

January 2025



## What's Wrong with This Picture?



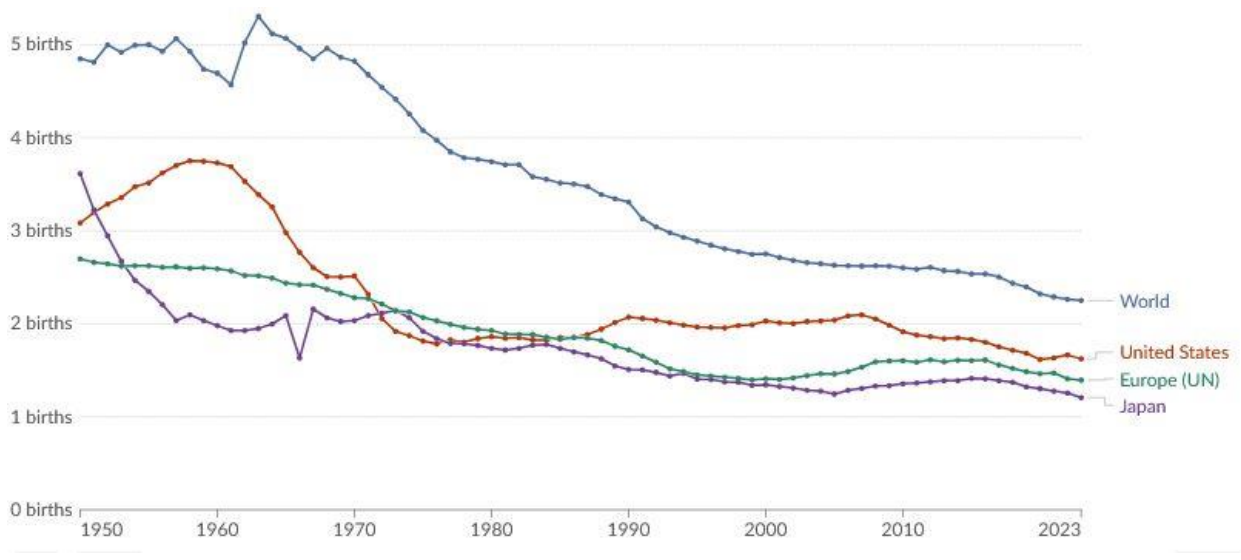
## Do You See the Existential Threat?

I'm quite certain that many of you *Rant* lovers are thinking, "That cranky old curmudgeon has finally gone off the deep end," but please bear with me for just a little while I explain.

Part of my fitness program involves daily walking in the downtown area of my community here in Essex, Connecticut. Increasingly, over the years I've noticed a new phenomenon: the majority of people who are walking about with strollers containing, not children, but pets. Thus, I've long wondered what the ramifications of this trend of fewer children might be for the future of society, and yes, even mankind. After some research on the matter, I've uncovered some startling findings.

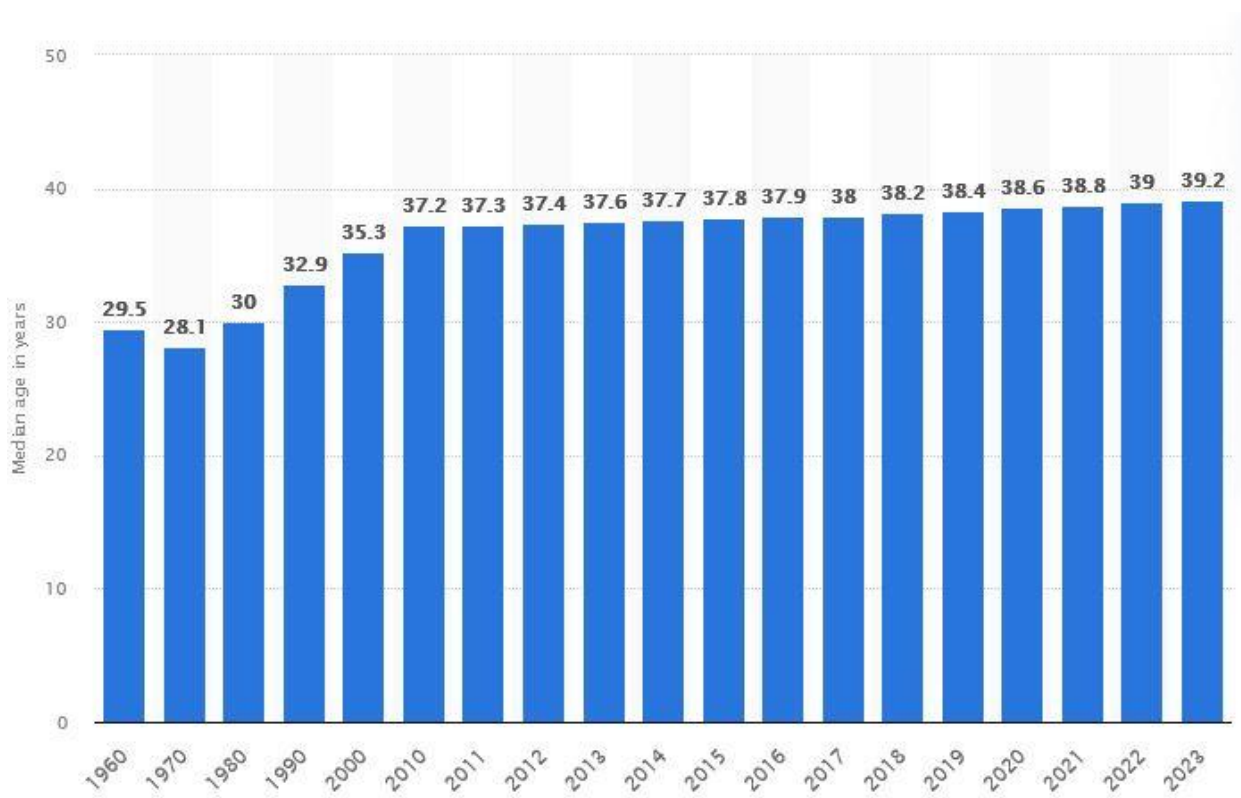
Traditionally, the existential threats to mankind have been seen as the four horsemen of the apocalypse: conquest, war, famine, and death. However, the insidious threat of population decline is real, yet ignored by most people and governments.

It is widely accepted that a birth rate of 2.1 children per woman is necessary to maintain a stable population, yet the chart below, based on UN statistics, gives graphic evidence that in our more educated, civilized and productive societies, the birth rate has fallen well below that number.



**These trends in fertility rates will completely reconfigure the global economy and the international balance of power, and will necessitate reorganizing societies.**

Let's now focus more specifically on the U.S.



Our population is aging, and that will have dramatic effects on everything from the workforce to Social Security to healthcare to immigration.

For Social Security, the ratio of workers to retirees has fallen from 16.9 in 1950 to 2.8 in 2013. That means that the burden on each individual worker will increase substantially, and we will no longer be able to keep our promises to retirees at current payroll tax levels. The reason for this is Americans are having fewer children.

Contracting population trends in G10 countries (Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and United States) are currently being mitigated by immigration. But, as we have already seen, significant immigration has resulted in harmful, disruptive cultural and ethnic shifts in those country's demographics.

Let's briefly look at some of the factors contributing to the declining American birth rate: women's empowerment, economic changes and changing norms.

### **Changing Norms**

Having been born in 1948, I grew up in the fifties and early sixties. I was fortunate to grow up in a traditional nuclear family in which dad worked, and mom stayed home to raise the children. I even walked to a neighborhood school and ate breakfast, lunch and dinner with my family. Some might malign this as hopelessly "Ozzie and Harriet," but I had a wonderfully normal childhood.

By the sixties, things were beginning to change. Large families were denounced as the cause of planet ruination, and women who stayed home to raise their families were demeaned as merely "housewives."

The increasing trend of women in the workforce, begun during WW II, accelerated, and workforce participation by women contradicted their traditional family roles.

Contraception, abortion and the increasing stress on women to maintain careers and family naturally led to smaller family size.

The mainstream media also played a part in setting social norms. Stories abounded about smartly dressed women carrying briefcases to a fancy office, as well as recent ones warning of pregnancy as a health hazard.

### **Changing Expectations**

Back in the fifties, success was defined as having a small house on a fifty foot-wide lot, a family car and a black and white TV.

As time progressed, our appetite for material things substantially increased. Bigger houses, more cars, swimming pools, travel, color TV, higher education, etc., became must haves requiring the transition to two income families, further increasing the stress on women of child bearing age.

The more affluent we become there is a disturbing trend toward hedonism. The economic and lifestyle changes necessary to have and raise children is in direct conflict with the "Club Med" mindset of a stress-free life of indolent pleasure.

### **Women's Empowerment**

Increasing education leads to a declining number of children per woman, and during the last sixty years, women's participation in all forms of education has seen a spectacular rise. The number of women now enrolled in college exceeds the number of men. The choice to have a child is often a question of opportunity costs, and education changes them. In many societies, mothers spend more time with their children than fathers, and so the opportunity costs of having children are mostly borne on the mother's part.

## **Labor Force Participation**

As women increasingly participate in the labor market, their opportunity costs for having children also rise, and they seek to have fewer children. This leads to a reinforcing cycle: as women work more and have fewer children, their reasons to limit family size further strengthen, enhancing their presence in the workforce.

## **Some Inconvenient Truths to Consider**

For whatever reason you want to believe, God, nature or evolution have created a world in which female mammals are primarily responsible for reproduction and the caring for offspring.

Humankind is the only species in our world that has made a conscious decision to either limit reproduction or not reproduce at all. When I think back on all the people I've known in my seventy-six years, it's incredible to come to the realization that many of my baby boomer acquaintances are childless.

The standard theory of evolution is that species mutations become dominant because the mutants better adapt to their environment as existing, less adaptable species die off. Another recognized theory of evolution is that certain mutated species become dominant due to their greater reproduction, overwhelming existing species.

In the early twentieth century era of Woodrow Wilson, eugenics, the belief that "inferior" members of our species should not be allowed to reproduce, was very much in vogue. That discredited philosophy was carried to its extreme in Nazi Germany. Today, we are in the midst of a perverse form of *reverse eugenics*, wherein our most intelligent and productive members of society have made the conscious decision not to reproduce.

In the coming decades, the majority of children will be born in some of the most resource-limited regions of the world, with over three-quarters (77%) of livebirths expected in low- and lower-middle-income countries by the end of the century.

This trend, if left unchecked, will have disastrous effects on civilized society.

## **So, What to Do?**

If civilized society is to continue to thrive and prosper, we need to do something to address this ticking timebomb. Some European countries, as well Japan, have not only recognized the looming problem but also have taken some limited steps to address the reasons for population decline. They have instituted family leave and tax incentives to encourage women, who want to be considered more than just baby machines, to have more children. In some countries, there are actually cash payments given to families based upon family size. So far, these policies have had only limited success.

In my opinion, the ultimate solution, in addition to the limited steps taken by certain countries to be more family friendly, is for men to step up and take substantially more responsibility for child care, child rearing and domestic affairs so that women can fulfill their educational and professional potential while embracing their biological responsibilities.

But first, we need to recognize that the issue of low birth rates is an existential threat, and I hope this obviously limited examination of a complex issue contributes to the awareness and dialog that needs to happen to begin to address it.

**Roger**