

*American women are not the only people  
In the world who manage to lose track  
Of themselves, but we do seem to  
Mislaid the past in a singularly  
Absent-minded fashion.*

Elizabeth Janeway  
Pulitzer Prize winning writer  
1971

## **Section II: Population Trends**

In terms of population trends, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been good for women. But lest we “lose track” of ourselves, as Elizabeth Janeway put it in the above quote, this section provides a detailed tracking of the population trends affecting women. Before getting into the specifics, some aspects stand out and an overview will provide a context within which to view the data.

**Women’s Longevity:** Thanks to advances in medical science, nutrition and sanitation, women are living longer. At the beginning of the century the median age of women (the point at which half are younger and half older) was just above 22 years; now it is almost 37 years – the highest level in history. Men are not faring quite as well. In 1900, the median age for men was slightly higher than women at a bit over 23 years, but by 2000 their median age was lower than women’s at about 35 years.

**Changing Birthrates:** Births in the United States followed predictable ups and downs until the Great Depression of the early 1930s. Birthrates continued to decline through the mid-30s and did not reverse until the economy began to improve. From the low of 1936, the birthrate increased until the birth control pill changed the dynamics of childbearing. With a few minimal upticks, the birthrate continued to decline through the 1970s – especially after *Roe v. Wade* overturned abortion laws throughout the nation. While birthrates continue to decline among married couples, the sky-rocketing increase in out-of-wedlock births is the defining characteristic of the demographics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In terms of its social and cultural impact, the unmarried birthrate is the demographic nightmare of the century.

**Shifts in Age Distribution:** Another demographic factor has had significant impact on women – the fact that women are living longer has inexorably changed the age distribution of the female population. At the beginning of the century, over two-thirds of the women were under 30; now that population group numbers only 40 percent. In contrast, women over 65 were a fraction of the population early in the century, but now that number is close to 20 percent. The ramifications of this dynamic have yet to be addressed by our culture.

**Death Rates:** Death rates, too, reflect the cultural dynamics. This century has treated women far more kindly than it has men. This is especially apparent during the mid-teen years to the mid-thirties when the rate of death for men is 2 to 3 times higher than that of women. The major factor affecting women’s death rates is the decline in maternal mortality. Beginning in the 1940s, deaths from complications of pregnancy and childbirth dropped precipitously. This decline is unquestionably one of the great achievements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Not only did the rates of death go down, they declined during one of the nation’s most difficult periods of economic depression and military unrest. The decline in infant mortality has been dramatic, too, and would have been miraculous except for the unprecedented increase in unwed births.

**Table 1. –Population Estimates for the United States, by Sex: 1900 – 2000**

Year	Females		Males		Both Sexes	
	Number (In 1,000)	Percent Increase	Number (In 1,000)	Percent Increase	Number (In 1,000)	Percent Increase
1900	37,227	21.8	38,867	21.2	76,094	20.7
1910	44,853	20.5	47,554	22.4	92,407	21.4
1920	52,170	16.3	54,291	14.2	106,461	15.2
1930	60,780	16.5	62,297	14.7	123,077	15.6
1940	65,770	8.2	66,352	6.5	132,122	7.3
1950	76,422	16.2	75,849	14.3	152,271	15.3
1960	91,352	19.5	89,320	17.8	180,672	18.7
1970	104,698	14.6	100,354	12.4	205,052	13.5
1980	116,826	11.6	110,399	10.0	227,225	10.8
1990	127,825	9.4	121,613	10.2	249,438	9.8
2000	140,619	10.0	134,511	10.6	275,130	10.3

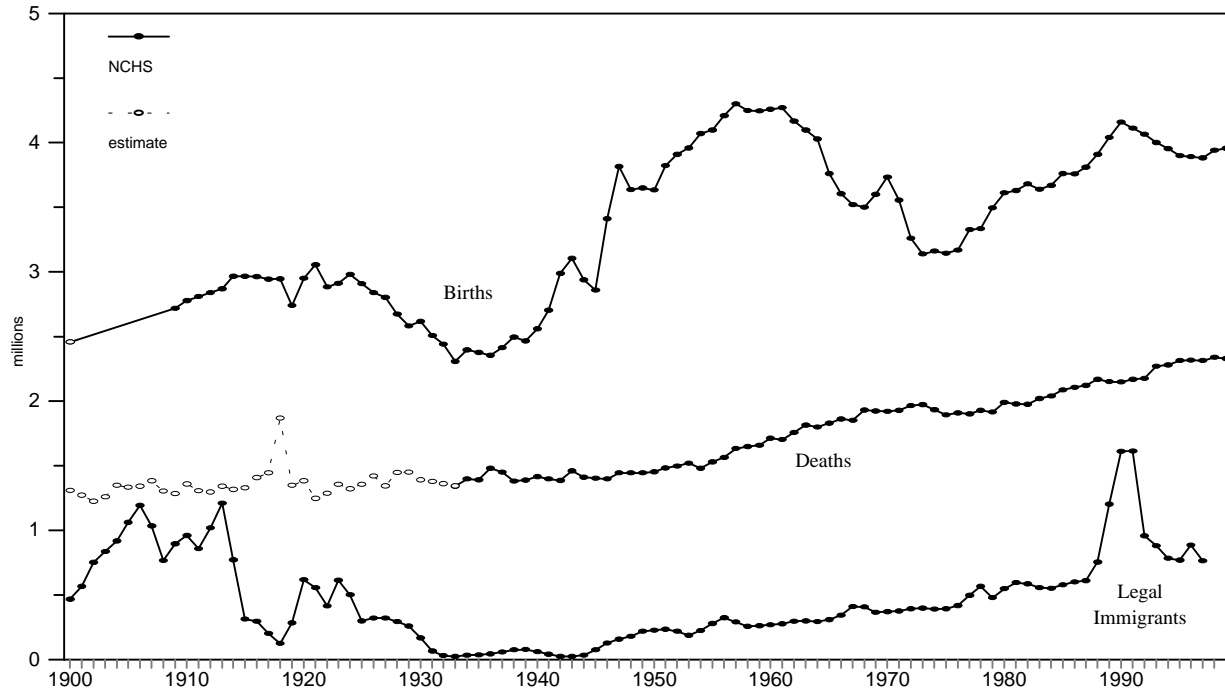
Year	Percent of Total	Median Age	Percent of Total	Median Age	Percent of Total	Median Age
	1900	48.9	22.4	51.1	23.3	100.0
1910	48.5	23.5	51.5	24.6	100.0	29.5
1920	49.0	24.7	51.0	25.8	100.0	25.3
1930	49.4	26.2	50.6	26.7	100.0	26.5
1940	49.8	29.0	50.2	29.1	100.0	29.0
1950	50.2	30.5	49.8	29.9	100.0	30.2
1960	50.6	30.3	49.4	28.7	100.0	29.5
1970	51.1	29.3	48.9	26.8	100.0	28.0
1980	51.4	31.3	48.6	28.8	100.0	30.0
1990	51.2	34.0	48.8	31.6	100.0	32.8
2000	51.1	36.9	48.9	34.6	100.0	35.8

Note: Armed forces overseas are excluded prior to 1940, but included 1940 to 1979. For 1980 and after totals are for resident population and exclude armed forces overseas.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*; *Current Population Reports*, No. 311, 917, and 1095; and "Resident Population Estimates of the United States by Age and Sex, April 1, 1990 to July 1, 1999 with Short-Term Projection to July 1, 2000," Internet release date August 25, 2000 (<http://www.census.gov>).

- The median age is that age which divides the population into two equal groups, one half being older and one half being younger. With advances in medical science, nutrition, and sanitation, the median age of women followed an upward trend from 1900 to 1955. Then with large growth in number of children born in the baby boom after World War II, the median age declined until 1971 going from 30.7 to 29.2. Subsequently it has risen to the current level of 36.9, the highest ever.
- The fact that women made up less than half the population in the early decades of the century is largely the effect of immigration. In the last 30 years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, men made up 61 percent of the 7.2 million immigrants arriving in America. Some 13.3 million immigrants came to America during the surge of immigration from 1900 until the summer of 1914 when the onset of WWI greatly slowed immigration. Of this total, 9.2 million (over 68 percent) were men.

**Figure 1. –Components of Population Change for the United States: 1900 – 2000**



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*; National Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Statistics*, annual and *National Vital Statistics Reports*, Vol. 48, No. 14, August 8, 2000 and earlier reports; and Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Statistical Yearbook*, annual.

- The rise and fall in the number of children born each year reflects numerous influences. The dip in 1919 was the effect of the great 1918 influenza epidemic that resulted in 550 thousand deaths nationwide. The return of the armed forces at the end of WWI brought a small uptick in births in 1921 but for the rest of the Roaring 20s the number of births declined as the birthrate dropped by over 25 percent. With the onset of the Great Depression unemployment rose from 3.2 percent in 1929 to 24.9 percent in 1933 and the decline in the birth rate continued dropping another 15 percent by 1936.
- In the first half of the 1940s the United States was involved with WWII and then in the early 1950s, the Korean War. Driven by the enormous need for defense goods, the American economy came back to life and child-bearing increased as the birthrate increased 62 percent from its low in 1936 to its peak in 1957.
- The development of oral contraception—the pill—in the early 1960s contributed to a sharp decline in the birthrate; this decline in the rate of childbearing reduced the number of children born annually by 18 percent from 1961 to 1968. Following a brief uptick from 1968 to 1970, the number of births again began to decline as Hawaii and New York started a trend by repealing their abortion laws in 1970. Then on January 22, 1973 the U.S Supreme Court issued its ruling in *Roe v. Wade* which overturned abortion laws nationwide. When the birthrate reached its minimum in 1976, it was only 53 percent of its peak level in 1957.
- The effect of recessions on births in the post-WWII period has been modest and has largely been overshadowed by the effects of other factors. Only the minor dip in the number of births in 1983 reflects the effect of the recession of 1981-82, the most severe since the Great Depression. The increase in the rate of growth of births from 1986 to 1990 was primarily due to a large increase in out-of-wedlock childbearing. Of the 400 thousand increase in births during this period, 71 percent (nearly 290 thousand) were unwed births. After peaking in 1990 births declined until 1997 because the **decrease** in married births was twice as large as the **increase** in unmarried births producing a net decrease in the total number of births.

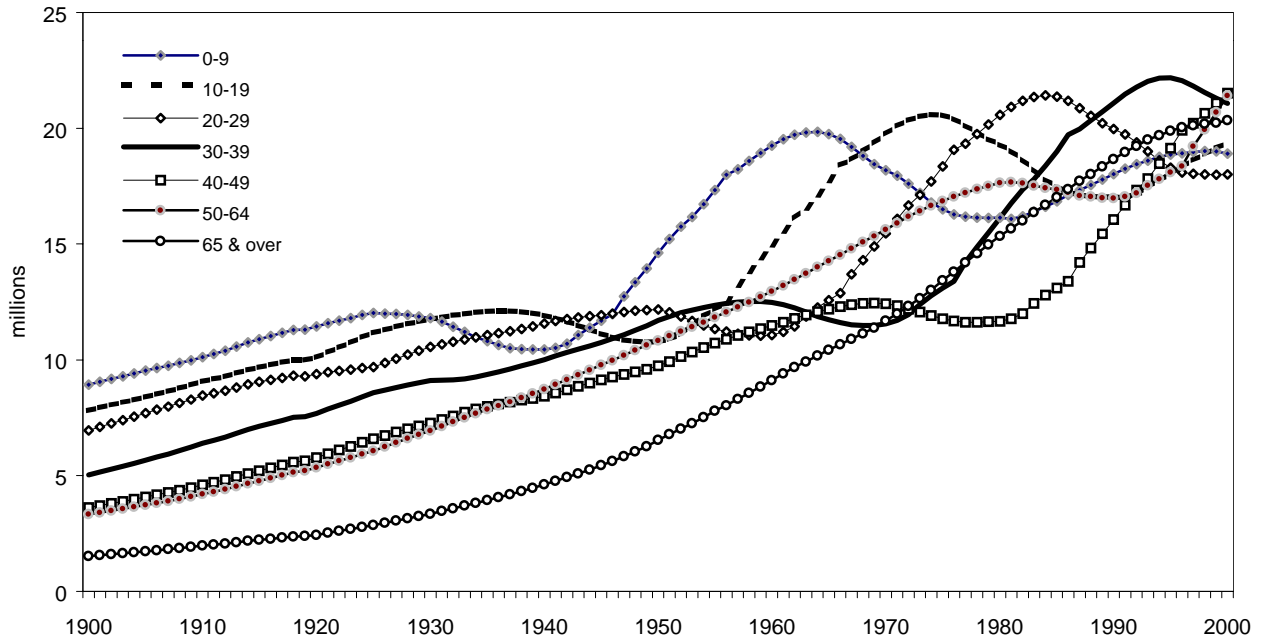
**Table 2. –Female Population, by Age and Ratio to Male Population: 1900 – 2000**

	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Number of Females (in millions)											
<b>Total</b>	<b>37.2</b>	<b>44.9</b>	<b>52.2</b>	<b>60.8</b>	<b>65.8</b>	<b>76.4</b>	<b>91.4</b>	<b>104.7</b>	<b>116.8</b>	<b>127.8</b>	<b>140.6</b>
0-14	12.9	14.7	16.7	17.8	16.2	20.1	27.6	28.4	25.1	26.4	28.6
15-19	3.8	4.6	4.8	5.8	6.1	5.3	6.6	9.5	10.4	8.7	9.7
20-24	3.7	4.5	4.7	5.6	5.9	5.9	5.6	8.5	10.7	9.4	9.1
25-29	3.2	4.0	4.7	5.0	5.7	6.3	5.5	6.9	9.9	10.6	9.0
30-34	2.7	3.3	4.0	4.6	5.2	5.9	6.1	5.9	9.0	11.0	9.9
35-39	2.4	3.1	3.7	4.5	4.8	5.8	6.4	5.7	7.2	10.1	11.2
40-44	2.0	2.5	3.1	3.9	4.4	5.2	5.9	6.1	6.0	9.0	11.4
45-49	1.6	2.1	2.6	3.4	4.1	4.6	5.5	6.3	5.7	7.0	10.1
50-54	1.4	1.8	2.2	2.9	3.5	4.2	4.9	5.8	6.1	5.8	8.9
55-59	1.1	1.3	1.7	2.2	2.9	3.6	4.3	5.2	6.1	5.5	6.9
60-64	0.9	1.1	1.4	1.8	2.4	3.0	3.7	4.6	5.4	5.7	5.6
65 & over	1.5	2.0	2.4	3.3	4.6	6.5	9.1	11.7	15.3	18.7	20.3
Percent of Total Females											
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
0-14	34.8	32.7	32.1	29.2	24.7	26.3	30.2	27.1	21.5	20.7	20.4
15-19	10.2	10.1	9.2	9.5	9.3	6.9	7.3	9.1	8.9	6.8	6.9
20-24	10.0	10.0	9.0	9.1	9.0	7.7	6.1	8.2	9.1	7.3	6.4
25-29	8.7	8.8	9.0	8.2	8.6	8.2	6.0	6.6	8.5	8.3	6.4
30-34	7.2	7.4	7.6	7.5	7.9	7.8	6.7	5.6	7.7	8.6	7.0
35-39	6.3	6.8	7.1	7.5	7.3	7.5	7.0	5.4	6.1	7.9	8.0
40-44	5.4	5.6	6.0	6.4	6.7	6.8	6.5	5.9	5.1	7.1	8.1
45-49	4.4	4.7	5.1	5.6	6.2	6.0	6.1	6.0	4.9	5.5	7.2
50-54	3.7	4.0	4.3	4.7	5.4	5.4	5.4	5.5	5.2	4.6	6.3
55-59	2.9	2.9	3.2	3.7	4.4	4.8	4.7	5.0	5.3	4.3	4.9
60-64	2.4	2.4	2.7	3.0	3.6	4.0	4.1	4.4	4.7	4.4	4.0
65 & over	4.1	4.4	4.7	5.5	7.0	8.6	10.0	11.2	13.1	14.6	14.5
Number of Males per 100 Females											
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>96</b>
0-14	102	102	102	103	103	104	103	104	105	105	105
15-19	99	100	99	99	101	102	102	103	103	105	106
20-24	98	102	96	97	98	98	100	101	100	104	104
25-29	104	108	99	98	97	97	98	99	99	101	99
30-34	109	111	104	100	98	96	97	97	98	99	98
35-39	112	111	111	103	99	97	96	96	97	98	99
40-44	114	113	109	107	101	99	96	95	96	97	98
45-49	114	114	116	109	104	100	97	94	95	96	97
50-54	114	118	116	110	107	100	97	93	92	94	95
55-59	108	115	112	109	106	101	96	92	89	91	92
60-64	105	110	113	107	103	100	91	88	86	87	90
65 & over	103	102	103	103	98	91	85	74	72	74	80

Note: Armed forces overseas are excluded prior to 1940, but included 1940 to 1970. For 1980 and thereafter totals are for resident population and exclude armed forces overseas.

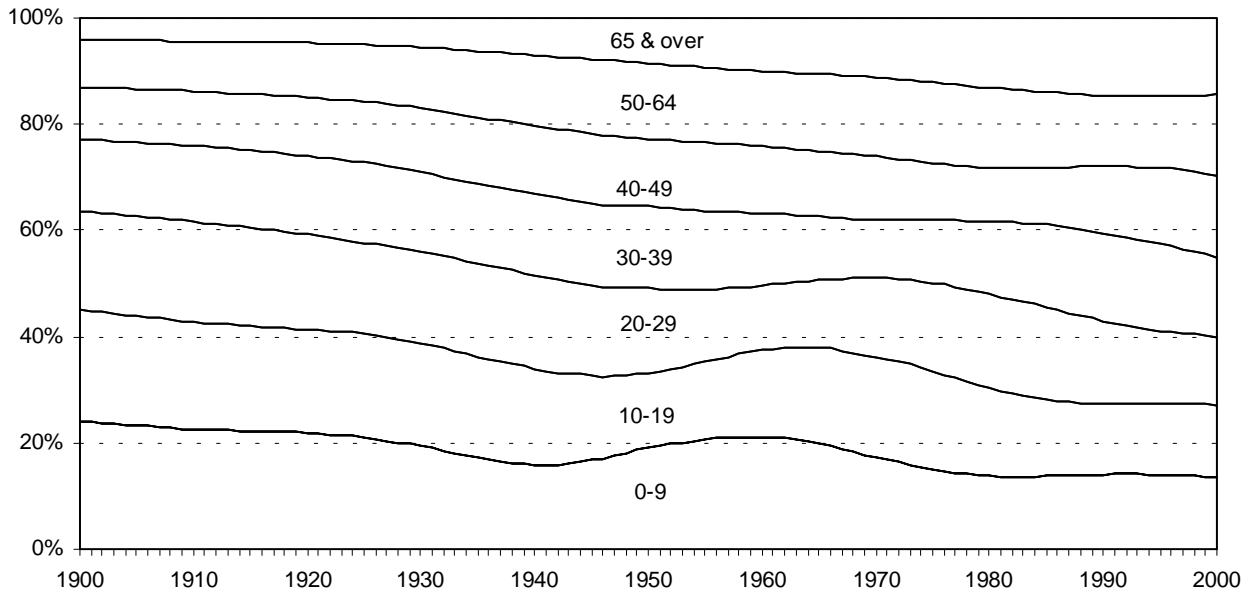
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970; Current Population Reports*, No. 311, 917, and 1095; and "Resident Population Estimates of the United States by Age and Sex, April 1, 1990 to July 1, 1999 with Short-Term Projection to July 1, 2000," Internet release date August 25, 2000 (<http://www.census.gov>).

**Figure 2.1. –Female Population, by Age Groups: 1900 – 2000**



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census *Current Population Reports*, No. 311, 917, and 1095; and “Resident Population Estimates of the United States by Age and Sex, April 1, 1990 to July 1, 1999 with Short-Term Projection to July 1, 2000,” Internet release date August 25, 2000.

**Figure 2.2. –Age Distribution of the Female Population: 1900 – 2000**



Source: See Figure 2.1.

- Figure 2.1. illustrates how the effects of large decreases and increases in the birth rate echo through the various population groups producing waves of second round effects on population growth many years later. In Figure 2.2. we see that the female population under thirty decreased from about 64 percent in 1900 to only 40 percent in 2000.

**Table 3. –Life Expectancy, Deaths and Death Rates by Sex and Age: 1900 – 1998**

	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	1998
<b>Life expectancy at birth</b>											
Female	48.3	51.8	54.6	61.6	65.2	71.1	73.1	74.7	77.4	78.8	79.5
Male	46.3	48.4	53.6	58.1	60.8	65.6	66.6	67.1	70.0	71.8	73.8
<b>Deaths (1,000)</b>											
Female	614 <sup>e</sup>	614 <sup>e</sup>	657 <sup>e</sup>	632 <sup>e</sup>	626	625	736	843	915	1,035	1,180
Male	666 <sup>e</sup>	700 <sup>e</sup>	699 <sup>e</sup>	748 <sup>e</sup>	791	828	976	1,078	1,075	1,113	1,157
<b>Age-adjusted death rates per 1,000 standard (1940) population</b>											
Female	17.0	14.6	13.7	11.4	9.4	6.9	5.9	5.3	4.3	3.9	3.7
Male	18.6	16.9	14.7	13.5	12.1	10.0	9.5	9.3	7.8	6.8	5.9
<b>Crude death rates per 1,000 current-year population</b>											
Female	16.5	13.7	12.6	10.4	9.5	8.2	8.1	8.1	7.9	8.1	8.5
Male	17.9	15.6	13.4	12.3	12.0	11.1	11.0	10.9	9.8	9.2	8.8
<b>Female death rates per 1,000 in specified age group</b>											
Under 1	145.4	117.6	80.7	60.7	47.7	28.5	23.2	18.6	11.4	8.6	6.8
1 - 4	19.1	13.4	9.5	5.2	2.7	1.3	1.0	0.8	0.5	0.4	0.3
5 -14	3.9	2.9	2.5	1.5	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2
15-24	5.8	4.2	5.0	3.2	1.8	0.9	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.4
25-34	8.2	6.1	7.1	4.4	2.7	1.4	1.1	1.0	0.8	0.7	0.7
35-44	9.8	7.9	8.0	6.1	4.5	2.9	2.3	2.3	1.6	1.4	1.4
45-54	14.2	12.1	11.7	10.6	8.6	6.4	5.3	5.2	4.1	3.4	3.1
55-64	25.8	23.7	22.4	21.2	18.0	14.0	12.0	11.0	9.3	8.8	7.9
65-74	53.6	52.4	50.5	46.8	42.2	33.3	28.7	25.8	21.4	19.9	19.7
75-84	118.8	117.4	115.9	106.6	103.7	84.0	76.3	66.8	54.4	48.8	48.3
85 & up	255.2	246.0	244.7	221.4	227.6	191.9	190.1	155.2	147.5	142.7	144.3
<b>Male death rates per 1,000 in specified age group</b>											
Under 1	179.1	145.5	103.6	77.0	61.9	37.3	30.6	24.1	14.3	10.8	8.2
1 - 4	20.5	14.6	10.3	6.0	3.1	1.5	1.2	0.9	0.7	0.5	0.4
5 -14	3.8	3.0	2.8	1.9	1.2	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.2
15-24	5.9	4.8	4.8	3.5	2.3	1.7	1.5	1.9	1.7	1.5	1.2
25-34	8.2	6.9	6.4	4.9	3.4	2.2	1.9	2.2	2.0	2.0	1.5
35-44	10.7	10.0	8.2	7.5	5.9	4.3	3.7	4.0	3.0	3.1	2.6
45-54	15.7	15.2	12.6	13.6	12.5	10.7	9.9	9.6	7.7	6.1	5.4
55-64	28.7	28.7	24.6	26.6	26.1	24.0	23.1	22.8	18.2	15.5	13.0
65-74	59.3	58.7	54.5	55.8	54.6	49.3	49.1	48.7	41.1	34.9	31.4
75-84	128.3	127.4	122.1	119.1	121.3	104.3	101.8	100.1	88.2	78.9	70.2
85 & up	268.8	255.8	253.0	236.7	246.4	216.4	211.9	178.2	188.0	180.6	167.6

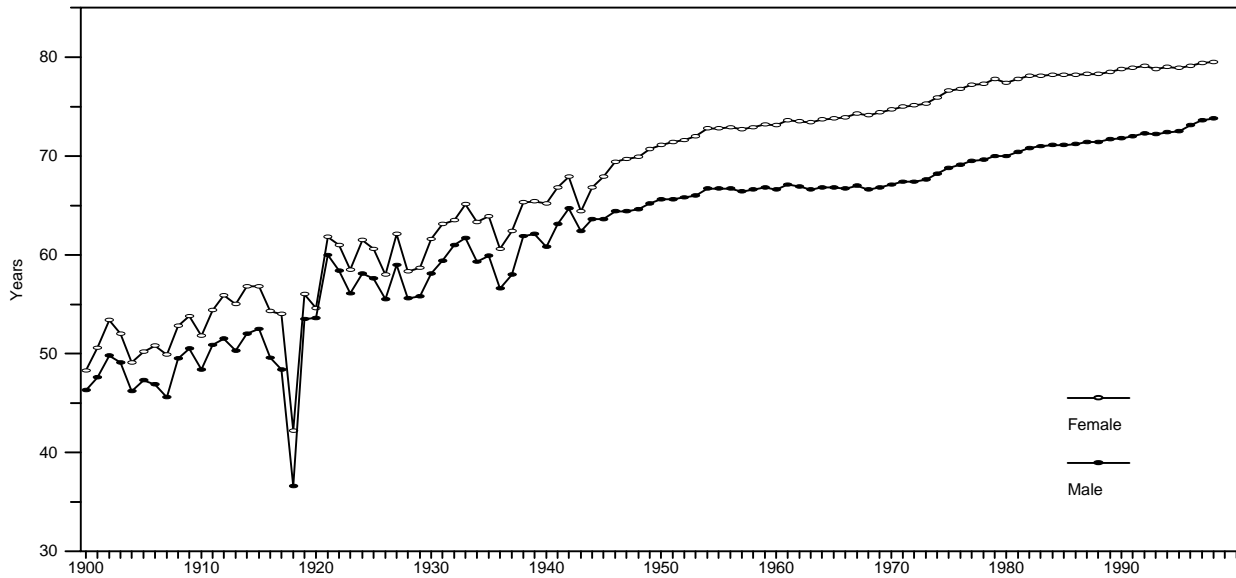
<sup>e</sup> Denotes estimates based on death rates times total population.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*; National Center for Health Statistics, *National Vital Statistics Reports*, Vol. 48, No. 11, July 24, 2000.

- During the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the age-adjusted female death rates were between 83 and 93 percent of male rates. After that female rates declined more rapidly than male rates so that by 1979 the age-adjusted female death rate was only 55 percent of the male rate. Over the last 20 years declines in male rates have exceed 23 percent while the decline in female rates has been only about 12 percent; consequently by 1998 the female rate rose to 63 percent of the male rate.
- Though at fairly low levels compared with older men, the death rates of males in the 15-24 and 25-34 age groups run 2 to 3 times as high as those for females of the same age.



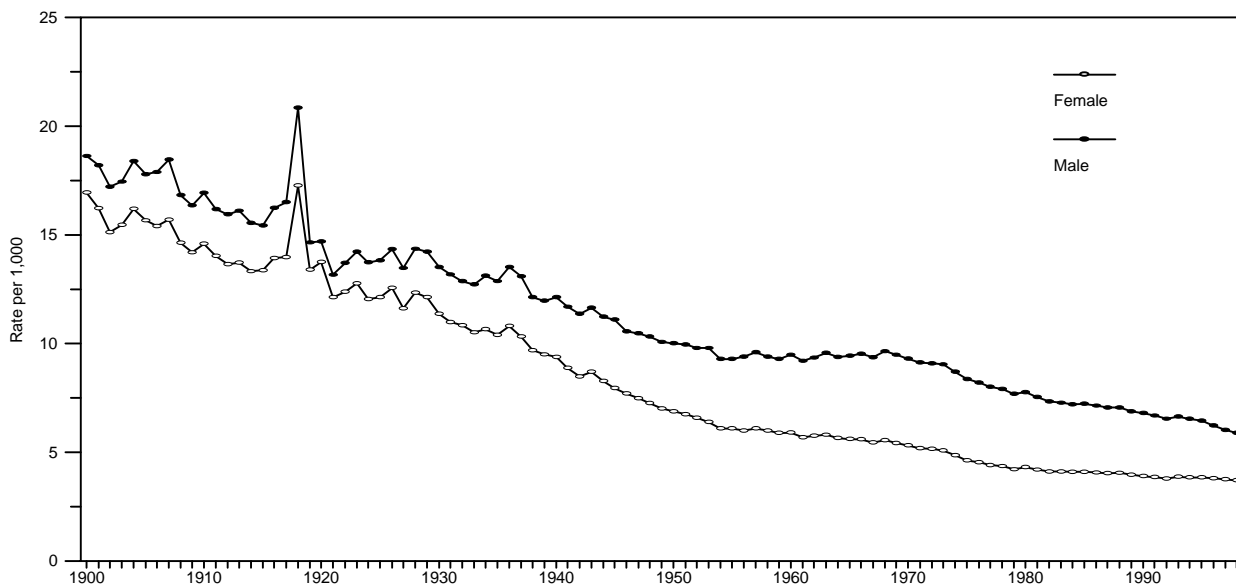
Figure 3.1. –Life Expectancy at Birth, by Sex: 1900 – 1998



Source: National Center for Health Statistics, *National Vital Statistics Reports*, Vol. 48, No. 11, July 24, 2000.

- Life expectancy at birth for any given year represents the average number of years that a group of infants would live if they were to experience throughout their lifetimes the age-specific death rates that prevailed in the year they were born. Increases in life expectancy are one measure of improvement in physical health. Due to a 78 percent decrease in their age-adjusted death rate, women's life expectancy at birth has increased during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century from 48.3 years in 1900 to 79.5 years in 1998.
- The difference in life expectancy between females and males increased from 2 years in 1900 to nearly 8 years in the 1970s. Subsequently the difference has narrowed to a little under 6 years.

Figure 3.2. –Age-Adjusted Death Rates, by Sex: 1900 – 1998



Source: National Center for Health Statistics, *National Vital Statistics Reports*, Vol. 48, No. 11, July 24, 2000.



