

# A Brief History of Reproductive Health and Rights in the Western World

...a tentative document

Event	TIME PERIOD	Description
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## Mythology

### MYTHOLOGY

6000 BC  
– 312 AD  
from many  
countries  
around the  
world

Mythology of ancient times explained the unknown, the complex and the confusing. Personifying abstract powers, gods and goddesses were held responsible for many of the mysteries of life.

### Fertility SYMBOLS

Long before knowing about fertility, birth, sexuality and even how crops grew, there was an understanding that the renewal of fertility was important for existence.

Conduct an Internet search using the terms “fertility symbols” and you will find information.

### Easter

Easter Sunday is determined by the ancient lunar calendar system, which places the holiday on the first Sunday after the first full moon on or following the Vernal Spring Equinox. Formally, this marked the pregnant phase of the Triple Goddess passing into the fertile season. (9)

Event	TIME PERIOD	Description
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## Easter Bunny



Noted during Pagan Times

The rabbit prolific and may have become a symbol of fertility in ancient times as a result. Christianity has long used the rabbit (Easter bunny) as a symbol of spring.

## Sexually Transmitted Infections

3000 BC

Some of the first references to sexually transmitted diseases are found in Ancient Babylonia, mainly gonorrhoea and syphilis. These diseases were said to be caused by the gods and their mismatches, which were shown in the sky by the crab and the scorpion.

## Ishtar



2100 BC  
Ancient Mesopotamia

Ishtar was the ancient Sumero-Babylonian goddess of love and fertility.

In most of the myths concerning her, she is described as evil and heartless, destroyed her mates and lovers.

Ishtar was portrayed either naked and with prominent breasts or as a mother with a child at her breast.

Event

TIME  
PERIOD

Description

# Inanna



1750 BC

Inanna, goddess Ishtar in other ancient cultures.

Ruled over everything including war and weapons. Time changed and men rose up, she lost some of her status as male gods began to surface that also bore weapons.

# Frog

*symbol of fertility*



1850 BC

The Frog was a symbol of fertility to ancient Egyptians because of its association with water.

Frogs were worshipped in South and Central Americas in ancient times. A frog often represented the patron goddess of fertility and childbirth. The early Aztecs worshipped the mother goddess who appeared as a toad, often in a squatting position giving birth to the world.

# Cats

*symbol of fertility*



1800 BC

Ancient Egyptians revered cats, often mummified and buried with their owners.

Cats were considered mysterious and a symbol of fertility.

Event	TIME PERIOD	Description
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**Aphrodite**  
*“Emerging Goddess”*



*Aphrodite rides a goose*

400 BC

In Greek mythology Aphrodite is the goddess of love, beauty and sexual rapture.

According to Hesiod, she was born when Uranus (the father of the gods) was castrated by his son Cronus, who threw the severed genitals into the ocean, which began to churn and foam about them. From the aphros ("sea foam") arose Aphrodite.

## Early Contraception

Early Contraception

1550 BC

According to an ancient manuscript called Ebers Papyrus, women were advised to mix together dates, acacia bark and honey into a sugary paste and place it in the vulva. This method was often efficient because as the sugar ferments it is converted into lactic acid, a well-known spermicide.

Earliest record of contraceptive use

1850 BC

Earliest record of contraceptive use. Egyptian women used crocodile dung and honey pressed against the cervix to control fertility.

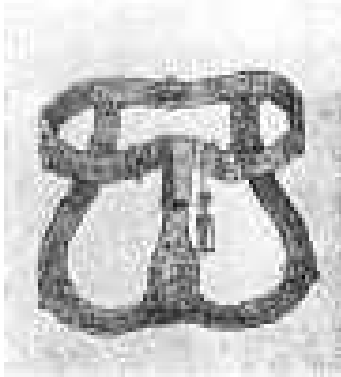
Event	TIME PERIOD	Description
Ancient Adoption	400 BC	Adoption was common in the ancient world. Those adopted were often adults. The reason for this was to have someone credible to inherit a family's possessions and property. Children were often a disappointment thus adoption provided a protection. (2)
Increasing knowledge about fertility	293 BC	<p>Venus, the Roman goddess of love and beauty was first the vegetation goddess and patroness of gardens and vineyards. Greek influence she was equated with Aphrodite.</p> <p>Learning about plants was the first education of fertility.</p>
<b>Middle Ages to Early Modern</b>		
Limited Rights for Women in the West	1000 AD & beyond	A time of great disturbance in the Western world, wars for land (the Crusades). Most women had few rights and there were only a few privileged women who married lords. (8)

## Event

## TIME PERIOD

## Description

### Chastity



1400s AD

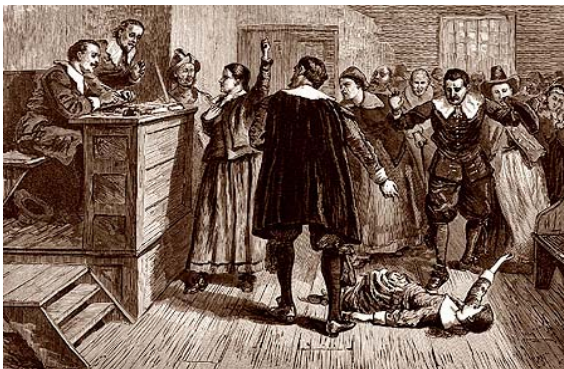
Medieval times, when Knights protected their women by locking them in chastity belts while they were on Crusades.

Nursing rhymes often have undocumented & interesting histories, such as this one:

*Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater,  
Had a wife and couldn't keep her,  
Put her in a pumpkin shell,  
And there he kept her, very well.*

The pumpkin shell is thought to be a chastity belt. (4)

### Witch hunts



1400-1700  
AD

As old as human history & became more prominent (negatively) in the 1600s. The word witch is from the Celtic word wiccam meaning "wise one" or "magician". European religious leaders tried to eradicate witchcraft. (11)

Persecutions and witch hunts took place in many countries. Joan of Arc was accused of being witch in 1431. She was condemned to death and burned at the stake. It is estimated between 300,000 and 850,000 people (mostly women) were accused and killed for being witches. Witches were accused of sexual crimes and healing powers, including medical and obstetrical skills. (13)

*Malleus Maleficarum*  
published for witch hunters

1400s AD

Provided an explanation of why women had to be hunted.

“When a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil.” (12)

Event	TIME PERIOD	Description
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Salem Witch Trials

1692 AD

Physicians were unable to determine bizarre illnesses of some young girls and turned to Satan for the reason. There is tremendous pressure to identify the sources and this escalated the witch hunt. (10)

### Radical Thinker



Mary Wollstonecraft

1792 AD

The publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by Mary Wollstonecraft brought her into the circle of radical thinking men during this time. In this book she attacked the educational restrictions that kept women in a state of "ignorance and slavish dependence." (7)

Thomas Robert Malthus



1798 AD

*An Essay on the Principles of Population*, by Thomas Robert Malthus.

...if unchecked, the human population would continue to increase geometrically in an exponential manner, and would soon outstrip the world's ability to feed it


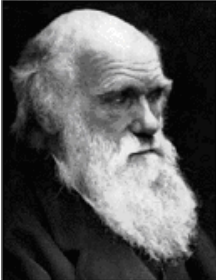
His essay influenced Charles Darwin.

## Modern Times

Manufactured Condoms

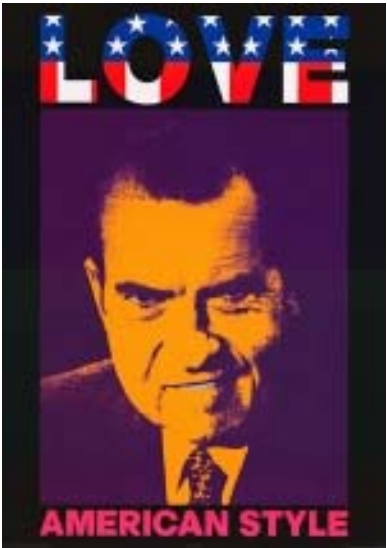
1839 AD

Goodyear learns how to 'vulcanized rubber' and begins to manufacture condoms and diaphragms.

Event	TIME PERIOD	Description
<p>Evolution of the Condom</p> 	<p>1840s AD</p>	<p>Long before condoms came in different sizes, shapes and colors, animal membranes and pieces of linen were sewn together to form a covering for the penis. Goodyear developed the rubber condom shortly after the creation of vulcanized rubber.</p> <p>Unusual condom materials have included oiled silk paper, fish bladders, and tortoiseshell.</p> <p>Photo: PPFA (3)</p>
<p>Repression of Male Sexuality</p>	<p>1850s-1940s AD</p>	<p>Male chastity devices were developed to prevent masturbation, thought to cause insanity.</p>
<p>Charles Darwin</p> 	<p>1859 AD</p>	<p>Charles Darwin's great work <i>The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection</i> published. Influenced by the essay from Thomas Robert Malthus. (1798)</p> <p>The simple concept has been the single most important insight in the history of biology, and no observation has ever been made in natural history to challenge Darwin's basic thesis, although a great deal has been discovered to reinforce his great vision. (1)</p>
<p>Increased Access to Condoms</p>	<p>1873 AD</p>	<p>Condoms and diaphragms available by mail</p>

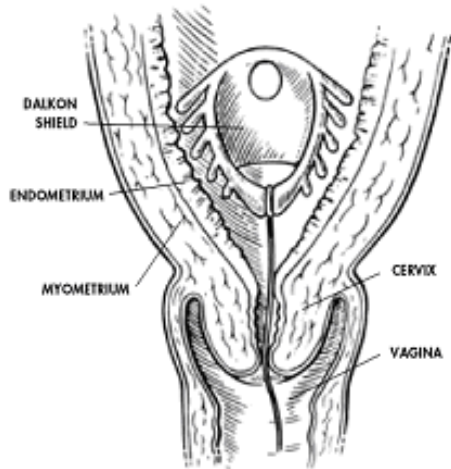
Event	TIME PERIOD	Description
<p>Comstock Laws</p> 	<p>1873 AD</p>	<p>Comstock Laws prohibiting the mailing, transport, or importing of obscene, lewd, or lascivious materials. A rider to this law included a prohibition on all information and devices pertaining to contraception.</p> <p>(Anthony Comstock, founder of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice)</p>
<p>Margaret Sanger (1879-1966)</p> 	<p>1916 AD</p>	<p>Margaret Sanger arrested for opening a women reproductive health clinic</p>
<p>The Rise of Public Health</p>	<p>1914 – 1918 AD</p>	<p>Public Health concerns started to win over the moralistic attitudes of the time regarding promiscuous sex, when syphilis became rampant among American soldiers in World War I.</p>
<p>Contraceptive Information Decriminalized</p>	<p>1918 AD</p>	<p>Judge Crane, rendered an opinion regarding women receiving birth control information, stated that physicians can and may give information to women in order to prevent disease or to cure disease.</p>
<p>American Birth Control League</p>	<p>1921 AD</p>	<p>Margaret Sanger founded the American Birth Control League.</p>

Event	TIME PERIOD	Description
First Legal Birth Control Clinic	1923 AD	The first legal birth control clinic in the U.S., the Clinical Research Bureau, NY.
"Girdles of Chastity"	1933 AD	The League of Awakened Magyars initiated a program for all unmarried Hungarian girls, 12 years and older. It stated that they should wear girdles of chastity. (6)
Bans Lifted on Mailing & Advertising	1936 AD	Ban on mailing contraceptives and advertisements for prevention of diseases lifted.
PPFA Founded 	1942 AD	Planned Parenthood Federation of America was established from the American Birth Control League.
Research for 'The Pill'	1951 – 1953 AD	Margaret Sanger wanted an inexpensive and effective "pill" for birth control. She met Gregory Pincus, a medical expert in human reproduction who was willing to conduct research and soon after she found a sponsor for the research: International Harvester heiress, Katherine McCormick.
FDA approves 'The Pill'	1960 AD	

Event	TIME PERIOD	Description
<p>Right to Privacy For Use of Contraceptives</p>	<p>1965 AD</p>	<p>Griswold v. Connecticut The Supreme Court nullified a Connecticut statute prohibiting the use of birth control by married persons, arguing that the right to marital privacy protects the access to contraceptives for married couples.</p>
<p>Title X The National Family Planning Program</p> 	<p>1970 AD</p>	<p>President Richard Nixon signed the Title X act for federally funded family planning.</p> <p>“No American woman should be denied access to family planning assistance because of her economic condition. I believe, therefore, that we should establish as a national goal the provision of family planning services...to all who want but cannot afford them.”</p> <p>* President Richard M. Nixon, 1970</p>
<p>Unmarried adults have right to birth control</p>	<p>1972 AD</p>	<p>Eisenstadt v. Baird The Court struck down a law prohibiting the distribution of birth control to unmarried adults.</p>
<p>Abortion Legalized In U.S.</p>	<p>1973 AD</p>	<p>Roe v. Wade By a vote of 7-2, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against a Texas law prohibiting abortions not necessary to save the woman's life, extending the fundamental right to privacy to a woman's decision to choose abortion. (5)</p>

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## The Dalkon Shield



1974 AD

FDA requested suspension of future sales of the Dalkon Shield IUD.

"If intrauterine devices were automobiles, the Dalkon Shield would have been a Pinto," according to a 1992 news article in *USA Today*.

The faulty design of both products warranted a massive recall and served to smudge the reputation of their manufacturers.

Unlike the big-three Pinto manufacturer Ford Motor Company, IUD makers didn't fare so well; Dalkon's A.H. Robins Company declared bankruptcy due to lawsuits costing the company over \$480 million, and other IUD manufacturers pulled out of the business because they could no longer afford liability insurance.

## Abortion Laws Protected

1976 AD

Planned Parenthood of Central Missouri v. Danforth. The Court ruled against a Missouri statute that would force a married woman to obtain her husband's approval before getting an abortion and ruled against a written parental consent requirement for minors.

## Access for Poor Women to Abortion is Restricted

1980 AD

Harris v. McRae  
The Supreme Court upheld the Hyde amendment, which prohibits the federal Medicaid funding of abortions not necessary to preserve the woman's life.

Event	TIME PERIOD	Description
IUD use Declines	1982 AD	Alan Guttmacher Institute indicates that IUD use falls to <b>less than 8%</b>
Pre-packaged ECPs	1998 AD	The FDA approved the application of Gynetics, Inc. of Belle Mead, NJ, to market America's first dedicated emergency contraceptive pill product.
Medical Abortion Approved by FDA	2000 AD	The FDA approves mifepristone (RU-486), following a 16-year struggle by reproductive rights activists to have it approved.
Global Gag Rule Reinstated  Women Die	2000 AD	The Bush administration reinstates the global "gag" rule that was first adopted in 1984 by the Reagan administration and later lifted by President Clinton. The "gag" rule caused 430 organizations in 50 countries to stop performing abortions or speaking about abortion laws in order to qualify for U.S. funding. Over 80,000 women around the world die each year from unsafe and illegal abortions.
Revised Guidelines Released <i>(at last)</i> 	2001 AD	National Family Planning Program guidelines are revised and released after many years.  Title X Family Planning Program, Office of Population Affairs, Office of Family Planning, Department of Health & Human Services.

Event	TIME PERIOD	Description
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Congress Bans Some Abortion Procedures

2003 AD

Congress passes and Bush signs the so-called "Partial Birth" Abortion Ban-the first federal ban on an abortion procedure since Roe v. Wade was decided in 1973. Subsequent studies show how safe the procedure is.

ECPs Restricted From OTC Access



2004 AD

FDA succumbs to political pressure and disallows emergency contraceptive over the counter.



2007 AD

The newly-conservative US Supreme Court upholds Nebraska's so-called 'Partial Birth' Abortion Ban Law.

Eve Gartner of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America said '...this ruling tells women that politicians, not doctors, will make their health care decisions for them.'

The Court determined that the Nebraska law is constitutional even though it makes no exception to safeguard the health of the mother, a primary component of Roe v. Wade.

## Tentative document

This is working document. Your comments, edits and critiques are welcomed and can be sent to [ccrosser@C2Strategies.com](mailto:ccrosser@C2Strategies.com).

This document is not meant as a detailed or perfect historical representation, or as an academic, scholarly, research paper. It is meant to provide a general historical perspective of reproductive health and rights that might be used for orientation, education or simply as entertainment. You are invited and encouraged to research the subject areas of interest.

Much of this document was put together from the Internet, reading books and articles, and information received from colleagues. Every attempt is made to use credible sources.

## Acknowledgements

The idea of a historical timeline was introduced while working on a project for Development Systems, Inc. of Kansas City, MO. The project was their Orientation to Family Planning. (<http://www.devsys.org/html/main.html>, 816-561-5050).

This document is being presented to participants of an orientation to family planning audio conference presented by the Health Education & Training Center of Indianapolis, IN (<http://www.hcet.org/>, 317-247-9008).

Hoy Thompson, nerd extraordinaire first presented the layout for this document.

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Thanks for materials from the web sites. If you see anything I did not credit, contact me and I will credit or remove.

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## End notes, references and resources

1. Potts, Malcolm and Shorts, Roger, *Ever Since Adam and Eve – the evaluation of human sexuality*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.
2. McLaren, Angus, *Reproductive Rituals, The Perception of Fertility in England from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (Methuen, London, 1984)
3. Planned Parenthood Federal of American,  
<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/articles/condomhistory.html>
4. The History of Nursery Rhymes,  
<http://www.simpletoremember.com/what/nurseryrhymeshistory.htm> (author's name is not provided, but do want to give credit – a wonderful story).
5. Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, NARAL Supreme Court Decisions Concerning Reproductive Rights, NOW Archives, Planned Parenthood Roe v. Wade Timeline
6. The History of the Chastity Belt, <http://www.chastity-uk.co.uk/History.htm>
7. A Vindication of the Rights of Woman by Mary Wollstonecraft,  
<http://eserver.org/feminism/history/wollstonecraft-vindication.txt>
8. Women in the Year ..., <http://www.womeninworldhistory.com/women1000.html>

### **On fertility symbols:**

9. OSTARA - Spring Equinox - March 20  
<http://www.nobleknights.com/~eagle1/eostre1.htm>. Good information on symbols and how Christianity has used ancient symbols, such as Easter. Most “every other Christian religious holiday is rich with an abundance of Pagan overtones, customs and traditions”.

### **Witches and women healers:**

10. Salem witch trials, <http://www.salemweb.com/guide/witches.shtml>
11. Absolutely Fantasy Art, <http://www.absolute-fantasy-art.com/history-witches.html>
12. Witches, midwives and nurses – a history of women healers, by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English,  
<http://www.blancmange.net/tmh/articles/witches.html>
13. Witchcraft, photo and information  
<http://www.rotten.com/library/occult/witchcraft/>

## Notes

Time line: Please note that B.C. is commonly known as “before Christ”. A.D. is a Latin phrase, *anno Domini*, which means "in the year of our Lord". Recently, some world scholars and archaeologists have been using the terms Before Common Era (B.C.E.) and Common Era (C.E.). This is in respect to other world religions (non-Christianity). These abbreviations are used in this document along with B.C. and A.D. I chose not to use these, but wanted to acknowledge these terms.