

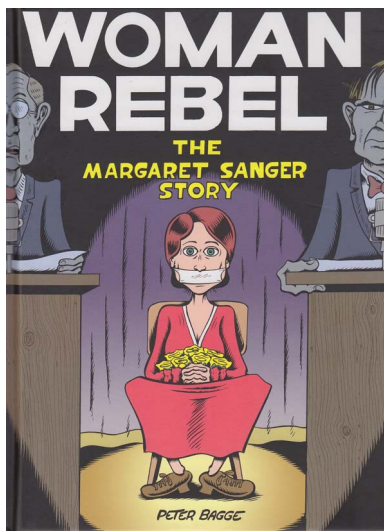
## BOOK REVIEW

**Woman Rebel: The Margaret Sanger Story**

Peter Bagge. Montreal, Canada: Drawn & Quarterly, 2013. ISBN-13: 978-1-77046-1-260. Price: £10.49. Pages: 80 (hardcover)

The controversial birth control activist, Margaret Sanger, may not seem like an obvious subject for a cartoonist but her action-packed life would rival any comic heroine. Her campaigning was one of the biggest contributions to women's rights in the 20th century and her insatiable thirst for justice is an example to feminists today. Bagge's expressive characters and deft storytelling disguise this education as entertainment, thanks to this exciting new genre, the graphic novel.

Witness to her mother's 18 pregnancies in 25 years, and later, as a nurse, to her patients' desperation not to bring more children into abject poverty, Sanger established the USA's first birth control clinic, illegally, in 1916. Although the rich women seemed able to access reproductive choice, the women Sanger encountered were still slaves to their biology. She encountered much resistance and challenged the State, the



Church and even other feminist movements to champion her causes. Hounded out of the USA by the Postmaster General for her outspoken views, she travelled the world, making an impact on everyone she met, from HG Wells to Gandhi. In her later years, it is clear she is of the “burn out rather than fade away” philosophy, travelling to India and making TV appearances, even at the risk to her health and reputation.

She is a deeply human character with personal struggles that modern women

still wrestle with today: balancing career and family, divorce, bereavement and imperfect mothering. Part of this book's appeal is that Bagge obviously enjoys exploring Sanger's foibles as much as her successes – she is at times bad-tempered and vain in the pursuit of her own agenda. This serves to make her all the more likeable.

Through birth control issues such as abortion, intrauterine devices and the advent of the pill, this three-dimensional cartoon protagonist makes the perfect insubordinate guide to the mores and politics of her time. The graphic novel format makes this milestone biography accessible, entertaining and memorable enough to convert the most reluctant biography reader.

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