas M. *Population Control Politics: Women, Sterilization and Reproduction Choice*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 43.

destabilizing force.”⁵¹ Many black leaders openly shared their disappointment in the system leading to a charge that the U.S. birth control programs were genocidal. “Floyd Mckissick’s, a contemporary proponent of the black genocide, reaction to the papal encyclical on contraception was reportedly to condemn the Pope and the “many white Protestant who feel that if poor people and black people just stop having children, the whole problem will go away. In a few more generations there will be no more black people—they seem to conceive of birth control as a sort of painless genocide.”⁵²

Many African Americans still share these conspiracy beliefs which were expressed over a century ago. A cross-sectional telephone survey was conducted in 2003 to explore the relationship of birth control conspiracy beliefs and perceived discrimination to contraceptive attitudes and behavior among a sample of African Americans in the United States. “Results indicated that a large percentage of respondents perceived discrimination targeted at African American women and endorsed birth control conspiracy beliefs, and that a significant proportion of female respondents perceived discrimination when getting family planning or contraceptive services.”⁵³ The result of the survey concluded that conspiracy beliefs and perceived discrimination may still play an important role in African Americans’ attitudes toward the use of contraceptives.

The Hispanics much like the black community was affected by these movements and controversial issues surrounding the use of contraceptives. However, its affects were different considering that the majority of Hispanics, like the Puerto Ricans, resided from other areas of a

⁵¹ Gordon, Linda. “*The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America.*” (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974. Reprint, Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 201.

⁵²Veatch, Robert M. *Population Policy and Ethics: The American Experience.* (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1977), 170.

⁵³ Thorburn Bird, Sheryl and Laura M. Bogart. (2003) “Birth Control Conspiracy Beliefs, Perceived Discrimination, and Contraception among African Americans: An Exploratory Study,” *Journal of Health Psychology.* (London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: SAGE Publications, Vol. 8 Issue 2, 263–276), 263.

different cultural background than the United States. When the birth control movement began to focus in on the eugenicist's beliefs, automatic attention was given to the island of Puerto Rico who had recently become a territorial possession in 1899. "It was clear to those who had social, economic, and demographic eyes to see that this small, hilly, tropical island on the Atlantic edge of the Caribbean Sea, east Cuba and Haiti, was suffering from overpopulation."⁵⁴ Much like the U.S. in the late eighteenth century, the Puerto Rican citizens did not accept the practice of contraceptives and the grand majority stuck to their Catholic beliefs. In spite of such objections president Roosevelt's administration, determined to help needy people directly or indirectly, funded the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA) in 1935; which eventually led to the establishments of a chain of maternal health clinics. In time the government seized the funding and Puerto Rico through the effort of Dr. Jose Belaval, physician of the first established clinic, formed its own birth control system. Even though birth control was eventually accepted the primary method of contraception was sterilization. Unlike in the United States, sterilization was a voluntary notion. It was the culture of most native Puerto Ricans not to practice reversible contraception, instead they would conceive children until they were sure they did not want anymore and would then get sterilized. For that reason, "for over two decades, Puerto Rico has had the highest rate of contraceptive sterilization in the world."⁵⁵

The notions imposed on the working class of the U.S. were not evident in the island of Puerto Rico, simply because it was only a territory and its influence was limited at the time. The growing population of Puerto Ricans in New York however was a different case. Puerto Rican women in the U.S. much like those of the island were known to result to sterilization. "The

⁵⁴ Williams, Doone and Greer Williams. *Every Child a Wanted Child: Clarence James Gamble M.D. and his work in the Birth Control Movement*. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1978), 159.

⁵⁵Salvo, Jose J., Mary G. Powers, and Rosemary Santana. (1992) "Contraceptive Use and Sterilization Among Puerto Rican Women," *Family Planning Perspectives*. (Vol. 24, Issue 5)

percentage of Puerto Rican women in New York who used sterilization (30%) resembled that of women in Puerto Rico (26%) and was more than twice that of all women in the United States.”⁵⁶

However the difference lied in the use of reversible contraceptive forms. For example “IUD use was higher among Puerto Rican women in New York compared to the other groups.”⁵⁷

Generally speaking since the birth control movement had taken place close to the time that Puerto Rico become a territory the number of Puerto Rican women who resided in the U.S. were not large. As a result, the effects of the birth control movement on this particular group were not as influential as on the African American culture.

The minorities that witnessed the movements imposed by birth control leaders and eugenicists also were around to see the wealthy suffer as they did. It wasn’t until the Great Depression that “those who had long been poor saw themselves joined by many others, and both groups suspected that their economic problems were not due to personal—heredity or moral—failings.”⁵⁸ Even so, after these experiences, events such as those of the mobile unit programs, led many to believe that the determination of oppressing the poor would not be over. The discriminatory and racist actions of the past would reside for years to come.

It is a statistically proven fact that the rich get richer and the poor get children. It was the proof of this statistical fact that gave leaders like the eugenicists the empowerment they needed to control the population; practically getting away with anything they pleased. They turned birth control into a tool with which to carry out their plans and attempted to do away with the “excess” population that they felt was a burden on society; a burden particularly to the portion of society

⁵⁶ Salvo, Jose J., Mary G. Powers, and Rosemary Santana. (1992) “Contraceptive Use and Sterilization Among Puerto Rican Women,” *Family Planning Perspectives*. (Vol. 24, Issue 5)

⁵⁷ Salvo, Jose J., Mary G. Powers, and Rosemary Santana. (1992) “Contraceptive Use and Sterilization Among Puerto Rican Women,” *Family Planning Perspectives*. (Vol. 24, Issue 5)

⁵⁸ Gordon, Linda. “*The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America.*” (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974. Reprint, Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 213.

that held themselves superior on the basis of wealth, power, privilege, and intelligence. However, it is also a well known fact that financial stature does not necessarily make a good parent. Often, there lies a choice in becoming engaged in work or parenthood; even if both are attained one is given priority. More often than not an individual of great success and wealth will not have the time to make a child a priority, but they will be able to provide for them. On the other hand are those of the lower class, who at times don't have the means but most likely have the time and love to offer. In reality, what right does a complete stranger have, to judge whether or not a woman should have a child? It is important to think about the financial needs a child will require. However, it is of the utmost importance for the individual to thoroughly think about and research the decisions they make. Whatever the choice it is imperative to stand up for personal choice and to make them informed. When looking at birth control choices or even more critically abortion, know that it is your opinion and choice that matters not society's expectations, which may or may not have hidden agendas.

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