

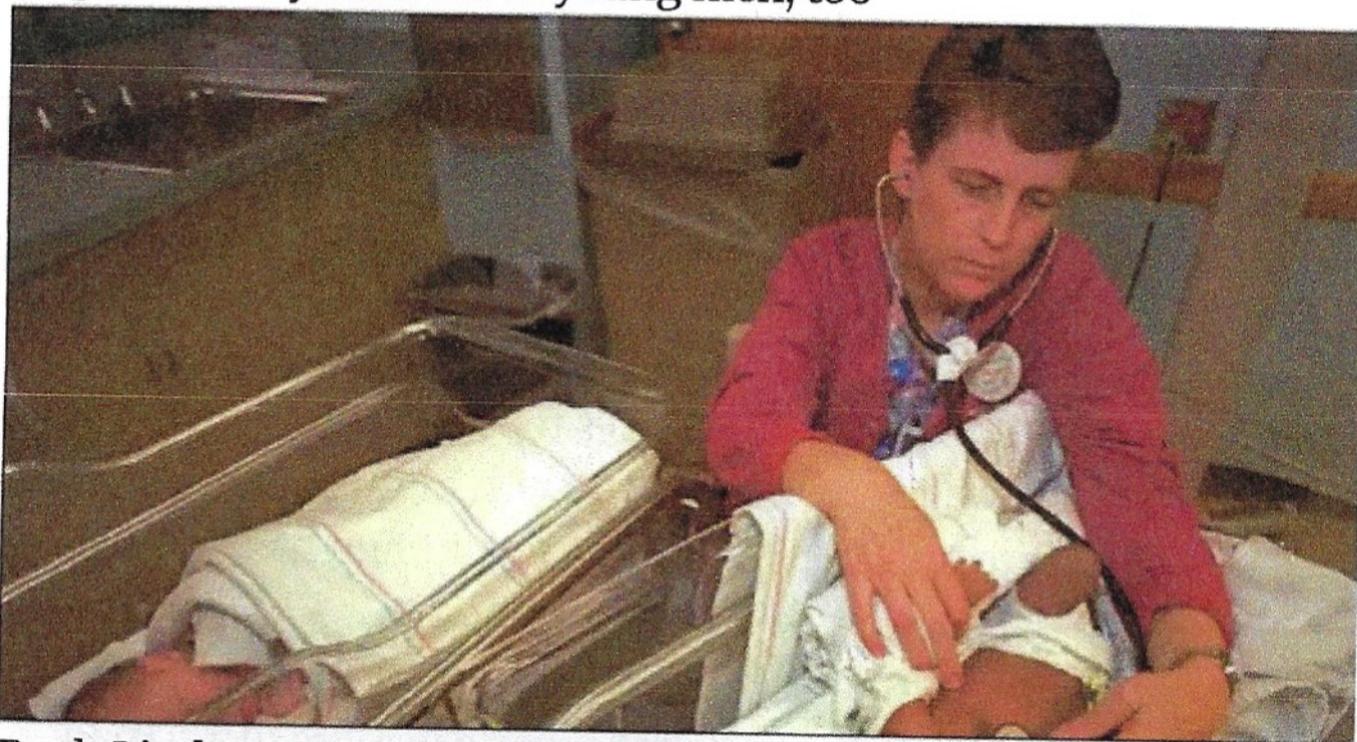
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# Low birth rate is not good news for women

GTK / GenRE

The Denver Gazette · 10 Mar 2026 · B5 · CONN CARROLL Conn Carroll is the commentary editor for the Washington Examiner.

Instead of celebrating the fact that increasing numbers of young women are lonely and childless, maybe the New York Times could better serve its readers by exploring ways to make it easier for young men and women to get and stay married. Higher male wages are associated with higher marriage rates. Easily accessible online pornography and marijuana are not. Legalized online gambling has proven to be particularly harmful to young men, too



Rush Limbaugh used to tell a joke about New York Times headline writers. If the world were ending, Limbaugh would say, the New York Times headline would be, “World Ends Tomorrow: Women, Minorities Hardest Hit.”

I thought of that joke last week when the New York Times published an article titled, “The Birthrate Is Plunging. Why Some Say That’s a Good Thing,” for women.

Turns out the end of the world is actually a good thing for women. Who knew?

The article itself isn’t completely false. Birth rates have declined since 2007, and they have declined the most among teenagers and women without a bachelor’s degree. And that is good! But births to married women have fallen too, not because married women are having fewer children than before, but because there are simply fewer of them. ← Note →

If you step back past 2007, you can see that the real driving force behind the decline in birth rates over the past 60 years is the decline in marriage. A baby boom of unmarried births has just been masking that decline for the last few decades, but that boom peaked in 2007 and has been falling ever since.

In 1968, the first year in which reliable married-unmarried birth data were consistently available, just 10% of all births were to unmarried mothers. Then, thanks to Supreme Court decisions and an ever-expanding welfare state that punishes marriage, that number rose steadily, hitting 18% by 1980, 28% by 1990, 33% by 2000, and then peaking at 41% in 2007. This unmarried baby boom covered up the fact that births to married women peaked at 3.3 million in 1970 and have been falling ever since.

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Those women who are married and are of childbearing age have been remarkably consistent in their propensity to have children over the last 50 years, hovering between 100 and 95 births per 1,000. The problem is that the number of women of childbearing age has been steadily declining. In 1968, 62% of women of childbearing age were married compared to just 38% who were unmarried. Today, those numbers have completely flipped, with just 37% of women of childbearing age being married, compared to 63% who are unmarried. Note

Are all these unmarried childless women happier without husbands and children? Are women really better off without marriage? The data does not appear to suggest so. Married mothers with children are twice as likely to report being very happy as unmarried childless women and far less likely to report being lonely.

The fact is, most women still want to get married and have children. And although the New York Times does not highlight it, there is evidence of that right in the article. The woman featured in the story's opening paragraph, 22-year-old Rose Paz of Salt Lake City, told the New York Times, "When I do have kids, I would want to be a stay-at-home mom for when they are young." And 50 paragraphs into the story, 33-year-old ReAnn Bell, who already has a 9-year-old daughter, says she wants more children, but she is "looking for a partner first." Which is totally understandable! Having children is a lot easier when you have a husband to help you.

Instead of celebrating the fact that increasing numbers of young women are lonely and childless, maybe the New York Times could better serve its readers by exploring ways to make it easier for young men and women to get and stay married. Higher male wages are associated with higher marriage rates. Easily accessible online pornography and marijuana are not. Legalized online gambling has proven to be particularly harmful to young men, too.

There is so much the government could do to make it easier for young women to find young men worthy of a lifetime partnership and children. Unfortunately, the end of the world is more likely than the New York Times publishing that article.