

Franks, Angela. *Margaret Sanger's Eugenic Legacy: the Control of Female Fertility.* Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2005. 359 pp. \$39.95 softcover.

"Natural law makes the female the expression and the conveyor of racial efficiency." —Margaret Sanger, *Woman and the New Race*, 1920, quoted by Angela Franks, *Margaret Sanger's Eugenic Legacy*, 2005, p. 21.

In April 1998, Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood (PPFA), was anointed as one of the 100 most influential persons of the century by Time Magazine. She is one of the canonized "saints" of modern-day secularism, owing to her extensive birth-control and population-control advocacy. She commands nearly the same level of respect among pro-aborts as does Pope John Paul II among Catholics and many other Christians. Sanger's adoring fan, radical pro-abort Gloria Steinem, quotes the late historian H.G. Wells, who wrote, "When the history of our civilization is written, it will be a biological history, and Margaret Sanger will be its heroine."¹ Steinem also paints a picture of Sanger as happy, someone who had a "brave and joyous life" which included "many lovers."²

Steinem, in her article, also does exactly what Dr. Angela Franks says admirers of Margaret Sanger typically do: "[explain] away her association with eugenics." Steinem simply calls it one of Sanger's "misjudgments."³ She certainly cannot deny it, as a plethora of Sanger quotes have been unearthed that are quite inculcating. The best that scholars can do, then, is to minimize her eugenic legacy, as if she did not really mean what she said.

Franks, on the other hand, takes Sanger seriously. Having sifted through dozens of documents, "Sanger's own papers, the archives of her organizations, and manuscript collections related to her co-workers and institutions friendly to her cause," Franks effectively argues that Sanger had a "genuine commitment to the eugenic ideology," as someone who "at no time [let] her belief in eugenics lag." Furthermore, Franks draws on these documents to show how Sanger's legacy—the control of female fertility—still inflicts suffering upon women.

For these reasons, then, *Margaret Sanger's Eugenic Legacy* can be viewed as part of a more recent move in feminist scholarship which is beginning to "examine more seriously the eugenic involvement of the first generation of American feminists" (1).

Though small in stature—she is under five feet tall—Franks’ scholarship could make her a giant in this general movement, owing to the tenacity and honesty she has employed in her exhaustive research of Sanger. This book is, no doubt, “the first scholarly, book-length work to treat the topic [of Sanger’s eugenic legacy]” (2).

Franks earned a doctorate in systematic theology from Boston College, a master’s degree in philosophy from the Catholic University of America, and graduated summa cum laude from the University of Dallas. (See <http://www.angelafranks.com>.) She is married, the mother of three, and the daughter of Dr. Wanda Franz, the current president of the National Right to Life Committee. Franks’ worldview and advocacy for the oppressed, especially women, was shaped by her exposure to the poor while working in a Harlem soup kitchen and homeless shelter when she was a teenager. She witnessed first-hand the deleterious effects of our society’s exploitative treatment of women, thanks in great part to our society’s acceptance of a controlling, contraceptive mentality that views female fertility as a chaotic problem. To many in our society, as Franks writes, “the female body is an abstraction, an ‘at risk reproducer,’ perhaps an opportunity for pleasure, but not a concrete reality—a nothing” (9). The “rights” language of today used by abortion advocates, she says, “belongs to the basic conceptual armament of the ideology of control,” rendering female procreative potential “as a problem to be managed, not as the material basis for, and expressive medium of, a life to be lived in full integrity” (248). The “rights” language of today does not help women truly understand their sexuality, and instead, serves to alienate themselves from their own bodies, making them more vulnerable, of course, to abuse and violence.

Part of the aim of her book, she says, is “to demonstrate that contraception has been and still is being used as a means of control—often, contrary to feminist hopes, for misogynist purposes” (7).

Several chapters of *Margaret Sanger’s Eugenic Legacy* read like a history book, as Franks not only explores Sanger’s documents, but also outlines the history of the politics of birth-control ideology. Franks does not use the term “ideology” lightly. It denotes “a worldview that obfuscates reality to such a degree that the person holding these beliefs is simply unable to recognize what is really the case” (9). And this was Sanger’s problem, according to Franks. Her “romance” with “social-control mechanisms” rendered her vision of female liberation “too truncated and too burdened” to be truly liberating. This ideology, unfortunately, lives on today in the organizations she founded (9). For example, according to Franks, Linda Beglio of the PPFA, during a 1981 annual meeting which focused on strategies for PPFA’s survival in the

1980's, stated, "Screw the patients, spend your money on politics" (203). This strongly suggests that women, to Planned Parenthood, are a means to an end—*money and power*—and not ends in themselves, betraying PPFA's stark utilitarianism. This, of course, is in stark contrast to Catholic teaching on human sexuality, such as that given to us by Pope John Paul II in *Theology of the Body*.

A new and true feminism, Franks writes, must move "beyond control" (237). The women's movement must overcome its blind spots. In the last chapter of her book, Frank's explores how those interested in furthering the liberation of women can protect the lives and health of women "without inflicting on them a culturally conditioned alienation from their bodies" (239). She proposes a few broad goals, for example, "when the usual misogynist suspects," such as the Hollywood elites and the education establishment, "are advocating a certain ideology and plan of action, feminists should investigate the matter very carefully, with full critical consciousness, before jumping on the bandwagon" (247). The historical truth of Sanger's legacy and its destructive effect on women is not debatable, Franks writes. It is a history that women must know if they are to "recognize their unfreedom and reject the eugenic model of progress forced onto them by the control movement" (251).

Margaret Sanger's Eugenic Legacy is also a case study, albeit inadvertently, in personality disintegration. Sanger grew increasingly dependent on drugs and alcohol—and increasingly lonely—throughout her life, thus revealing how an individual cannot live by—or promote—a worldview contrary to natural law. Furthermore, how could she be at peace with herself while living a double life? Publicly, she opposed abortion, but at least one private letter indicates she "had little, if any, moral problem with the practice" (11).

Franks' book sets the record straight on Margaret Sanger. It is a must-read not only for feminists, but for anyone who wants to understand how the control mentality behind contraception has deeply wounded our society and who wants another tool to contribute in some way to its healing.

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Notes

1. Gloria Steinem, April 13, 1998. *Margaret Sanger: her crusade to legalize birth control spurred the movement for women's liberation*, Time Magazine Online Edition: <http://www.time.com/time/time100/leaders/profile/sanger4.html>.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.