Adventures in Family Limitation

HISTORY COMIC

written by Khris Soden and Michael Helquist
drawn by Khris Soden

THIS GRAPHIC SHORT STORY uses visual narrative to depict events that occurred during the 1916 visit to Portland by birth control advocate Margaret Sanger. It is complementary to the article "'Lewd, Obscene, and Indecent': The 1916 Portland Edition of *Family Limitation*" in this issue. "Adventures" relies on evidence and imagination to portray the lectures, arrests, and rally supporting Sanger. "Lewd, Obscene, and Indecent" employs those events as context for analysis of Marie Equi's revision of Sanger's birth control pamphlet.

Graphic nonfiction can enhance historical events and engage readers with visual information that is more evocative and nuanced than narrative text alone. The opening scenes, for example, depict what a text-only account might describe as "women cannery workers close together along an assembly line." Viewers imagine the women standing for hours on end — repeatedly selecting, stemming, and returning fruit to the conveyor belt. The setting suggests that efficiency surpasses concern for comfort and health, but the scene also reveals camaraderie among the women. Their proximity makes conversation possible, and perhaps more private, amid the din.

Bertie, Polly, and Frederick — all fictional observers — represent the intended readers of Sanger's pamphlet in the workplace, home, doctor's office, and theaters. Their responses reflect the probable reactions of working people based on newspaper reports and Sanger's writings. We assumed, for example, that the endorsement by union leaders of the revised *Family Limitation* was effective, and so, Frederick expresses this sentiment. Similarly, we suggest that male union members recognized and appreciated content directed at their interests and concerns. Graphic nonfiction permits a mix of probable, imaginative events with documented actions and words spoken. Primary sources inform the details about the arrests and content of the pamphlet and supply real excerpts from contemporary interviews with Sanger.

By offering greater nuance and insight about everyday activities and historically significant events, the graphic imagery and point of view of fictional observers enhances readers' appreciation of the historical record.

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ADVENTURES IN FAMILY LIMITATION
Written by Khris Soden and Michael Helquist
Drawn by Khris Soden
June 15, 1916
OREGON PACKING CO.
Any plans for the week, Bertie?
Why, yes! Have you heard of Margaret Sanger?
Oh, yes! "The Woman Rebel".
Well, she's speaking at the Heilig on Monday and I'll be taking Frederick.
That sounds like quite the night! May I join you?
Of course! How often does this ever get talked about?
The Portland Hotel
There she is- on the patio!
Mrs. Sanger! Do you have a few minutes to speak with the press?
Certainly! Just don't keep me from this loganberry juice for too long!
I have been called a vile female, a person with a barnyard philosophy, a God-send, the greatest woman of the century, the counterpart of Abraham Lincoln, and a horrible creature. Rather conflicting epithets, but I go on doing what I believe to be right, carrying a message of help, as I believe it to be.
I am of the opinion that a greater knowledge of birth control will raise the standard of morality instead of lowering it, and I am making an appeal to the Western women voters to help in my campaign to repeal the puritanical laws as they exist.

June 19, the Heilig Theater
Polly, you remember my husband, Frederick.
Of course!
Charmed, Miss.
I'm glad we got here early- there's so many people here!
And more men than I had expected.
Sh! She's starting!
Birth control is the keynote in the social awakening. It challenges the idea that women should not try to keep from having children and advances the idea that the real wrong is in having children they do not want and for whom they cannot provide.
They're arresting those men!
Sirs, you can't be selling that material here.
FAMILY LIMITATION
But Mrs. Sanger said it was okay! What about my free speech rights?
Save it for the judge, buster!
Dr. Equi! What are you doing?!
FAMILY LIMITATION
Take this knowledge for free, brothers and sisters!
FAM
Later, at the police station..
I told them they should arrest me instead, but they wouldn't have it.
Margaret, don't worry: I'll make their bail. I'm so sorry about all of this - it's just like what they did to Emma Goldman last year when she was here.
We won't let it stop us. Before the men's trial, Marie, could you give a doctor's eye to the text? I wrote it so hastily before. It needs to be more polished and professional.

Dr Marie Equi
You're in fine health, Bertie. You can go ahead and get dressed.
Now, you have little ones at home, don't you?
Why yes, two: Freddy and Evelyn. They're quite the handful!
Unless you're thinking of having more Freddies and Evelyns, I'd like for you to have this.
FAMILY LIMITATION REVISED
Thank you, Doc, but I already have a copy.
Well, this is a new version. Maybe you can share this copy with your husband. There's information for him in there, too
While I was at Doc's yesterday, she gave me a new edition of "Family Limitation."
I heard the city council banned the distribution of it.
Of course they did! Have you seen those flyers? "Shall five men legislate in secret against 100,000 women?"
I hear there's going to be a big rally in support of Mrs. Sanger when she returns to the Baker Theater this week.
Well, if you're planning on going, you can count me in!
How was your day today?
Oh, fine! Just another day at the Works.
Say, I was reading through this "Family Limitation". Did you see all these endorsements from union men? That's really something!
And listen to this - there's that talk of condoms and "Sanitube." Well, I bought some of that over at Nichols Drug on the way home.
But this is the hot stuff they arrested those boys over?
I've read saltier parts of the Bible!
Surprised there's no talk of abortions in here, but I guess with all of this other informa
They removed the references to it in this edition.
Would you like to come to Mrs. Sanger's Protest Meeting with me?
You bet I would.

June 29, the Baker Theater
This crowd's bigger than the Heilig!
"Family Limitation"! City Council doesn't want you to know what the rich know already!
Gee, Doc Equi and the other women selling these when they're banned!
And read that first page: "This new edition is mainly the result of the stupid persecution of the city administration of Portland, Ore."!
Back again, it is my pleasure to welcome Mrs. Margaret Sanger!
CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP
The cops are already on the stage!
They're going to arrest her!
She's barely started talking!
They're arresting Doc and those other women, too!
Let's give them Hell!
This is wrong! What's wrong with us owning this?
We've also broken the law!
You should arrest us, too!
Arrest us, too!
ARREST US, TOO! ARREST US, TOO! ARREST US, TOO! ARREST US, TOO! ARREST US, TOO! ARREST US, TOO!
"The three men and four women were all found guilty. Of course this happened! But I'll keep this going -get these out to more women. Even print more if I must. Just imagine: Portland, the only town on the tour to toss Margaret Sanger in jail."

NOTES

Page 1: The authors selected the Oregon Packing Company, located at East Belmont and Eighth streets, as the characters' worksite to reference the 1913 strike there. Greg Hall, "The Fruits of Her Labor: Women, Children, and Progressive Era Reformers in the Pacific Northwest Canning Industry," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 109:2 (Summer 2008): 226–51. Sanger was known nationally for her radical monthly newsletter, *The Woman Rebel,* which first appeared in 1914. It discussed contraception without describing specific methods, but federal authorities charged her with obscenity for its distribution. Prosecutors dropped the case in early 1916, and Sanger then began the national tour that brought her to Portland. Jean H. Baker, *Margaret Sanger, A Life of Passion* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), 83–87, 105–108, 110–12; "Mrs. Sanger Here," *Oregonian*, June 17, 1916, 15.

Page 2: "Says Birth Control Would Right Wrongs," *Oregon Daily Journal*, June 18, 1916, 5**.** In August 1915, Emma Goldman, the nationally known anarchist, spoke in Portland on "How and Why Small Families Are Best." When she discussed contraception, police arrested her. She was later released due to insufficient evidence. "Miss Goldman Free," *Oregonian*, August 14, 1915, 9.

Page 3: Equi was an active member of the Birth Control League of Portland and helped distribute birth control information to her patients and other women. Equi revised *Family Limitation* at Sanger's request. She targeted union members and addressed the concerns of both men and women. She also reminded women of their responsibility to limit "the human material for exploiters and militarists." Michael Helquist, *Marie Equi, Radical Politics and Outlaw Passions* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2015), 149. The Portland City Council — all men — convened in emergency session on June 23, 1916, and declared *Family Limitation* obscene. They also prohibited distribution or sale of the pamphlet. "Book Sale Stopped," *Oregonian*, June 24, 1916, 18; "Women to Voice Protest," *Oregonian*, June 26, 1916, 4; "Sanger Birth Control Protest Meeting," advertisement, *Oregonian,* June 28, 1916, 11. The Portland version included a list of seven prominent West Coast union officials who promoted birth control. Sanger, *Family Limitation, Revised Edition,* 1916, inside front cover. Sanitube was recommended for use by men to help improve sexual hygiene. Sanger, *Family Limitation*, 1916, 11. Although abortion is alluded to in the 1916 Portland edition of *Family Limitation,* the procedure was not mentioned as specifically as in earlier versions. See Michael Helquist, "Lewd, Obscene, and Indecent," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 117:2 (Summer 2016): 276–89.

Page 4: The Portland police arrested Margaret Sanger, Dr. Marie Equi, Mrs. F.A. Greatwood, and Maude Bourner. More than one hundred women followed the arrestees. "Book Sale Stopped," *Oregonian*, June 24, 1916, 18. The four women and three men arrested for distributing obscene material were tried on July 7, 1916, and all found guilty. The judge ordered ten-dollar fines, suspended for the men, and no fines for the women. "Mrs. Sanger's Book Declared Obscene," *Oregonian,* July 8, 1916, 16. Portland was the only city on Sanger's seventeen-city 1916 tour to arrest her. Sanger, "A Birth Control Lecture Tour," August 9, 1916, *Malthusian,* September 1916, 83–84; *The Public Writings and Speeches of Margaret Sanger,* https://www.nyu.edu/projects/sanger/webedition/app/documents/show.php?sangerDoc=320118.xml (accessed January 15, 2016).

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Peter Bagge, *Woman Rebel, The Margaret Sanger Story (*Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2013) (a full-length, graphic nonfiction biography of Margaret Sanger).

Jean H. Baker, *Margaret Sanger, A Life of Passion* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011).

Ellen Chesler, *Woman of Valor, Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in America (*New York: Anchor Books, 1993).

Jonathan Eig, *The Birth of the Pill: How Four Crusaders Reinvented Sex and Launched a Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014).

Michael Helquist, *Marie Equi, Radical Politics and Outlaw Passions* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2015).

Margaret Sanger, Esther Katz, Cathy Moran Jajo, and Peter Engleman, *The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).