

THREE WOMEN IN A DECADE OF CHAGE -- A COLLECTIVE
BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH TO THE 1920'S

A Senior Thesis

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1920s

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Three Women in a Decade of Change -- A Collective Biographical Approach to the 1920s. Sarah Frances Kragle (Sara Alpern), History, Texas, A&M University.

Perhaps no decade heralded the volume of historical change that the 1920s did. Women's lives were dramatically affected by the world around them. In the aftermath of World War I, intolerance prevailed. In this atmosphere of fear, women were also confronted with the technological, commercial, and political advances of the 1920s and the gender roles that carried over from previous generations.

We can gain insights into how three women of diverse backgrounds answered the challenges of the 1920s by looking at their individual lives in depth. Self-proclaimed sociologist Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), black southern reformer Lugenia Burns Hope (1871-1947), and birth control activist Margaret Sanger (1879-1966) each brought mature insight into the 1920s. To better see what they did and why, the activities and writing of these women will be examined. These three women should be examined as representatives of mature women who were active, self-reflective, and contributed to the advancement of women, yet do not fit the stereotype of the 1920s woman. Although these women produced a wealth of material and activities during the period, this study will analyze work that is most representative of their thoughts and actions during the decade. Though they can not represent their entire sex, these women offer windows into different life choices for women in the 1920s.

While the media personified the 1920s woman as the young flapper in search of self--analysis of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Lugenia Burns Hope, and Margaret Sanger reveals a different kind of self. They found self-fulfillment in dedicating their lives to improving the lives of others.

Three Women in a Decade of Change -- A Collective Biographical Approach to the 1920s

INTRODUCTION

In the words of Freda Kirchwey, “The old rules fail to work: bewildering inconsistencies confront her.”¹ In the introduction to a book she edited about sex and morality, Kirchwey highlighted the inner conflict a woman felt when she attempted to reconcile the new opportunities of the 1920s with the past value system that still influenced her.

Perhaps no decade heralded the volume of historical change that the 1920s did. Women’s lives were dramatically affected by the world around them. In the aftermath of World War I, intolerance prevailed. In the 1920s, hatred and fear was diverted from the Germans to anyone who was different. Communists, African Americans, ethnic minorities, and political activists received the disdain of many Americans. In this atmosphere of fear, women were also confronted with the technological, commercial, and political advances of the 1920s and the gender roles that carried over from previous generations.² The 1920s were called the “Roaring Twenties,” the “Decade of the

¹ Freda Kirchwey, ed., *Our Changing Morality: A Symposium* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1924; reprint, New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1972), viii.

² Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: Overture Books, The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1996), 241.

Dollar,”³ and the “Decade of Fear.”⁴ In this chaotic time, the media such as film and popular literature, selected the “flapper” to personify the woman of the 1920s. The flapper was young, provocative, competitive, and in search of self.⁵ Though the flapper did exist, she was not the only woman of the 1920s.⁶

The women of the 1920s differed in class, age, and race. Not all women reacted to the decade in the same manner. In fact the majority of women in the 1920s did not conform to the easily visible flapper image, rather they found their own ways of coping with the complex realities of the decade.

Windows into the Past

We can gain insights into how three women of diverse backgrounds answered the challenges of the 1920s by looking at their individual lives in depth. Self-proclaimed sociologist Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), black southern reformer Lugenia Burns Hope (1871-1947), and birth control activist Margaret Sanger (1879-1966) each brought mature insight into the 1920s. To better see what they did and why, the activities and writing of these women will be examined. Though they can not represent their entire sex, these women offer windows into different life choices for women in the 1920s.

These three women should be examined as representatives of mature women who were active, self-reflective, and contributed to the advancement of women, yet do not fit

³ Dorothy M. Brown, *Setting a Course: American Women in the 1920s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 1.

⁴ Sara Alpern, Lecture, Texas A&M University, History 473, 27 February, 1996.

⁵ Woloch, 241.

⁶ Ibid., 242.

the stereotype of the 1920s woman. Although these women produced a wealth of material and activities during the period, this study will analyze work that is most representative of their thoughts and actions during the decade. Viewing the 1920s through the lives of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Lugenia Burns Hope, and Margaret Sanger offers insights into strategies that women of the 1920s used to reconcile the confusion of the decade with their desire to create better lives for women.

A Decade of Change

The 1920s represent a very dynamic period in American history. Commonly called the “Roaring Twenties,” few other decades have ever been so stereotyped or labeled.⁷ On a similar note, few other decades have seen as much change as the 1920s. The decade began with America recovering from World War I, the largest scale conflict it had yet to participate in, and ended with the nation plunging into a depression that would define the next decade.⁸ The 1920s were, in the words of historian Dorothy Brown, a decade that “seemed a distinct period with a style, content, and mood of its own.”⁹

World War I left its mark on the 1920s in a rather ominous manner. America returned home from war triumphant, and was determined to keep foreign influences at bay. The Bolshevik success in Russia led to a paranoid fear of communism in America, resulting in a Red Scare unequaled until that of McCarthyism in the 1950s.¹⁰

⁷ Brown, 1.

⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Not only were Americans fearful of outside influences, they were also wary of internal influences that were considered “un-American”. Many U.S. citizens in the 1920s adhered to a nativist philosophy that promoted distrust of ethnic minorities. Nativists were concerned that the primarily white Anglo-Saxon culture of America was being threatened by immigrants and more recent citizens.

With fear came intolerance of differences. American society already had deeply entrenched racist feelings, as illustrated by segregation laws. The 1896 Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* was the most infamous decision that upheld the “separate but equal” doctrine.¹¹ The persecution of African Americans continued and even escalated in the 1920s. Lynchings increased; the Jim Crow laws kept African Americans separated from whites, and intimidation, poll taxes, and literacy restrictions prevented most African Americans from voting.

Some of the intellectual trends of the 1920s included social Darwinism, eugenics, and the popularization of psychology. Social Darwinism’s basic tenet was that survival of the fittest would result in the production of “superior men, superior nations, and superior races.”¹² This argument resulted in the idea that government and society should not intervene in nature’s selection process, and “weaker citizens” (i.e. ethnic and racial minorities and the under class) would eventually disappear. Eugenics proposed that with selective mating, society could pass on favorable characteristics. Eugenics in the 1920s also encouraged the prevention of reproduction among the “unfit.”¹³ Psychology

¹¹ Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 274.

¹² Ibid., 145.

¹³ Duane P. Schultz and Sydney Ellen Schultz, *A History of Modern Psychology*, 6th ed. (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996), 135.

popularized the writings of Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud. These men promoted an ideology of a sexual revolution, that was mainstream culture during the 1920s. Ellis's philosophy encouraged a moral structure that granted room for "freedom and self-expression" in relationships. Freud's philosophy did not encourage sexual promiscuity like Ellis's, but it did state that sex was the central issue of human development.¹⁴

During the 1920s, birth control became a focus of much controversy. Birth control was promoted as a method to liberate women from "enforced motherhood."¹⁵ Those who supported birth control believed it would help alleviate economic strain on large families and allow couples to space their children, while also providing a method to prevent the birth of so-called "unfit" children.

The 1920s was characterized by the "golden Glow" of prosperity.¹⁶ The middle-class was growing rapidly, and changing the economic dynamic of the nation. At the same time, women were gaining more economic independence. Whereas some women entered the work force out of necessity, others did so to pursue careers of their choosing. The economic bounty of the 1920s gave rise to a consumer economy where consumption was emphasized over saving. American consumers adopted a buy now, pay later strategy that led to six billion dollars owed on installment by 1929.¹⁷ This was ultimately a contributing factor to the economic crash and subsequent depression that ended the decade.

¹⁴ Woloch, 255.

¹⁵ Ibid., 271.

¹⁶ Brown, 6.

¹⁷ Ibid., 24.

Fear, sex, and economics were not the only characteristics of change in the 1920s. On August 26, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, enfranchising all American women.¹⁸ With suffrage, women were offered an avenue of political activism that had previously been denied them.

With all of the changes taking place during the 1920s, women had various opportunities and resources to use in building their lives. Women used these opportunities in different ways during the 1920s. Charlotte Perkins Gilman focused much of her writing on women gaining access to economic equality. Lugenia Burns Hope became an advocate for African American advancement through social work and community improvement. Margaret Sanger promoted the dissemination of birth control information as a means for improving the lives of women.

¹⁸ Ibid., 50.

CHAPTER ONE

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

As women stood poised to enter the 1920s filled with confusion about their place in society and the home, Charlotte Perkins Gilman had the luxury to enter the decade with sixty years of experience to help her face the decade's challenges. Born in Hartford, Connecticut, July 3, 1860, Charlotte Anna Perkins had a legacy to live up to from the start.¹⁹ Gilman's²⁰ father was Frederick Beecher Perkins, grandson of the minister Lyman Beecher. Distantly related to English Royalty, Gilman's Beecher-Perkins relatives had a distinguished American background as people of piety and learning. All of Lyman Beecher's children had gone on to earn respect and reputations as socially active citizens. Gilman later noted: "In this moving world, the Beechers swung foreword, the sons all ministers, the daughters as able."²¹ Her great aunts were Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catherine Beecher, and Isabella Beecher Hooker, women famous for their individual viewpoints and fearless determination. Ironically, Gilman's grandmother was the only non-activist of Lyman Beecher's daughters.²² Mary Beecher married Hartford lawyer Thomas C. Perkins. Their first son was Gilman's father, Frederick Perkins.²³

¹⁹ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (New York: D. Appleton - Century Company, 1935; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1972), 8.

²⁰ Hereafter the name Gilman will refer to Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

²¹ Ibid., 3.

²² Carol F. Kessler, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Her Progress Toward Utopia with Selected Writings* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 15.

²³ Gilman, *Living of*, 1-3.

Mary Fitch Wescott, Gilman's mother, was also from a genteel American family. Her ancestors had been instrumental in the founding of Rhode Island.²⁴ She was born to Henry Wescott, pioneering Unitarian, and eighteen year old Clarissa Fitch Perkins (a distant cousin of Frederick Perkins).²⁵ At the age of twenty-nine, Mary Wescott married her thirty one year old second cousin, Frederick Beecher Perkins. Their marriage represented the intermingling of white, Anglo-Saxon families who were well anchored in the middle class Protestant society of the Northeast. The social activism legacy of the Beecher lineage met the more genteel, traditionally feminine Wescott upbringing.²⁶

Within a few years of their marriage, Frederick and Mary Perkins had children. Their son, Thomas Perkins and third child, Charlotte Anna, were the only ones to survive childhood. After her fourth pregnancy, doctors suggested that Mary would not survive another child's birth.²⁷ In her autobiography, Gilman said, "Whether the doctor's dictum was the reason or merely a reason, I do not know. What I do know is that my childhood had no father."²⁸ After Mary's fourth pregnancy, Frederick Perkins left his wife and children, for reasons that can only be speculated. He wrote his daughter frequently and would continue to visit sporadically throughout her life. Frederick Perkins's vocation of librarian influenced his contact with Gilman, as he frequently sent her books and lists of suggested readings. For years, Frederick and Mary had no official separation; he was conspicuously absent, always "somewhere else."²⁹

²⁴ Kessler, 14.

²⁵ Gilman, *Living of*, 6-7.

²⁶ Kessler, 15.

²⁷ Ibid., 16.

²⁸ Gilman, *Living of*, 5.

²⁹ Ibid., 5.

Mary Wescott had gone from a socially prominent family to a deserted wife with two small children.³⁰ She relied on both sides of the Gilman family for support, moving from one relative's house to another. The Perkins family lived an itinerant lifestyle, supported by extended family, and less frequently by Frederick. For a time during Gilman's childhood, her family was moving yearly.³¹ After thirteen years of separation, Frederick and Mary divorced in 1873 at Mary's urging, so her husband could remarry. Unfortunately the divorce made the Perkinses' life more difficult, as many family members then refused to help Mary and the children since they no longer felt pity for them and were instead embarrassed by the divorce.³²

Gilman remembered her mother as having a gift for caring for babies. However, once her children began to grow up, Mary had difficulties interacting with them. Throughout her childhood, until she was twenty-one, Gilman recalled her mother as controlling. Her mother was well known for denying her permission for activities and sharply criticizing Gilman's actions.³³ As a result, Gilman began to practice self denial at an early age. Gilman also tried to teach herself absolute truthfulness, consideration, and self-determination because her mother had criticized her for failing in these areas. Gilman picked these areas of her personality, among others, to target for improvement so that she would always be right and her mother could not find fault.³⁴ One of the most painful memories of Gilman's childhood was her mother's misguided attempt to shelter her from suffering by withholding affection from the young Charlotte, showing care and

³⁰ Ibid., 8.

³¹ Kessler, 17.

³² Gilman, *Living of*, 9.

³³ Gilman, *Living of*, 10; Kessler, 18.

³⁴ Gilman, *Living of*, 56.

tenderness only when Charlotte slept. Her mother wrongly assumed this would make her daughter more self-reliant and less prone to heartache. Instead, it only made Charlotte starved for affection.³⁵

In June 1873, Mary Perkins moved her family into a cooperative housekeeping home with members of the Swedenborgians Church. The effects of this were two fold. The first was the development of Gilman's long-standing dislike of cooperatives. The second was her opportunity to attend school for one of the longest periods in her life.³⁶ By her own estimation, Gilman's formal schooling totaled four years spent among seven schools.³⁷ Her love of literature and poetry was mostly self taught while her family moved through Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New York.

At fourteen, Gilman entered a school where she took classes on calisthenics, hygiene, elocution, and poetry--classes that helped form the basis of her lifestyle. She also excelled at Natural Philosophy, or physics, much to her delight. The idea that there were laws she could prove and follow greatly appealed to her and would influence much of her later thinking.³⁸

During her teenage years, Gilman had several experiences that would stay with her. She had her first "crush" experience. She became infatuated with the actor who played the Prince in the "Frog Prince" opera in Providence, Rhode Island. Though she never met him, this was her first experience in feelings for a male. She also formed a close friendship with a young woman named Martha Luther. Gilman would later recall

³⁵ Kessler, 17.

³⁶ Gilman, *Living of*, 26.

³⁷ Ibid., 18.

³⁸ Ibid., 28-30.

this friendship as her first love. When Luther married, Gilman felt deserted by her one companion, and she dealt with her pain by writing about her grief.³⁹ Also during these years, Gilman began her search for religion that would culminate in her 1923 book *His Religion and Hers*.

During her later teens, Gilman was able to persuade her mother to allow her to attend the Rhode Island School of Design which helped her build enough skill to exhibit some of her paintings.⁴⁰ Gilman used her artwork to generate income. She would paint advertising cards for companies and give art lessons. When she turned twenty-one she gained her long-awaited independence and more freedom of movement. However, financial concerns kept her close to home.

In May of 1884, Gilman married Charles Walter Stetson.⁴¹ She did so with great reservation about marital commitment: “On the one hand I knew it was normal and right in general, and held that a woman should be able to have marriage and motherhood, and do her work in the world also. On the other hand, I felt strongly that for me it was not right.”⁴² Housework came easily to Gilman, since she had been her mother’s main help throughout her early life. Despite the ease of the work and the fact that she found Stetson to be a good husband, Gilman felt somewhat oppressed by marriage.

On March 23, 1885, Katherine Stetson was born. Gilman found the baby to be “exquisite”⁴³ and thought Katherine would help bring her some of the joy that she had

³⁹ Ibid., 80.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 70.

⁴¹ Kessler, 21.

⁴² Gilman, *Living of*, 83.

⁴³ Ibid., 89.

been missing in her life. Unfortunately Katherine's birth triggered a major depression that haunted Gilman throughout her life.

In 1887 the Stetsons separated in light of Gilman's depression. They both believed that she would never be well enough to be a wife and mother again. Gilman and Katherine moved to California with Gilman's mother, where Gilman taught art lessons, sold artwork, and published articles to support them.⁴⁴ Gilman's 1892 short fiction work "Yellow Wallpaper" became a therapeutic tool. By writing through her depression, she helped recover somewhat until she could write and mother Katherine again. She described the "Yellow Wallpaper" as a "description of a case of nervous breakdown beginning something as mine did."⁴⁵

Gilman raised Katherine alone for many years. She tried to be absolutely honest with her daughter, and avoided harsh discipline and punishments. Gilman's child raising was cut short by her divorce in 1894 and Stetson's subsequent remarriage.⁴⁶ Katherine was sent to live with her father and his new wife, because Gilman thought that Katherine should be raised in a two parent home.⁴⁷ This choice made Gilman unpopular among friends and family, but she hoped to spare Katherine the pain that she herself had experienced growing up without a father. Gilman, perhaps clouded by the memories of her own childhood pain, did not take into account how Katherine would feel being raised without her natural mother.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 96-101.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 119.

⁴⁶ Kessler, 26.

⁴⁷ Gilman, *Living of*, 163.

Once Katherine moved to live with Stetson in 1895, Gilman entered the phase of her life for which she is most well known. She spent the majority of her time traveling the nation and arguing for women's rights. She was an active member of the California Woman's Congress, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), and participated in social reform movements, such as the settlement house movement (in particular Hull House). Gilman counted among her friends Jane Addams, Florence Kelly, and social evolutionist, Lester Ward.⁴⁸ In the years without Katherine she remained propertyless and almost penniless, keeping virtually no money for herself and instead donating money to her causes.⁴⁹

Gilman became known as one of the intellectual leaders of the feminist movement. Her books such as *Herland* (1925) and the earlier *Women and Economics* (1898) would call for female economic independence to liberate women from the domestic subjugation imposed on them by men. Gilman's controversial ideas generated so much interest that she spent much of her time on trains going from one speaking engagement to another, and even made several speaking trips to Europe.

On June 11, 1900, Gilman married again to George Houghton Gilman.⁵⁰ Though she was wary of marriage, after her first failure, Houghton proved to be the type of husband she had always wanted. After their marriage, she moved to New York with him, but he was supportive of her travels. He helped her establish the *Forerunner*, the magazine that she used as a forum to advocate socialism and the other causes she fought

⁴⁸ Kessler, 28-29.

⁴⁹ Gilman, *Living of*, 183.

⁵⁰ Kessler, 33.

for. With Houghton beside her, Gilman found the ability to blend a happy marriage and her work for feminist reform.

In January of 1932, Gilman was diagnosed with breast cancer. Her only worry was that she would die and leave Houghton alone. Her fears were allayed when he died of a sudden cerebral hemorrhage in May of 1934. She carefully planned her own death after that, and on August 17, 1935, committed suicide, leaving behind the infamous letter containing the line “I have preferred chloroform to cancer.”⁵¹

Gilman in the 1920s

Charlotte Perkins Gilman entered the decade of the 1920s a well-respected author and feminist. She was settled in a happy marriage and maintained a warm relationship with her daughter and grandchildren. Though her days of traveling engagements had ended, she still remained an active writer. In 1923 she published *His Religion and Hers*, expressing ideas she had been contemplating for decades. Her ideology saw religion as a social issue, not necessarily a theological question.⁵² In her autobiography, she recalled that when she was about sixteen she had “figured it out that the business of mankind was to carry out the evolution of the human race, according to the laws of nature, adding the conscious direction proper to our kind.”⁵³ Around 1925 Gilman finished work on her autobiography *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, leaving only one chapter to add

⁵¹ Gilman, *Living of*, 333-334.

⁵² Kessler, 38.

⁵³ Gilman, *Living of*, 42.

at the end of her life. *Unpunished*, a detective story, was written during the later 1920s, but remained unpublished.⁵⁴

Gilman had long been a nativist, and during the 1920s she and her husband moved from the increasingly ethnic New York City to a Norwich Town, Connecticut family home. The philosophy of eugenics gave birth to some of the ideas contained in Gilman's late 1920s articles, "Sex and Race Relations," and "Progress through Birth Control".⁵⁵ These articles promoted birth control, an idea she had initially opposed, as a tool to prevent the ethnic expansion of America, an extension of her anti-foreigner sentiments.

To appreciate Gilman's life in the 1920s her various works should be sampled. Throughout her life, she was known for a variety of ideas and during the 1920s her work and writing again showed that breadth. Since Gilman was not an activist in a conventional sense, her work should be viewed as that of an intellectual activist. She used writing, in its many forms, to convey her thoughts. Some of her ideas were a continuation of work begun long before the 1920s that only culminated during the decade. Other works were in response to the decade of the 1920s, itself and some of Gilman's writings were merely for artistic purposes.

Gilman's Thoughts on Monogamy

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was a well respected writer by the 1920s, frequently contributing to newspapers and magazines. In 1924, a book was compiled from articles

⁵⁴ Ibid., 332.

⁵⁵ Kessler, 38.

in the journal, *The Nation*. Freda Kirchwey, the editor, put together a selection of fifteen articles that had examined the “moral disorder” of the 1920s.⁵⁶ These articles became the book, *Our Changing Morality: A Symposium*, including one article, “Toward Monogamy”, by Gilman.

Though a type of sexual revolution characterized the early twentieth century by introducing looser morals, more open discussion on sex, and an acceptance of sexuality in women, these changes played a large part in the turmoil of the 1920s.⁵⁷ The decades changing technology, economics, and sexual mores caused much bewilderment and confusion. *Our Changing Morality* was published, according to Kirchwey, because “never in recent generations have human beings so floundered about outside the ropes of social and religious sanctions.”⁵⁸ Bringing together these authors’ ideas, Kirchwey hoped that they could help readers sort through the chaos and maybe understand what was really happening from some different points of view. Gilman’s article spoke of hope for the future, while acknowledging the social confusion of the decade. Her article was written in response to the social conditions of women that she felt contributed to the 1920s’ sexual disorder.

Gilman’s writings were frequently influenced by the theory of social Darwinism. She thought societal development should occur when humans used the intelligence they had gained through evolution to modify their social conditions. She believed that the human race’s social progress was guided by evolutionary laws, just like in the animal

⁵⁶ Kirchwey, vii.

⁵⁷ Woloch, 254.

⁵⁸ Kirchwey, v.

kingdom. Gilman however, rejected some aspects of the social Darwinism ideology of the survival of the fittest. She felt that the theory, as it was, applied only to men because men had long oppressed women. This oppression eliminated women's ability to compete with each other, a necessary element for evolution to occur.

"Toward Monogamy" explored the social evolution of women and men that had brought them to where they were in 1924, and discussed how, with time, evolution would lead them back to monogamous marriages. According to Gilman's article, the human race's journey from savage to civilized had occurred in such a short time that people were still having trouble adjusting to the most recent changes. The main reason Gilman identified for delayed adjustment was that social evolution had "been limited to half the race, the other half being restricted to domestic industry and to the still lower level of misused sex."⁵⁹ Though the 1920s witnessed more sexual freedom for women, this freedom had to be viewed in light of the past strictures that had been imposed on women.

The flawed human social development was attributed to the exploitation of females by males who kept women in lower, ultra feminine positions. Gilman thought that the social morals of men had developed by the 1920s due to their exposure to society and traditionally male constructs. Women, however, had one job, that of "sex loyalty."⁶⁰ Regardless of what they did, as long as women remained sexually chaste, they would be acceptable to men, namely their husbands. However, if women were sexually disloyal, no other virtue could save them.

⁵⁹ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Toward Monogamy" in *Our Changing Morality*, ed. Freda Kirchwey (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1924; reprint, New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1972), 54.

⁶⁰ Ibid., "Monogamy", 55.

Gilman thought the alarm and confusion that people felt in the 1920s had to do with women's newly escalating desires to work outside of the home. Gilman believed that this would be "inherently for the improvement of society"⁶¹ but acknowledged that for the time being the changes would create turmoil. However, she felt that if women would leave the home and develop their own lives outside of the kitchen, society would lead itself to "a rational and permanent basis for ... monogamous marriage."⁶²

Though the idea that women leaving the home would lead to monogamy was foreign to the 1920s, Gilman developed arguments for such an outcome based on her ideas of social Darwinism. She thought that men would react to women leaving the home as a personal loss to their work force. Because more women were economically independent in the 1920s, men were beginning to lose the financial control they had had over their wives. Therefore, men couldn't force women into sexual loyalty as they had in the past, rather they had to seduce women with what Gilman argued was "mutual attraction and persuasion."⁶³ Gilman assumed that monogamy would return as soon as women and men realized the benefits that mutually affectionate sexual relationships had on families, especially when raising children.

Gilman absolved men and women of fault in the social confusion of the 1920s because they were only reacting based on the history they had been taught. She predicted that though the current sex role distress was unpleasant, it would resolve itself with time in the form of a natural monogamy. "It is to this end [natural monogamy], with all its

⁶¹ Ibid., "Monogamy", 54.

⁶² Ibid., "Monogamy", 56.

⁶³ Ibid., "Monogamy", 63.

widening range of racial progress that social morality tends”⁶⁴ Gilman concluded. Her view was very forward thinking and positive. Gilman saw the sexual confusion as just a stumbling block towards society’s eventual evolution.

The Poetry of Charlotte Perkins Gilman

In her autobiography, Gilman recalled her school days as somewhat difficult, except for her classes in elocution. She reminisced that “poetry was always a delight to me. I learned it by heart, miles of it, from early childhood and at this time used to keep a book open on my bureau and learn long poems while combing my hair.”⁶⁵ Her love of poetry eventually led to her own writing of verse. Her first volume of poetry, entitled *In This Our World*, was published in 1893, receiving a warm reception from critics. Toward the end of her life, Gilman began corresponding with her friend Amy Wellington to try to arrange for the publication of another volume of her poetry.⁶⁶

Gilman suggested a list of her work to be included in the proposed volume. Some of the work was still unpublished, while other poems had appeared in various magazines. Wellington helped arrange Gilman’s verse into three categories: “The Satirist”, “The Philosopher”, and “The Artist”.⁶⁷ Unfortunately this book remained unrealized until scholar Denise Knight resumed the work in 1996. In that year, Knight finally published a volume based on the work by Wellington and Gilman, hopefully realizing Gilman’s

⁶⁴ Ibid., “Monogamy”, 66.

⁶⁵ Gilman, *Living of*, 28.

⁶⁶ Denise D. Knight, ed., *The Later Poetry of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1996), 21.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 23.

desire after so many years. Knight's research revealed that several of Gilman's selections had been written in the 1920s, some for pure artistic reasons and some in reaction to the social and political climate of the decade.

Gilman's poem, "The Oyster and the Starfish" originally appeared in a 1925 issue of *Forum*. This poem related the story of an oyster who remained tightly sealed against a hungry starfish, yet the persevering starfish managed to crack the oyster and:

Through the crack he poked his stomach and digested him inside.

Safe from all external dangers yet the oyster surely died,
While that soft extruded stomach ate his own inside.

But that oyster, food for starfish, did no suicidal sin,
Did not try to oysterize him! did not ask him to come in!⁶⁸

Though this poem might be viewed as nothing more than a simple story about marine life, when viewing it in the relation to the 1920s, it takes on a philosophical nature.

Gilman wrote it during a decade filled with nationalist feelings. After World War I America experienced a generation of fear of external dangers such as communism and internal fears of anti-American sentiments. Gilman herself shared the fears of Americans who thought America was in danger of being overrun by foreigners.

In "The Oyster and the Starfish", the oyster thought he had protected himself from the outside and was still destroyed from the inside. Many Americans, Gilman included, thought that their own destruction might come from within. She used many of her poems in such a philosophical manner to talk about the issues of the decade such as suffrage and politics.

⁶⁸ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Oyster and the Starfish," in *The Later Poetry of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. Denise D. Knight (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1996), 90.

Some of Gilman's poetry fit more under the category of satire. In response to the 19th Amendment, woman suffrage, she published a poem in the *New York World*.

Women of 1920

On the Women of 1920
So newly freed--
Hangs the fate of a nation--
The pride of a nation--
God guide their deed!

Will the women of 1920
Drink party hate
Sink to the grade of a party--
Believe the cant of a party--
Forget the world for a party--
And repent--too late?

Will the women of 1920
Hear the world's appeal?
Forty three nations together
Ask us join together
With them and stand together
For the common weal.

On the women of 1920
The choice must fall.
Shall we join in with the others
Dare and bear with the others
Or stand apart from the others
Shamed before all?

O Women of 1920
This is your home!
On you hangs your country's honor--
World safety, Peace and honor
You have the choice and the home
You have the power!⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Women of 1920" in *The Later Poetry of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. Denise D. Knight (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1996), 58.

Poetry such as this was based on political subjects of the day. Once women were enfranchised in 1920, people were curious as to what women would do with the vote. Women such as Gilman had long fought for suffrage for their gender and once suffrage was won, faced the future with both hope and fear. Women had received a great responsibility, and Gilman wrote poetry to express her feelings about the future of women in politics, hopeful that women would use their new power to improve their nation.

Gilman on Religion

One of the most remarkable facets of Gilman's writings was her views on religion. Rather than devoting her life to answering the great theological debates religion fostered, she used religion as a tool to examine social evolution. In her autobiography, Gilman had remarked that she began the journey towards her religious ideology at a young age, and her work on religion as a social construct culminated in 1923 with *His Religion and Hers*.

Gilman described religion as "the most powerful group of concepts governing conduct."⁷⁰ She acknowledged that religion is a very helpful tool to guide behavior, or at least it would be if it were based on natural laws instead of on those laws developed only by men. *His Religion and Hers* is a study in which Gilman looked at the "effect of sex on religion" and also at "some of the influences which must modify conduct."⁷¹ She truly believed that if women had been more instrumental in developing religion, society might

⁷⁰ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *His Religion and Hers* (New York: The Century Co., 1923), 5.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

be vastly improved. Regardless of the validity of her hypothesis, Gilman used her book, *His Religion and Hers*, to outline her ideas.

According to Gilman, “the main line of race improvement is through the child”⁷² and therefore the mother needs to be instrumental in the child’s development so as to guide the evolution of society. However, men had kept women subjugated so much that women did not have the chance to fulfill their jobs.

Gilman perceived the emphasis on afterlife as a problem with religions of her day. People were caught up in how to get to heaven, or a comparable paradise, and avoid hell. “Neither the individual nor the religion thinks or cares about the beyond of human life on earth.”⁷³ Gilman believed that religion had developed with too much emphasis on what happens after death instead of on earth. This could be remedied by developing “birth-based”⁷⁴ religions, which could only be developed by women because birth is the major issue in their lives. The birth-based religions would focus on renewal and building up of the race as opposed to sins, anguish, and forgiveness.

Gilman recognized that women in the 1920s had achieved an unsurpassed level of equality, but they used their equality to imitate men, rather than to advance society. People “assumed a thing to be right because it was customary.”⁷⁵ Following that logic, people still assumed that older ideas about women’s roles were more correct, and the changes women were experiencing were wrong.

⁷² Ibid., 9.

⁷³ Ibid., 18.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 46.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 124.

Gilman believed in human evolution and the idea that humanity would keep evolving. She developed the idea that humanity's "persistent misunderstanding in the matter is due to our general confusion of sex and service."⁷⁶ People, especially women, saw sex and submission to men as inextricably linked. They couldn't separate the idea of sex and marriage from the older strictures where males had legal control over women--control condoned by society and necessitated by economic dependence.

Gilman said in *His Religion and Hers* "we can construct the future...no swift flood of utter peace is promised."⁷⁷ She hoped that the changes occurring in society would eventually lead to a "religion" that would motivate people to concentrate less on what would happen to individuals after death and more on the advancement of the human race during their time on earth. Gilman believed that this would happen when women helped turn religious theory towards their interests that had so long been ignored.

Summary

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's contribution to American women was her ability to write for them. Her fiction, poems, and even socially themed non-fiction were targeted for women of the 1920s, introducing them to new perspectives. Gilman was fortunate enough to not have to make decisions about marriage and children during the 1920s, because she had already lived those parts of her life. Instead, she could share her wisdom and experience with others and perhaps help them come to terms with their own

⁷⁶ Ibid., 209.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 257-258.

struggles. Gilman's philosophies on the equality of women survived the 1920s, and later generations of women would find truth in her ideas. What Gilman thought women of the 1920s could achieve, women of the 1990s are still struggling for, making Gilman's work of timeless value.

CHAPTER TWO

Lugenia Burns Hope

Lugenia Burns Hope lived her life as a black leader of race reform; ironically, she might have successfully passed as a white woman. She was born on February 19, 1871, to Ferdinand and Louisa Bertha Burns in St. Louis, Missouri. Ferdinand was a prosperous carpenter originally from Mississippi. Ferdinand's father was William Burns, a former Secretary of State of Mississippi, and his mother, Rachel Burns, was a free black woman. William and Rachel had five mulatto children including Ferdinand, and though interracial marriages were illegal, they lived together openly and proudly. Louisa Bertha was born to a man of French decent who had had two white children, but fathered Louisa with a black woman.⁷⁸ Though it is unknown when Ferdinand and Louisa married, they had seven children together before Ferdinand's death. After he died, Louisa moved her family to Chicago, Illinois, where she hoped to start over and be able to provide an education for her younger daughter, Lugenia.

During the late nineteenth century, Chicago was very much separated into lower, middle, and upper class African Americans. The Burns family found itself struggling to stay within the middle class, and the boys were always working to support their mother and sister, Lugenia. Some time after 1890, Lugenia managed to attend high school, which was not easily accessible to young African American women of the era. She

⁷⁸ Jacqueline A. Rouse, *Lugenia Burns Hope: Black Southern Reformer* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 11.

would also, over the years, attend The Chicago School of Design, Chicago Art Institute, and Chicago Business School, but financial constraints prevented her from achieving any formal degrees.⁷⁹

Around 1893, Lugenia's brothers lost their jobs, and she was forced to quit her schooling to become the bread winner for her family. Lugenia started as a bookkeeper and dressmaker, but quickly landed a job as the first black secretary for the King's Daughter's Board of Directors.⁸⁰ This charity organization provided, among other things, instruction for working girls in basic academic areas. Alternately, Hope⁸¹ attended and organized these classes. Hope then took on a second job as the secretary for the Silver Cross Club, an organization that operated cafeterias for working men and women. During all this, she managed to find time to volunteer at Hull House, the Chicago settlement house. Hope found that she enjoyed these jobs, because they not only made her self-sufficient, but also made a positive difference in the lives of others.⁸²

In 1893 Chicago, one of the biggest events was the World's Colombian Exposition. Though the Exposition had invited all the countries of the world to set up displays, it did not provide for an African American exhibition. A Negro Day was established after many of the black associations in Chicago protested, and white visitors expressed their interest in African American issues to the organizers of the Exhibition. Frederick Douglas arranged all the activities, and a young Paul Lawrence Dunbar read

⁷⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁸¹ Hereafter the name Hope will refer to Lugenia Burns Hope.

⁸² Ibid., 17.

some of his poetry, but many African American people felt this gesture was too little and too late. People had come from around the country to visit the Exposition, however, and one such visitor was a Brown University student named John Hope. Lugenia met John at a party commemorating the Exposition on August 21, 1893.⁸³ Though at first Lugenia was not enamored with John Hope, the two dated for the remainder of the summer, and after he returned to Brown, they began an impassioned love affair through letters.

John Hope began teaching at Roger William College, a coeducational, black school in Nashville, the next year. He still corresponded with Lugenia, and by 1896, had begun proposing marriage. Lugenia, however, was not ready for marriage. She was still the main economic support for her then aging mother. John remained patient but finally told Lugenia that “he had thus far respected her wishes but ... believed that she was being too difficult.”⁸⁴ Though her family launched a campaign against John, hoping Lugenia would marry someone else and stay in Chicago, John remained firm in his suit. On December 29, 1897, they married in Chicago and Lugenia traveled to Nashville to join John at Roger Williams.

Hope had worried at the outset of their marriage that her husband would be too controlling. The Hopes came to an amicable settlement by agreeing on a policy of mutual respect. John agreed not to treat Lugenia as a servant, and she in turn would have control of the household affairs.⁸⁵ The Hopes did not stay in Nashville long, however, because later that year John received word of a position at Atlanta Baptist College. Atlanta

⁸³ Ibid., 19.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 22.

Baptist College (renamed Morehouse in 1913) had been John's dream teaching job, and he and Lugenia decided to move there to begin the fall semester in 1898.⁸⁶

John had entered into their marriage believing that Lugenia would soon forget her passion for social work and concentrate on being a wife. Instead, the Hopes had not been in Atlanta long when they met African American activist W.E.B. DuBois. DuBois had heard of Lugenia Burns Hope's interest in social work and invited her to become involved in the West Fair Community. The West Fair area of town was the community surrounding Atlanta Baptist and Hope soon became involved in the Gate City Free Kindergarten Association.⁸⁷ This group was trying to fill the need for kindergarten and day care for Atlanta's black children.

Hope's social activism would increase on August 28, 1901, with the birth of her first son Edward. As a mother, Hope had no playground to take her child to since in the age of legal segregation, Atlanta had built no black playgrounds. Hope helped organize the community and solicit merchants for donations to build a playground at Atlanta Baptist for the community's African American children.

Lugenia and John had a second child, John II, in 1909. Though Hope was a dedicated, loving mother, she was never completely able to put her family before her activism. When the boys were young, both she and John traveled extensively, and they tried to coordinated their trips so that one of them would always be home. Hope still experienced parental guilt, feeling that she did not give her children enough time. This

⁸⁶ Ibid., 25.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 28.

feeling of guilt can be seen in her later letters to Edward. She remained very close to him after he left home and could never get used to his absence.

The Hope household was a guest house much of the time. Since African American travelers could not stay in most hotels, many opted to stay with the Hopes. Their hospitality became famous with not only travelers, but also with students, who Hope was always inviting over. Their household expanded greatly in 1906 when they moved to the president's house after John's appointment as the first black president of Atlanta Baptist College.⁸⁸ As first lady, Hope ran a very organized household. Fortunately she always had help from student workers. She also kept her boys participating in the household care. Edward and John were assigned chores and both helped do dishes, "periodically, John Sr. contributed to the kitchen detail,"⁸⁹ and Hope was known for her well-organized and welcoming household.

At the turn of the century, when the Hopes moved to Atlanta, it was one of the most segregated cities in the South. In Georgia, the progressive era manifested itself as conservative and even racist. The African American citizens were still being denied even basic city service, like sewage and water.⁹⁰ Hope's reform experience was well appreciated in her community. Since the white reformers were not attentive to the needs of African American citizens, black women like Hope formed their own clubs to help deal with the social, civic, educational, and even medical needs of their communities. Examples of these organizations were found throughout the south, such as Margaret

⁸⁸ Ibid., 45.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 34.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 58.

Murray Washington's Tuskegee Woman's Club in Tuskegee, Alabama, and Marion B. Wilkenson's Sunset Club of Orangeburg, South Carolina.⁹¹ The most well known club, however, remained the Neighborhood Union, founded by Hope.

In 1908, Hope called a meeting of her neighbors to discuss the state of their community. Shortly before this meeting, a woman had been found, alone and dying, and to the dismay of her neighbors, no one had even known she was ill. Hope proposed that an organization needed to be formed to care for the women and children of the neighborhood, and she felt such care should be the responsibility of the African American women. She, along with the majority of her middle-class African American peers, subscribed to the idea that women were the keepers of society's morality. Hope's group became known as the Neighborhood Union, and by 1914 there were branches all over the city. The organizational structure of the Neighborhood Union drew the most attention. Each area was divided into districts, zones, and communities, each with chairpersons that reported directly to a city wide Board of Managers.⁹²

Lugenia Burns Hope was a very outspoken leader who embraced a classically Victorian set of ideals. Hope looked upon uplift of the African American race as a moral duty. Hope attributed racism largely to a lack of understanding, and believed that eliminating racism would result in the uplift of the African American race as well as the uplift of all women. She believed that white people formed stereotypes based on experiences with few, impoverished, uneducated African Americans. Hope planned to bring together the races by showing white women that there existed a class of educated,

⁹¹ Ibid., 5.

⁹² Ibid., 65-68.

socially active African American women who shared their concerns and goals. Unlike many white feminists, however, Hope saw a place for men in facilitating uplift and would include men in her efforts by offering them auxiliary positions in the women's clubs.⁹³

Hope's commitment to reform and equality began around the turn of the century and she fought those battles until the mid thirties when her health began to fail. Her commitment to the Neighborhood Union, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), and Young Woman's Christian Association (YWCA) showed the incredible determination and drive that made her one of the south's foremost African American reformers.

Unlike many women of the 1920s, Hope was not struggling to find meaning amidst all the changes of the decade. Rather, she was fighting to overcome one of the only things that refused to change, the entrenched racism of society. Much of her work for equality was noticed during the 1920s and many of her goals were finally realized. Hope's reform work was not the only struggle she faced in the 1920s. She had to come to terms with her son Edward leaving home, and to long stretches of traveling by both her and John. These long absences from home made it difficult for John and Lugenia to maintain their relationship, but their letters illustrate a relationship that seemed to flourish anyway.

John died in February 1936, and Lugenia spent the rest of her life with her family in Chicago and New York. She would get the chance to live with her sons again as they helped her through the last decade of her life. On August 14, 1947, Lugenia Burns Hope

⁹³ Ibid., 121.

died of heart failure and her ashes were later spread over Morehouse, where she had spent most of her reform career.

The Neighborhood Union and the 1920s

Lugenia Burns Hope is credited with establishing the Neighborhood Union of Atlanta, the “most successful and professional Black American settlement to date.”⁹⁴ Atlanta society had failed to provide the needed support for African American women and children. Part of her mission was to spread culture, morals, and aid to less fortunate black citizens. Another part of her mission was to help expose the black community’s issues and needs to those who could best help. Black women, such as Hope, were known to head reform movements that would lead to the improvement in the quality of life for their race. Hope herself faced a twofold oppression -- that as a woman and as a black woman. She transformed that consciousness into a fight on behalf of her entire community, especially children.⁹⁵

The Neighborhood Union was conceived in 1908 based on the desire of women to eradicate the bad element from their neighborhood and promote the welfare of those who needed protection, such as women and children.⁹⁶ The 1920s were a very active time for the Neighborhood Union. Under Hope’s leadership, the Neighborhood Union continued

⁹⁴ Karen S. Adler, “Race, Class, and Gender and Women’s Settlement Houses: Hull House and the Neighborhood Union” (Paper presented at the American Sociologist Association meeting, August, 1994), Brandeis University, Waltham, MA, 2.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 21.

its long standing practice of surveying the neighborhood to determine needs. Two of their main victories were in health care and education.

The Neighborhood Union had managed to secure a location for a health clinic early in their operation. In 1926, that property was sold to an orphanage, and the Neighborhood Union purchased property on West Fair Street where they operated well into the 1930s.⁹⁷ The clinic's opening was an important victory for the Neighborhood Union. The West Fair clinic opening would gain the attention Hope had always hoped the Neighborhood Union would create. Margaret Murray Washington, the founder of the Tuskegee Woman's Club, arrived to dedicate the building, helping to add to the grandeur of the event. The scale of the grand opening added legitimacy to the cause that Hope had dedicated the Neighborhood Union to -- providing health care for African American women and children who had no other means of receiving it.

The 1920s were also busy years of the Neighborhood Union in protecting the welfare of school-age children. Segregation was at work in Atlanta, especially in the schools; the African American children attended black only schools that were supposedly "equal" under the segregation laws. Hope recognized the fact that many of the African American schools were in fact substandard. The Neighborhood Union conducted many investigations into the schools of Atlanta, and time and time again reported the same finding. The problem the Neighborhood Union faced, though, was making people listen. Regardless of how many advances they made, it seemed as if African American schools continually faced setbacks. By 1923, the African American schools were having triple

⁹⁷ Rouse, 72.

sessions, meaning that three groups of students were taught in shifts each day because there were not enough teachers.

Hope launched an intensive campaign to promote an Atlanta bond issue in 1921 that was designed to give four million dollars to schools, \$1,250,000 of which was pledged to black schools.⁹⁸ The reason that Hope headed such a campaign for the Bond issue is at least one-third of white voters were in opposition. To help counter this opposition, Hope helped organize mass informational meetings for African American voters. Also, it was arranged for supporters of the bond issue to watch the polling places to make sure that there was no voter fraud and also to ensure that African American voters were left unharrassed. Even though African American men and women legally had the right to vote, they were frequently prevented from doing so by harassment and discriminatory practices by those running the polling places.

Hope and the Neighborhood Union's work on the 1921 bond issue was a large part of their work as the first organized group working for equality in Atlanta schools. In 1924, partly due to the effort of Hope's campaign, the school board opened the first black high school in Atlanta--Booker T. Washington High School.⁹⁹

The Neighborhood Union was well known as an organization that performed social work. In the fall of 1920 the National Conference of Social Workers concluded that a school was needed to train African American social workers and, knowing her interest in social work, asked Hope for her involvement. A committee comprised of members from Atlanta University, Emory University, and the Urban League, along with

⁹⁸ Ibid., 78.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 79.

Lugenia and John Hope helped form the Atlanta School of Social Work at Morehouse. This school accepted students who were over twenty years old and had high school diplomas. These students were accepted into the year long course of classes such as economic and social theory, psychology, mental problems, statistics, and social casework. A certification was issued to these students and many became African American social workers. Between 1920 and 1925 the Atlanta School of Social Work remained incorporated at Morehouse where Hope herself taught classes and helped run the program.¹⁰⁰

Hope's legacy of social work and organization extended far beyond the Neighborhood Union, however. She was instrumental in helping to develop black branches of the YWCA in Atlanta. She was also active in the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, and she regularly attended the 1920 meetings of the Interracial Council of Women of the Darker Races. Hope's breadth of social activism and reform was enormous, eventually leading her recognition as a leading black reformed.¹⁰¹

The 1920s Struggle for Racial Equality

One of Hope's most well known struggles began around the end of World War I when she joined the battle to form black branches of the YWCA. America's post war patriotism led to a hatred of anything Americans viewed as threatening to the nation's

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 84-85.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 131.

morals.¹⁰² Not only did some white women fear opening the YWCA to African American women because of their race, they also believed the African American women would bring an immoral element to the YWCA. People claimed the YWCA “was not an organization for rescue work”¹⁰³ and that Hope was trying to turn it into one. Hope, however, did not want the YWCA to become a charity organization, but she did believe in extending services when needed.

Hope called a meeting in her home in April of 1920 to organize a protest against a YWCA conference in Louisville. The Louisville conference had decided that the rules of branch development read that African American women could only develop branches if white women approved of the branch’s establishment.¹⁰⁴ The years ahead would prove a struggle for Hope and her associates to gain the right to form branches.

Hope helped to draw up an appeal to this rule that she would then present at that year’s YWCA national conference. The “petitioners wondered why the national office of the YWCA permitted its field secretaries to ignore local conditions.”¹⁰⁵ Hope believed the national office should approve the start up of black branches instead of sending uninformed white field secretaries to make the judgments.

In 1922, the YWCA national board decided to handle black branches of the YWCA from the national office, a decision Hope would express thanks for by writing the director.¹⁰⁶ She was instrumental in petitioning the YWCA Board for the advancement of black branches, as many of her contemporaries knew. In a letter from black female

¹⁰² Brown, 192.

¹⁰³ Rouse, 100.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 98.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 100.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 106.

activist Mary McLeod Bethune to Hope, Bethune noted that when she could next meet with Hope they would “take up the YWCA matter.”¹⁰⁷ Obviously women recognized her struggles toward YWCA equality. A later letter from Mary Talbert, another black reformer, would congratulate Hope on her work so far but say that “a long hard fight still is before” her.¹⁰⁸ Hope’s YWCA work would continue her entire life, fueled by her desire for autonomous black YWCA branches. Though she did not see black branches gain the level of independence she had hoped for, Hope did witness an acceptance of black branches in the south.

A liberal Methodist minister, Will Alexander, formed the Commission on Interracial Cooperation at the beginning of the 1920s to encourage white and African Americans to become more enlightened about each other’s race.¹⁰⁹ Black women petitioned the CIC to form a division that would focus on the needs of women and children. Alexander solicited Hope’s help in organizing the participation of the African American women of Atlanta in the CIC. To encourage an interchange of ideas between the races, Hope selected two white women, Carrie Johnson and Sara Hawkins, and asked them to attend the 1920 NAACP biennial conference. Her attempt to foster relationships between white and African American women was noble but had many intrinsic flaws.¹¹⁰ There was entrenched suspicion between African American and white women. The suspicion was not only on the part of white women. In a September 30, 1924 letter from

¹⁰⁷ Mary McLeod Bethune to Lugenia Burns Hope, June 18 1921, Reel 15, Papers of John and Lugenia Burns Hope, Atlanta University Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library. (hereafter cited as J&LBH MSS)

¹⁰⁸ Mary Talbert to Lugenia Burns Hope, February 2 1922, Reel 15, J&LBH MSS.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Kadison Berson, *Marching to a Different Drummer* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenword Press, 1994), 132.

¹¹⁰ Rouse, 108.

Mrs. Booker T. Washington (also known as Margaret Murray Washington) to Hope, Mrs. Washington wrote, “I am an old fashioned segregationist in many ways. I believe thoroughly in race integrity, and I am afraid I am not very much of a Christian when it comes to mixing with folk who do not seem to want me.”¹¹¹ Hope, however, never gave up working for interracial harmony.

The International Council of Women of the Darker Races, working in conjunction with the CIC began an educational campaign in 1925. They appointed Hope to a group assigned to institute African American history courses. These courses would encompass studies of African American history and also representative African American literature. Not only would these classes be taught to African American children in public and private schools, they were also designed to be taught to white children in hopes of overcoming racial barriers.¹¹²

President Herbert Hoover recognized Hope’s work nationally in 1927 when he appointed her to the Colored Advisory Committee of the Red Cross to help analyze the great floods in Mississippi.¹¹³ During her investigation of the flooding, she found that the black refugee camps were frequently in terrible condition. The black men there suffered great injustices such as being forced into hard labor to earn food for their families. The guards at the camps were found to be harassing the African American inhabitants, forcing them to seek white patrons for protection. Hope’s report contained many feasible suggestions for improving the camp conditions and she received praise for them from

¹¹¹ Mrs. Booker T Washington to Lugenia Burns Hope, 30 September 1924, Reel 15, J&LBH MSS.

¹¹² Rouse, 114.

¹¹³ Ibid., 85.

President Hoover. Hope would communicate her concerns to the president and he would even once write back to her telling her it was “heartening to receive letters of such friendliness and support.”¹¹⁴ Despite the efforts of Hope and her committee, for the most part, their reform suggestions for the black flood victims were ignored.

Hope and her Family

When comparing Lugenia Burns Hope to Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Margaret Sanger, one stark difference was Hope’s greater belief in classic Victorian values. She had married John Hope in her mid twenties and made her marriage a success. Hope had to prioritize, and though her social reform work was important to her, “her family was essential to her.”¹¹⁵ The melding of her social work career and family life frequently seemed difficult, however Hope managed to keep a close relationship with her husband and children while leading an active public life.

It has been thought in some cases that Hope felt maternal guilt for frequently leaving her children. However, a wealth of letters between her and her elder son Edward written during the 1920s demonstrated that the two maintained a close relationship. Edward left home in 1925 to pursue his studies. Hope wrote him “just two weeks from the time [he] left home”¹¹⁶ and continued with her letters almost every two weeks for the

¹¹⁴ Herbert Hoover to Lugenia Burns Hope, 6 September 1928, Reel 15, J&LBH MSS.

¹¹⁵ Rouse, 55.

¹¹⁶ Lugenia Burns Hope to Edward Hope, 4 October 1925, Reel 15, J&LBH MSS.

remainder of the decade. In turn, Edward would write his mother lengthy letters about his studies every few weeks.

Hope used her letters to tell Edward about the life at Morehouse, with details ranging from the dog having distemper, to John's travels, to the football team scores. She also used her writing to express how hard it was to adjust to his being gone. In October 1925 she wrote to Edward: "You know I never cease to miss you, we still have four plates at the table."¹¹⁷ Regardless of how much time Hope spent with Edward as a child, she felt a profound sense of loss when he finally left home at the age of twenty four. Her letters were always filled with maternal concern for his studies: "enjoy yourself, but don't fail in anything."¹¹⁸

Hope's letters to Edward frequently asked his opinion on what trips she might take and she encouraged him to pursue field work that would eventually lead him to Brazil, and farther away from home. Her love and concern were genuine and she spent much time writing to Edward so that she could keep their family as together as possible and she could send "thousands of kisses for [her] dear boy."¹¹⁹

One scholar has suggested that Lugenia and John's marriage suffered from their frequent absences from home.¹²⁰ In contrast to this theory, dozens of letters exist between the two that span the entire 1920s and illustrate considerable affection and support. Both Lugenia and John (or Genie and Jack as they called each other) maintained contact during their absences, and it was not uncommon for Jack to send back twelve

¹¹⁷ Lugenia Burns Hope to Edward Hope, 19 October 1925, Reel 15, J&LBH MSS.

¹¹⁸ Lugenia Burns Hope to Edward Hope, 9 February 1926, Reel 15, J&LBH MSS.

¹¹⁹ Lugenia Burns Hope to Edward Hope, 17 April 1929, Reel 15, J&LBH MSS.

¹²⁰ Rouse, 53.

page letters several nights in a row. Lugenia wrote to John in 1924 that he was “representing the American colored people abroad, and a fine representative too.”¹²¹

Lugenia seemed well aware of the importance of her husband’s race work, a sentiment he returned in 1928 in a letter he wrote to calm her before a speech: “You are standing much higher in the estimation of social workers than [you have] any idea.”¹²²

Beyond understanding each other’s work, Lugenia and John appeared to have a deep and abiding love. One such example of a letter from Lugenia to John reads “Now my dear, you do not know how much I miss you -- how I would love to put my arms across the sea and hold you close to me, and shower you with kisses.”¹²³ Jack’s letters to his “loved one”¹²⁴ were usually in a similar vein. He would discuss the events going on and then address his thoughts of her.

John’s letters to Lugenia during the 1920s were very revealing, in that he did much reflection on their relationship. Perhaps during these years he was rediscovering their old love, for in a 1928 letter he wrote: “This I think is remarkable. That a man after thirty years should find a new love and almost a new interest issuing forth from his wife to him.”¹²⁵ John also mentioned the couple’s lack of money in several letters; he lamented that he had not been more financially successful. He always concluded his musings with the thought that the two were richer than most, because of their love and their children.

¹²¹ Lugenia Burns Hope to John Hope, 29 March 1924, Reel 15, J&LBH MSS.

¹²² John Hope to Lugenia Burns Hope, 23 February 1928, Reel 15, J&LBH MSS.

¹²³ Lugenia Burns Hope to John Hope, 29 March 1924, Reel 15, J&LBH MSS.

¹²⁴ John Hope to Lugenia Burns Hope, 30 March 1924, Reel 15, J&LBH MSS.

¹²⁵ John Hope to Lugenia Burns Hope, 23 February 1928, Reel 15, J&LBH MSS.

Hope did not seem to believe that her relationship with her family was lacking because she chose to pursue her reform work. Many women of the 1920s faced difficulties and regrets when dealing with combining family and work. Hope seemed to have found the middle ground where she was happy with both.

Summary

Lugenia Burns Hope is perhaps best known for her work as a black reformer. However, she was also an advocate for women's rights. Perhaps this dual activism came naturally to her, because she felt first-hand the restrictions that society put on African American citizens and on women in particular. Hope's strength lay in her ability to organize work that would make her concerns heard. Hope's pioneering of black settlement houses opened up an avenue for African American women in the south to uplift their race. Her work with the CIC and YWCA provided a way to integrate African Americans into society where they had before been excluded. From the Neighborhood Union, NAACP, and the CIC, to her role as mother, wife, and first lady of Morehouse, Lugenia Burns Hope showed a strength of spirit that was inspiring to all who struggled to achieve equality.

CHAPTER THREE

Margaret Sanger

Margaret Sanger is perhaps best known for her work as a birth control activist. She was born on September 14, 1879 in Corning, New York to Michael Higgins and Anne Purcell.¹²⁶ From the beginning of Sanger's¹²⁷ childhood, she was pulled in different directions by her traditionally female mother and more liberal, free-thinking father.

Michael Higgins was an Irish stone cutter and first generation Irish-American. After serving the Neighborhood Union army in the Civil War, Michael married Anne Purcell in 1869. The Higginses moved to Corning around 1877, where Michael opened his own business as a marble and stone cutter. Unfortunately, Michael was more of an artist than a businessman, and the family frequently suffered from a lack of income. He was also a man of fairly liberated thinking who rejected the Catholic dogma of the church and instead thought socialism was a more true form of Christianity.¹²⁸ His socialist leanings made him with fairly unpopular in Corning, and the Higgins children felt the disdain of the town and church.

¹²⁶ Ellen Chesler, *Woman of Valor: Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in American* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1992), 22.

¹²⁷ Hereafter the name Sanger will refer to Margaret Sanger.

¹²⁸ Margaret Sanger, *Margaret Sanger: An Autobiography* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1938), 20-23.

Michael Higgins's source of income was the work he did in the Catholic cemeteries, and his radical activities jeopardized that income. When Higgins aligned himself publicly with the well known atheist, Robert Ingersoll, his standing in the community disintegrated.¹²⁹ The children were ostracized by the rest of the town, and their schooling at the Catholic school became difficult, because everyone thought they were the children of a heretic.

Anne Purcell Higgins was a woman whose pride was her family and husband. Margaret was her sixth child and over the years, Anne would give birth to five more. Sanger's earliest impressions of her mother were confused and uncertain. Sanger remembered her mother as always sick, and having a cough most of the time.¹³⁰ When Sanger was just eight, she helped her mother give birth to one of her siblings, a fourteen and a half pound baby. She remembered her mother being up and working a week later.¹³¹

The majority of Anne Higgins's life was spent as a mother. She struggled to maintain a household, feed her family, and clothe eleven children on a meager income. Michael's irresponsible behavior with money, and his ability to alienate much of the community, made it a battle to keep the family above the poverty line. However, Anne never blamed her husband for their lack of material possessions. Anne and Michael had a relationship that was "unusual for its day", because they "not merely loved, but liked and

¹²⁹ Chesler, 26.

¹³⁰ Sanger, *An Autobiography*, 11.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

respected each other.”¹³² Sanger and her siblings admired their parents’ marriage, and appeared to enjoy their childhood.

Sanger viewed her father as a “non-conformist through and through”¹³³ and in her autobiography claimed him as her childhood role-model. Sanger never acknowledged the influence her mother had on her. One of her most influential childhood experiences was living in a house where her mother was constantly sick. Sanger grew up watching her mother’s health decline, and with the birth of each child Anne got weaker. Sanger’s childhood was therefore not very secure, because her mother was always at risk of dying. Because each child weakened her more, Anne should have avoided childbirth. Michael Higgins was most likely familiar with birth control methods, but Anne was a devout Catholic who would never accept such practices.¹³⁴ It is reasonable to think that Margaret Sanger was aware of the toll that childbirth took on Anne, but wasn’t aware that there were ways to prevent pregnancy.

Sanger’s education at Corning’s parochial schools left her unhappy, due in part to the stigma of being Michael Higgins’s child. Her older sisters worked and managed to gather enough money to send her to the Claverack College in the Catskill Mountains.¹³⁵ Sanger was an instigator of the other girls and would get caught helping them sneak out at night and carry out other such pranks that made her greatly popular.¹³⁶ She delighted in her school work, however, and was especially interested in social science work,

¹³² Ibid., 16.

¹³³ Ibid., 12.

¹³⁴ Chesler, 39-41.

¹³⁵ Sanger, *An Autobiography*, 35.

¹³⁶ Chesler, 30.

helping foster her future thoughts on suffrage and even birth control. Sanger was becoming a beautiful woman during these years and she attracted a host of male suitors.

After three years, Sanger could no longer afford Claverack, so without a diploma she left to teach for a year.¹³⁷ However, her mother's health was declining rapidly, and Sanger returned home to help nurse her. Sanger's mother was very weak from a lifetime of multiple pregnancies and illness. She died of consumption in 1899 when Sanger was twenty.¹³⁸

Sanger remained in Corning for several months after her mother's death. The Higgins family needed someone to help hold them together when they were suddenly left without a care giver. Michael made Sanger's stay difficult, however. After Anne's death, Michael became angry and hateful; Sanger described him as a tyrant.¹³⁹ The other children were becoming caught up in their father's rage, and Sanger was desperate to leave Corning.

Through friends at Claverack, Sanger arranged to attend the White Plains Hospital to study medicine.¹⁴⁰ Though she had originally intended to become a doctor, she was discouraged by the trend to specialize and also by the difficulty women had in being admitted to medical school. Nursing proved a viable alternative for Sanger, and so she entered White Plains two year accredited program for nursing.¹⁴¹ Sanger's studies required her to take traditional classes and perform fieldwork in the wards where she

¹³⁷ Sanger, *An Autobiography*, 40.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁴¹ Chesler, 46.

earned much respect from patients and colleagues who were fond of her and admired her work.

Sanger's own health began to deteriorate, and by 1902 she was diagnosed with an extremely communicable form of tuberculosis.¹⁴² She might have acquired this disease from her mother or even while working as a nurse, but Sanger never recovered entirely and was plagued by this illness throughout her life. It would interrupt the work she was doing in her third year of nursing school--the year she needed to fulfill all of her certification requirements.

At one of the White Plains dances, Margaret met architect William Sanger, and on August 18, 1902 they married, having known each other just six months.¹⁴³ William's expectations for marriage were more conventional than Margaret's, and while he hoped she might continue her nursing studies, he also wanted her to become more concerned with him and their home. William was also very similar to the father Margaret was trying to escape. Both she and her new husband rebelled against organized religion, and they were both staunch supporters of the Socialist party.¹⁴⁴

After only six months of marriage, Sanger was stricken again by her tuberculosis. This time the illness was more complicated, though as she was pregnant with her first child. She was sent to Saramac Lake to spend her pregnancy in the Trudeau Sanitarium, where it was hoped rest and a natural environment would help her recover. On November 28, 1903, Start was born.¹⁴⁵ Sanger did not recover as hoped, however.

¹⁴² Ibid., 47.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 46.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 50.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 50.

Instead she sank into a deep depression and she was disinterested in her baby.¹⁴⁶ It would be five years before the Sangers had any more children.

Sanger once said that she “learned everything she ever knew about romantic love from Bill Sanger” and she talked at great length of their youthful passion. If indeed Margaret and William had shared an impassioned and intimate love, it would have been unlikely that they could have put off pregnancy for five years, without first hand knowledge of birth control.¹⁴⁷ In 1908, Margaret gave birth to the Sanger’s second son, Grant, who was followed in twenty months by their daughter, Peggy.

Motherhood was special to Sanger, who would watch the antics of her babies with joy. She suffered from her own problems, though, that prevented her from forming close bonds with her children. Sanger’s long battle with life threatening tuberculosis gave her a sense of desperation to lead a full life. She never stayed in one place for long before she got restless and would search for a new activity. Sanger also lived with the constant fear that she would infect her children with her tuberculosis and so she retained wet nurses and nannies to care for them.¹⁴⁸

About 1910 the Sanger family moved to New York City. Margaret Sanger became involved in the radical socialist ideology of the cities prominent socialists and feminists, such as Emma Goldman and Mabel Dodge. Sanger was restricted from fully participating in these groups, though, because she was a mother with three young children who required her attention.¹⁴⁹ At the same time William Sanger became politically active

¹⁴⁶ Sanger, *An Autobiography*, 56.

¹⁴⁷ Chesler, 53.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

in the Socialist Party and focused his attentions on public office. Unfortunately his interest in left-wing socialism cost him his architectural career and forced his wife back to work.¹⁵⁰ She took a part time job with Lillian Wald's Visiting Nurses Association as a nurse in the immigrant lower east side.

Sanger's work as a visiting nurse did not inspire her with hope and optimism for her patients. Instead, she saw the bitterness, the despair, and the poverty they felt. She also was exposed to experiences that solidified in her mind the need for birth control. She witnessed women lining up outside buildings to visit the five dollar abortionists, while others died alone giving birth or doing self abortions. Sanger highlighted her birth control crusade with a story from this period. One of the women she tended, Sadie Sachs, implored her for advice on birth control so she wouldn't get pregnant again, and Sanger had nothing to give her. The advice for Sadie's husband to sleep elsewhere did not seem to help, for Sadie died trying to self-abort her next pregnancy. While the story of Sadie Sachs might be apocryphal, it painted a poignant story of the dire consequences for women who were unable to stop getting pregnant.¹⁵¹

One of Margaret Sanger's stumbling blocks for birth control activism was Anthony Comstock. In 1873 he had encouraged Congress to pass a federal obscenity statute that prohibited the dissemination of obscene information.¹⁵² Comstock couldn't challenge doctors, but he could challenge activists, such as Margaret Sanger, and his righteous indignation was an enemy of the birth control movement. Margaret Sanger,

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 62.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 63.

¹⁵² Ibid., 67.

with the help of radical friends, coined the term “birth control” and began publishing *The Woman Rebel* in 1914 to promote her ideas. Comstock retaliated by bringing charges against Sanger for *The Woman Rebel*.¹⁵³

Margaret and William’s marriage had fallen apart by the time of the trial in 1914, and without saying good-bye to him or to the children, she fled to Europe. Though she was desperate for the company of her children, she was ironically delighted by her new found freedom. Sanger planned to remain in Europe indefinitely. She changed her mind when Comstock died in 1915 and she realized William was being prosecuted for the distribution of one of her pamphlets, “Family Limitation.”¹⁵⁴

In November 1915, Peggy died suddenly from pneumonia and Margaret and William’s separation became permanent. Sanger once again sunk into depression from the overwhelming guilt she felt over not spending Peggy’s last year with her. Her solace though, was in knowing that Peggy would be with her wherever she was. Instead of encouraging Sanger to spend more time with her sons, she took this knowledge and doubled her efforts for the birth control movement.

On October 16, 1916, Sanger and her sister Ethel opened the doors to the first birth control clinic. Although they claimed not to dispense birth control, pessaries were found in their clinic’s inventory. On the tenth day they were shut down by police. Several weeks later they reopened only to be shut down again. Sanger spent thirty days in jail for opening the clinic, but the hundreds of women who came to the clinic while it was open convinced her of its value.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 97.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 127.

After Sanger's failed first attempt to open a clinic, she redoubled her efforts to distribute informational writings. She began work on the *Birth Control Review*, a journal in which she put forth her ideas on birth control so women could access them.¹⁵⁵ As the birth control movement headed into the 1920s, Sanger's previous alliances with organizations such as the National Birth Control League disintegrated, and she set off on a more radical path to bring birth control into the lives of all women.

The Birth Control Movement in the 1920s

Margaret Sanger was already a prominent figure in the birth control movement when the 1920s began. Though not everyone in America agreed with Sanger's philosophies on family limitation, much of America watched, full of curiosity, to see what she would do next. During the 1920s Sanger's life was characterized by her speaking engagements, clinic activities, and publications to promote birth control.

From November 11 - 13, 1921, Margaret Sanger and her fellow activists organized the First National Birth Control Conference in New York City. Sanger planned for the conference to be held at the Plaza Hotel, with Sunday's closing meeting to be held at Town Hall. At the hotel, Sanger chaired conference committees that presented papers on topics such as the economical and social aspects of birth control. She also arranged for doctors to share medical information regarding birth control. The American Birth Control Conference set a precedent for forums where people could

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 165.

discuss issues of birth control in an educated, well organized arena. Though the Birth Control Conference made strides toward informing the citizens about birth control, on the final day of the conference, the intolerance of the Catholic Church and city government led to the arrest of the conference organizers.

When Margaret Sanger showed up at the Town Hall, one of her supporters, Anne Kennedy, told her the police were inside, ready to stop the conference. Sanger was undaunted and tried to take the stage to speak to the crowd. The police, however, remained insistent and dragged the speakers off the stage one by one. Amidst the confusion, Sanger could only determine that the police were working on the orders of Catholic Archbishop Patrick Hays.¹⁵⁶ The Archbishop had sent an emissary, Monsignor Dineen, to supervise police action, and he told the activists that they were being stopped for carrying on talks on an “indecent, immoral subject.”¹⁵⁷

Sanger knew that the police were not acting within the bounds of their legal power, and believed that if she could turn the issue away from birth control to the right to free speech, she would gather more support. In her autobiography, Sanger recounted: “I knew that I had to keep on until I was arrested in order that free speech might be made the issue.”¹⁵⁸ Sanger’s tactics worked and the “efforts to muzzle the birth control propagandists”¹⁵⁹ failed, because the general public was interested in the apparent violation of the First Amendment.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 203.

¹⁵⁷ Sanger, *An Autobiography*, 303.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 304.

¹⁵⁹ Chesler, 205.

When the Birth Control Conference case went to court, the police and Catholic officials seemed too confused to pinpoint who was responsible for the arrests at Town Hall. The Archbishop and arresting officers did not even show up in court to defend their actions.¹⁶⁰ Though this turmoil only added to the bitter debate between the Catholic Church and the birth control activists, it also gave great publicity to the formation of Sanger's American Birth Control League.

The American Birth Control League found a voice in the *Birth Control Review*, which was launched by Sanger in January of 1917. This magazine was developed as an alternative to the birth control leagues that had sprung up across the nation, encouraged by Sanger's speaking tours. She was tired of the administrative mire and political bickering the leagues promoted and the *Birth Control Review* provided a forum independent of the different leagues.

During the 1920s, *The Birth Control Review* remained Sanger's best way of expressing her issues and concerns. The articles she wrote were frequently in response to those who spoke out against birth control, such as Archbishop Hays. Sanger also would use the *Birth Control Review* to answer general questions women had mailed them about birth control and family planning.

The mail turned out to be one of Sanger's greatest tools for determining birth control support. In 1921, Sanger sent out a mailing, asking women about their birth control practices and opinions. She received over 5000 responses, and though they did

¹⁶⁰ Sanger, *An Autobiography*, 304.

not produce statistically sound data, Sanger was able to show that the interest did exist and American women wanted birth control.¹⁶¹

Sanger was not satisfied with knowing women desired access to birth control. She wanted to bring some organization to the movement that would allow birth control activists to work in an effective manner. In 1922, the American Birth Control League gained recognized status as a not-for-profit, public service institution.¹⁶² Sanger hoped to establish a network of clinics that could be based on a medical model, and not only provide education and service to women, but also conduct research into birth control methods and practices.¹⁶³

The American Birth Control League and Margaret Sanger's most influential advance in the 1920s came in 1923 when Sanger founded the hugely successful Birth Control Clinical Research Bureau. Finally, the birth control advocates had a location where they could see clients and conduct research on the birth control needs of women.¹⁶⁴ The need also developed for a way to provide women with contraception devices, which were not easily acquired in the United States.

During the early 1920s, the New York clinic had to secure contraceptive devices from other countries, such as Holland or Germany. Sanger was particularly interested in distributing pessaries (similar to diaphragms) and spermicidal jelly to clients.¹⁶⁵ However, she faced difficulties smuggling the shipments into the country. Sanger used

¹⁶¹ Chesler, 202.

¹⁶² Ibid., 223.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 201.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 226.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 254.

her business contacts and the assistance of her second husband, millionaire Noah Slee, to begin the manufacture of contraceptive goods in America.

Slee's company, 3-in-one Oil, helped secure the German formula for spermicidal jelly, and began to manufacture the product in America. To manufacture contraceptives, Slee also invested money in the Holland-Rantos Company, started in 1925 by a business contact of Sanger's.¹⁶⁶

The Holland-Rantos Company began the job of producing the American equivalents of European contraceptive pessaries and jellies. As recalled by George Stubbs, selling these contraceptives was "not a socially acceptable job."¹⁶⁷ Once Holland-Rantos created the contraceptives, someone had to sell them to the doctors and clinics, and the first salesman was Stubbs. He would approach doctors in their offices to show them the pessaries and jellies he carried in a case. Sometimes the doctors were sympathetic to family planning and welcomed the instruction on distributing contraceptives to their clients. More frequently, Stubbs was ordered off the property.

Sanger acted with "missionary fervor"¹⁶⁸ in those years, trying to promote birth control against the protest of the Catholic Church. Some people felt that "Sanger was not rational in her attitude towards the Catholics."¹⁶⁹ Sanger's anger and resentment towards the church was most likely due in part to her memories of her mother. Anne Higgins used the Catholic faith to sustain her through eleven births, and in the end, the physical strain ruined her health.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 255.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with George Stubbs, by Ginger Harmon, Los Angeles, CA, 13 January 1976.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Chesler, 200.

Sanger's crusade for birth control led her across the country in her public appearances, but she still desired to make her cause accessible to everyone. By publishing *Birth Control Review* Sanger was able to reach more women than she could have reached personally. By publishing articles in popular journals and writing books, she was able to increase awareness even more for the birth control cause.

Margaret Sanger's Correspondence

Publishing the book *Motherhood in Bondage* (1928) was Sanger's method for making heard the thousands of pleas and questions she received each year from women. According to Sanger, "Motherhood in Bondage, is by and large, the same story--the same pattern of pain."¹⁷¹ The impact of this book was in the similarity of the letters in it. Over and over women presented their plights and pleaded for "deliverance" by learning methods for preventing conception.¹⁷²

Sanger was discouraged by the opponents of the movement who claimed birth control would lead to the moral destruction of society. She believed it would free women from so many hardships. To help people see that birth control would help families, Sanger compiled these stories and letters, to show the human side of the women she wanted to help.

¹⁷¹ Margaret Sanger, *Motherhood in Bondage* (New York: Brentano's, 1928; reprint, New York: Pergamon Press, 1956), xii.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, xii.

Sanger's correspondence was so voluminous, that she categorized the letters she published in *Motherhood in Bondage*. Each category illustrated a group of women who would benefit from birth control. The first chapter set the tone for the entire book, for in it Sanger grouped letters that told heartbreaking stories of children having children.

"To American minds there is something shocking in the child marriages,"¹⁷³ Sanger began. While some girls in America were forced to marry at thirteen or even twelve years of age, Sanger thought it was intrinsically wrong that they should also have to bear children at that age. Sanger chose to put letters from child mothers in chapter one, because she saw them as highly illustrative of the good birth control would do. Birth control would help prevent motherhood from burdening young women until they were old enough to raise children.

Motherhood in Bondage also attacked the poverty and destitution that plagued women when they gave birth to more children than their families could afford. These women were said by some to "exemplify the typical American woman," the "breeders,"¹⁷⁴ who were in the business of being mothers. Sanger's plea for birth control was in part to protect women. Many of her letters contained similar tales: "our physician said I ought not become pregnant again, as my life would be endangered, but when my husband asked him for a contraceptive, he said there was none."¹⁷⁵ Many women in the 1920s suffered from difficult pregnancies, ones that destroyed their health as pregnancies had destroyed that of Anne Higgins, and Sanger hoped to prevent that tragedy. She felt that one of birth

¹⁷³ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 40.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 89.

control's biggest advantages was that it might save the lives of women who were too "unfitted either by physical defect [or] psychic abnormality"¹⁷⁶ to undergo pregnancy and childbirth.

Women in the 1920s faced many challenges in raising families. Some women had no husbands to financially support them while others had husbands who themselves did not want large families. The women who were about to enter marriage did not want to end up repeating their mothers lives. Most of all, women wanted to be able to control their own lives.

Summary

Margaret Sanger's philosophy was not, in her opinion, against families, rather it was in favor of women's advancement. She believed that universal access to reliable contraception would allow women to balance their public and private lives. With the ability to plan their families, women could avoid health damaging pregnancies, better space children's births, and increase the economic well being of their families. Sanger also adhered to the belief that women who could control pregnancy would have better, and more sexually satisfying, relationships with their spouses.

Sanger did not promote birth control as an excuse for immoral sexual behavior. She believed that birth control would eventually lead to the development of well planned families.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 60.

The effect Sanger had on women was far reaching. Women everywhere looked to her for the support and encouragement that society did not provide. Sanger understood that most women were not turning to birth control so they could avoid having children. Women wanted to have access to birth control so they could responsibly plan their families. For these women, Sanger was an advocate, a woman who spoke for them so that they too could be heard.

Sanger's struggle to promote birth control did not go unnoticed or unappreciated. One woman wrote Sanger after reading about a professor challenging the birth control work: "You will be remembered long after he is dead, as a benefactor to the world and what you advocate will come to pass."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 210.

EPILOGUE

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Lugenia Burns Hope, and Margaret Sanger each present life stories that differ. Yet they shared a common bond reacting to issues of race, birth control, suffrage, and activism in the 1920s.

Hope was herself a victim of racism. She made a conscious choice in her life not to pass as a white woman, but rather to take pride in her African American heritage. During the 1920s, she encountered racism in many forms. Hope had trouble gaining an audience for her activism, because many white citizens did not want to listen to an African American woman discuss black issues. She had to confront racism in her work to advance education in schools, because racism was entrenched in the school system due to the separate but equal doctrine. Hope's actions in the 1920s were dedicated to helping African American people overcome the racial barriers they faced. Sanger's contact with race came from her work with ethnic minorities. She did extensive work in primarily working class, ethnic neighborhoods, and recognized that the women in these areas needed to be able to control reproduction to improve their economic and health conditions. Gilman was a self-professed nativist who believed that American society was in danger of being overrun by recent immigrants. She wrote as an advocate for maintaining a primarily white America.

Margaret Sanger is the woman whose name is most closely related to birth control. She saw birth control as the way to liberate women from enforced motherhood

and promote better family conditions by planning births. Gilman saw birth control as a means to decrease the recent immigrants' birth rate, thereby preserving American "purity." Hope maintained Victorian ideals that, instead of embracing birth control, promoted the female's maternal role.

Suffrage touched the life of many women in the 1920s, including these three. Hope utilized suffrage in achieving her goals. When she was working for school reform in Atlanta, Hope was able to gather women to vote for reform. Suffrage provided an opportunity to make Hope's voice heard. Gilman believed that suffrage was a step towards independence and equality for women. Sanger, though not a suffrage activist, manipulated women's entry into politics to further the birth control movement. She lobbied politicians to support her programs and to design legislation that would legalize the dissemination of birth control information.

The 1920s have been characterized by their lack of social reform movements. However these three women based their lives on reform and the elevation of women to achieve results. Hope contributed to social reform by designing strategies for large communities and creating a social work network for her African American community. Gilman's talents were not in her activities, but in her ability as a speaker and a writer. She was a leader of the intellectual reformers, who shared her ideas with a widespread audience. Charisma was Sanger's reform skill. She had the ability to motivate groups of women to work toward the eradication of human suffering.

Gilman, Hope, and Sanger also shared profound childhood experiences which influenced their major work during the 1920s. Gilman and Hope were raised without

fathers and Sanger's mother was always in uncertain health. These personal experiences contributed to Gilman's, Hope's, and Sanger's public work. Gilman and Hope promoted strong family relationships, with monogamous, two parent homes. Sanger hoped that birth control would prevent other women from suffering the fate of her mother--frailty and early death. Each woman's family suffered from economic hardship and each was able to generalize her personal struggle to the plight of America's poor.

While the media personified the 1920s woman as the young flapper in search of self--analysis of Gilman, Hope, and Sanger reveals a different kind of self. The "self" of the flapper was of a vain, hedonistic nature, but search for identity by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Lugenia Burns Hope, and Margaret Sanger took a philanthropic direction. They found fulfillment in dedicating their lives to improving the lives of others. Lugenia Burns Hope summarized this fulfillment: "I have always felt it the privilege of my life to have had that rich experience...we thought these problems through and they were helped."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Lugenia Burns Hope, "Biographical Statement of Mrs. John Hope," Neighborhood Union Collection, quoted in Jacqueline A. Rouse, *Lugenia Burns Hope: Black Southern Reformer* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 17.

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