

ACS Speech Museum of the City of New York - Dec 4, 2014

The movements for social justice and humanitarian justice take many forms because there are so many root causes to be addressed. What my grandmother saw 100 years ago on the Lower East Side was maternal deaths, unsafe abortions, infant deaths and rampant disease. The maternal and infant mortality statistics for the United States back then were the equivalent of the least developed country in the world today. To her, and to us, these deaths were an affront to civilization and decency, and preventable. Her solution, birth control, to enable women to time, space, delay and reduce her births contributed to the massive improvement in the public's health today.

But still: worldwide over 290,000 women die annually from pregnancy related causes, that is 800 a day, including 43,000 from unsafe abortions, and 5.6 million babies die at birth or are stillborn. 1.5 million men and women die annually from AIDS and 35% of women worldwide have been the victims of intimate partner violence. This is an affront to decency and civilization.

And, no surprise, there are those today as there were 100 years ago who oppose our efforts to save these lives.

100 years ago, Anthony Comstock, the government's enforcer of Puritan morality, proclaimed that sexual pleasure within marriage was "bestial and base".

The judge who sentenced my grandmother to jail for opening America's first birth control clinic in 1916 said, "A woman has no right to copulate without fear of pregnancy."

So, let's talk about men. The week's news:

The male President of Turkey said last week that women would never be equal to men, and that they should stay at home and have 3, preferably 5, children. The male Minister of Education in Russia yesterday said that sex ed would never be taught in Russia's classrooms. ISIS banned birth control in Mosul. The Gambia enacted a draconian anti-gay law. And a Bishop in Poland

declared that “The ideology of gender presents a greater threat worse than Nazism and Communism combined.” And then there is the Texas Legislature.

Is reproductive and sexual freedom a male versus female thing? A zero sum game, where women win and men lose? No, it isn't. Are women universally in favor of reproductive rights and men universally opposed? In this country, not even close. If only it were that Manichean.

In the USA, women favor reproductive freedom only slightly more than men do.

Just to cite one recent poll from Quinnipiac:

61% of women want abortion legal in all or most cases. But so do 53% of men. 8% point difference, hardly a vast gulf in opinion. Over a third of women and men are opposed, and they show up and vote the issue.

We aren't speaking effectively to all women and men, about the necessity of reproductive freedom. My grandmother said to her colleagues in 1952, when they founded the International Planned Parenthood, that “we won't get anywhere without the men”. Quite simply, reproductive freedom, and the liberation of women from enforced childbearing, are in everyone's best interests, both men and women.

100 years ago, while my grandmother was in exile in Europe under indictment for publishing *The Woman Rebel*, there is a trial going on in the criminal courts downtown of an unsuspecting individual, who was entrapped into handing out one of my grandmother's pamphlets, *Family Limitation*, to an undercover agent of Anthony Comstock's. The accused, after declaring in open court that Comstock was a “religious and pornographic fanatic” and a “victim of incurable sexaphobia”, declared, “I deny the right of the state to exercise dominion over the souls and bodies of our women by compelling them to go into unwilling motherhood. “

The defendant was found guilty. The presiding judge said, “Your crime is not only a violation of the laws of man, it is a violation of the law of God as well. Such persons who circulate such pamphlets are a menace to society. There are

too many now who believe it is a crime to have children. If some of the women who are going around advocating equal suffrage would go around and advocate women having children they would do a greater service.”

The defendant was sentenced to 30 days in jail for handing out *Family Limitation*. The defendant was my grandfather, William Sanger. The first person to go to jail for advocating birth control in my grandmother’s crusade was not my grandmother - it was my grandfather. 100 years ago.