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DROPPING OUT OF MOTHERHOOD

Like most college graduates, I receive a magazine sent regularly with the compliments of my alma mater. The current issue of the 'Radcliffe Quarterly" presents statistics which show that, whereas all young women are having fewer children, four-year college women graduates are having still fewer, and Radcliffe College graduates are having the least of all. Radcliffe is the women's college of Harvard **University** and shares equally in its academic prestige.

According to the latest U.S. Census Bureau report, 17 percent of married women between the ages of 25 and 29 are childless. But 86 per cent of the graduates of Radcliffe College in that same age group who are married are childless. The author suggests that we address ourselves to the consequences of the sociological phenomenon that the best-educated women are dropping out of motherhood at a landslide rate and are not reproducing themselves.

Educators are already facing the problem of declining school en rollments. In the last five years, the enrollment in our country's elementary and high schools has dropped by a million and a half. This decline will continue for the next decade.

At various teacher and administrative conventions this year, the new watchword has been "RIF." That stands for "reduction in force" - quite a shock for educators who, only a few years ago, were enthusi astically building schools and increasing staffs. Many schools are facing the grim prospect of dismissing even tenured teachers, and are already discussing whether the layoffs should be by seniority or by quota or by ability.

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'rhe unprecedented drop in births will ultimately have a disastrous effect on Social Security, whose fiscal solvency is based precariously on having more young workers who pay into the system than senior citizens who draw out benefits. Last year, for the first time, more was paid out in Social Security benefits than was taken in. "1984," a year which has had special meaning in our language ever since George Orwell's book with that title, has now been targeted by Social Security trustees as the year when Social Security reserves will be completely depleted.

A new Census Bureau study shows that .Americats elderly population has almost doubled in the last quarter of a century, and will probably double again by the end of this century. By the year 2020, there will be almost 43 million senior citizens in the United States. Jacob Siegel, a senior Census Bureau statistician, calls this 11one of the most important demographic isfmes of ou.r time.•

Hany causes are advanced for the plmm:neting of birth rates: the milli.o:n abortions that take :place every year, the widespread use of the Pill, the large influx of women into the labor force, the women's studies courses in the colleges that encourage young women to choose paying ,jobs instead of career as wife antl mother in the home, and the general disillusionment with what happens to children who grow up in the present school and community environment.

Several years ago, the lecture halls and the talk shows rang with alarms about an alleged "population bomb." We were told that we faced a population explosion that would lower the quality of life. The quality of American life is indeec lowered, but not because of too many people. Crime and taxes are up. Inflatton has robbed our money of its former buying power, and wage increases simply put us in a higher in come tax bracket without giving any increase in real income.

These problems, we hope, can be remedied with changes in policies. But if we become a nation of old people instead of productive young workers, the longterm decline in our living standards will be irreversible.

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