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# Can We “Have It All”?

## Work, Motherhood, and the History of Work-Life Balance

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**Erin Strecker** ✓

@ErinStrecker

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At Barclays tonight, Michelle Obama said: "It's not enough to Lean In because that s---t doesn't always work!" Tattoo it on my body!

10:27 PM - 1 Dec 2018



**Jeanna Kadlec** 🌈

@jeannakadlec

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"You can't always lean in." — Michelle Obama

THE THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE IN BARCLAYS  
JUST LOST OUR COLLECTIVE S---T



**doreen st. félix**

@dstfelix

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re the unevenness of marriage, "it's not enough to lean in, cause that s---t doesn't work all the time." - michelle obama at barclays 😂

9:33 PM - 1 Dec 2018



"I tell women that whole 'you can have it all'—mmm, nope. Not at the same time—that's a lie. It's not always enough to lean in, because that sh\*t doesn't work."

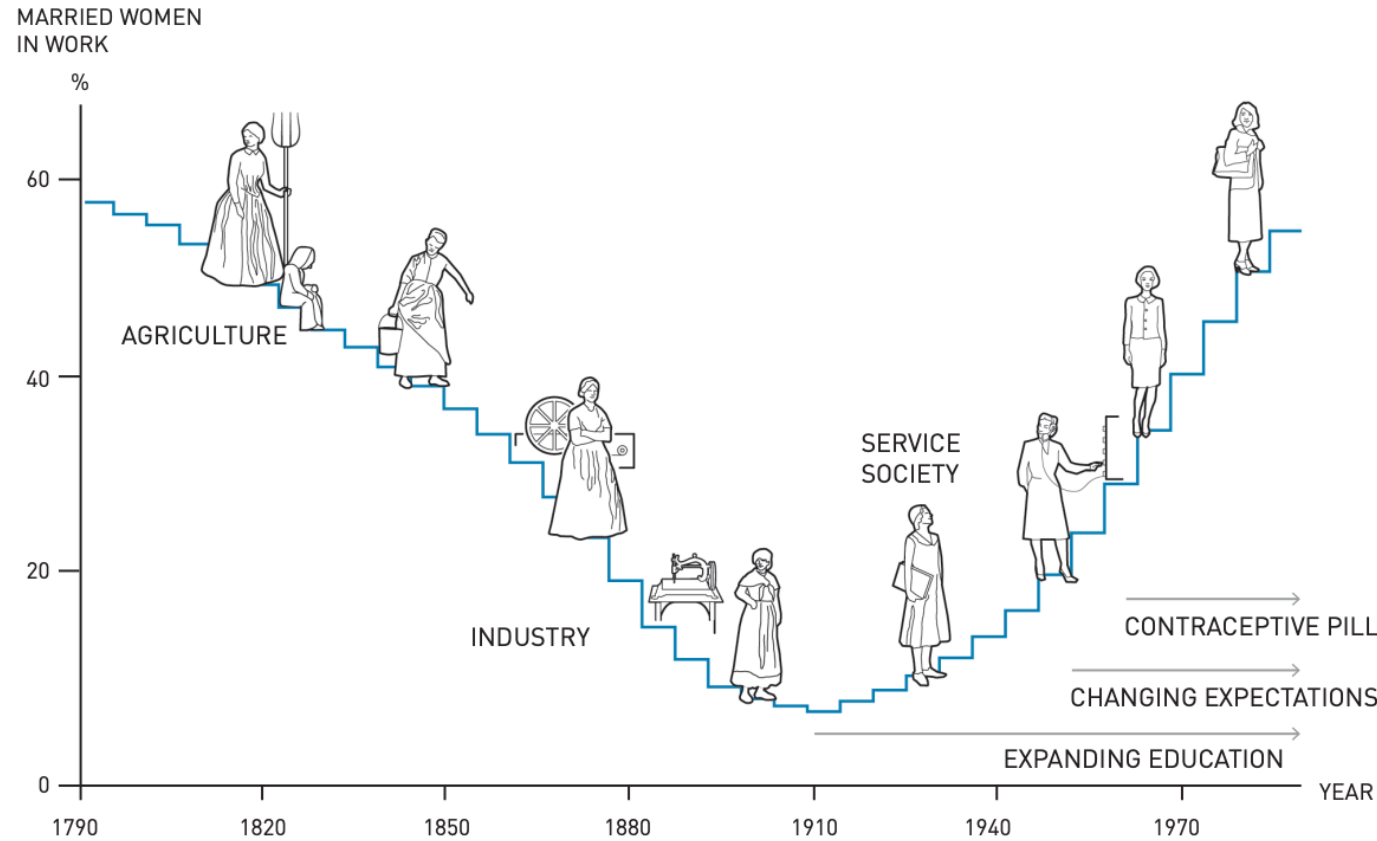
– Michelle Obama





Promotional image from the 1988 movie *Working Girl*.

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©Johan Jarnestad/The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences

“[...] the labor force participation rate for married women (20 to 44 years old) with a child under the age of one year [...] soared from 0.20 in 1973 to 0.62 in 2000.”

From Goldin, Claudia. 2006. "The Quiet Revolution That Transformed Women's Employment, Education, and Family." *American Economic Review*, 96 (2): 8.

Visual summary of Claudia Goldin's research on women's workforce participation. Published in *SAPIENS* online, November 16, 2023.

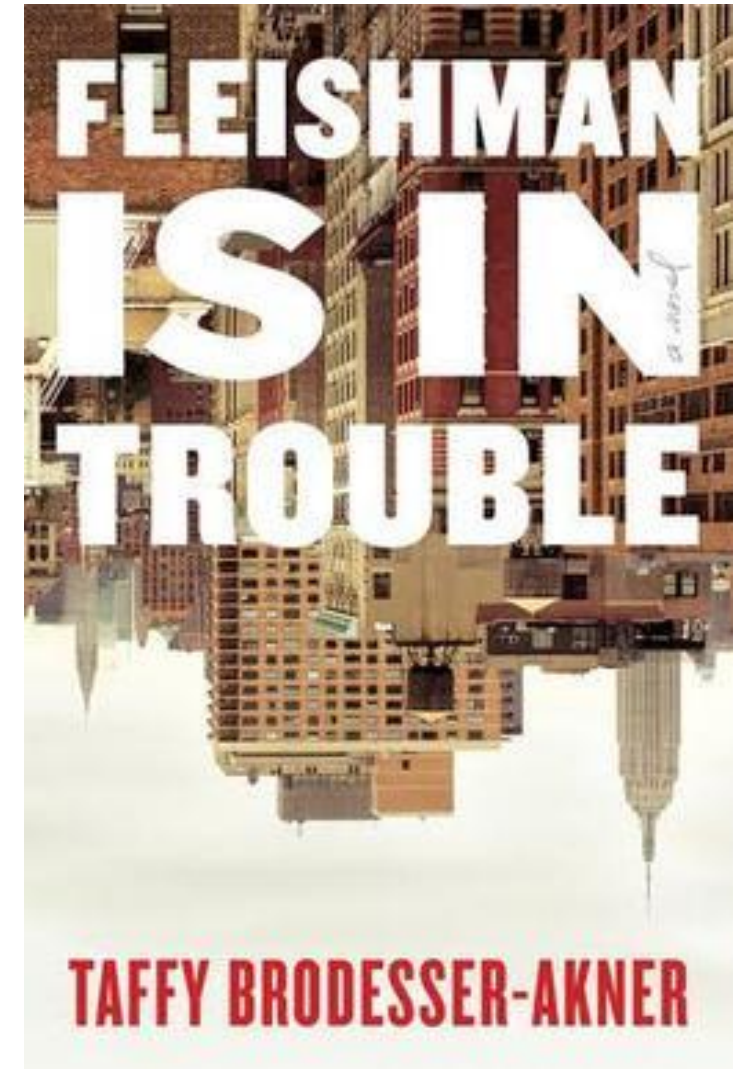
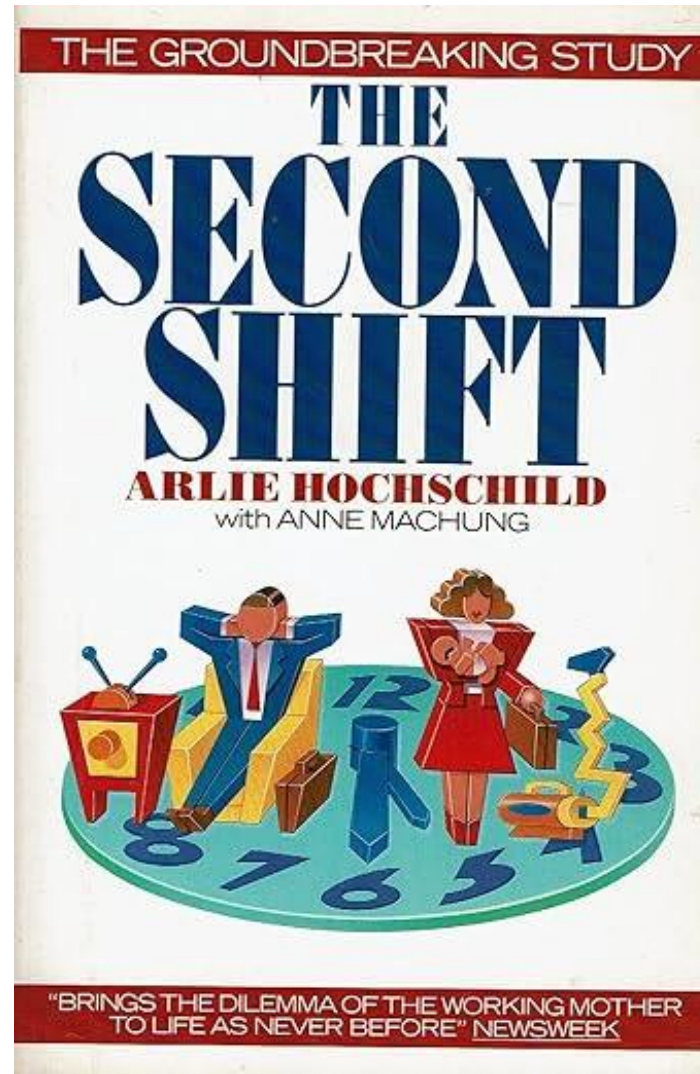


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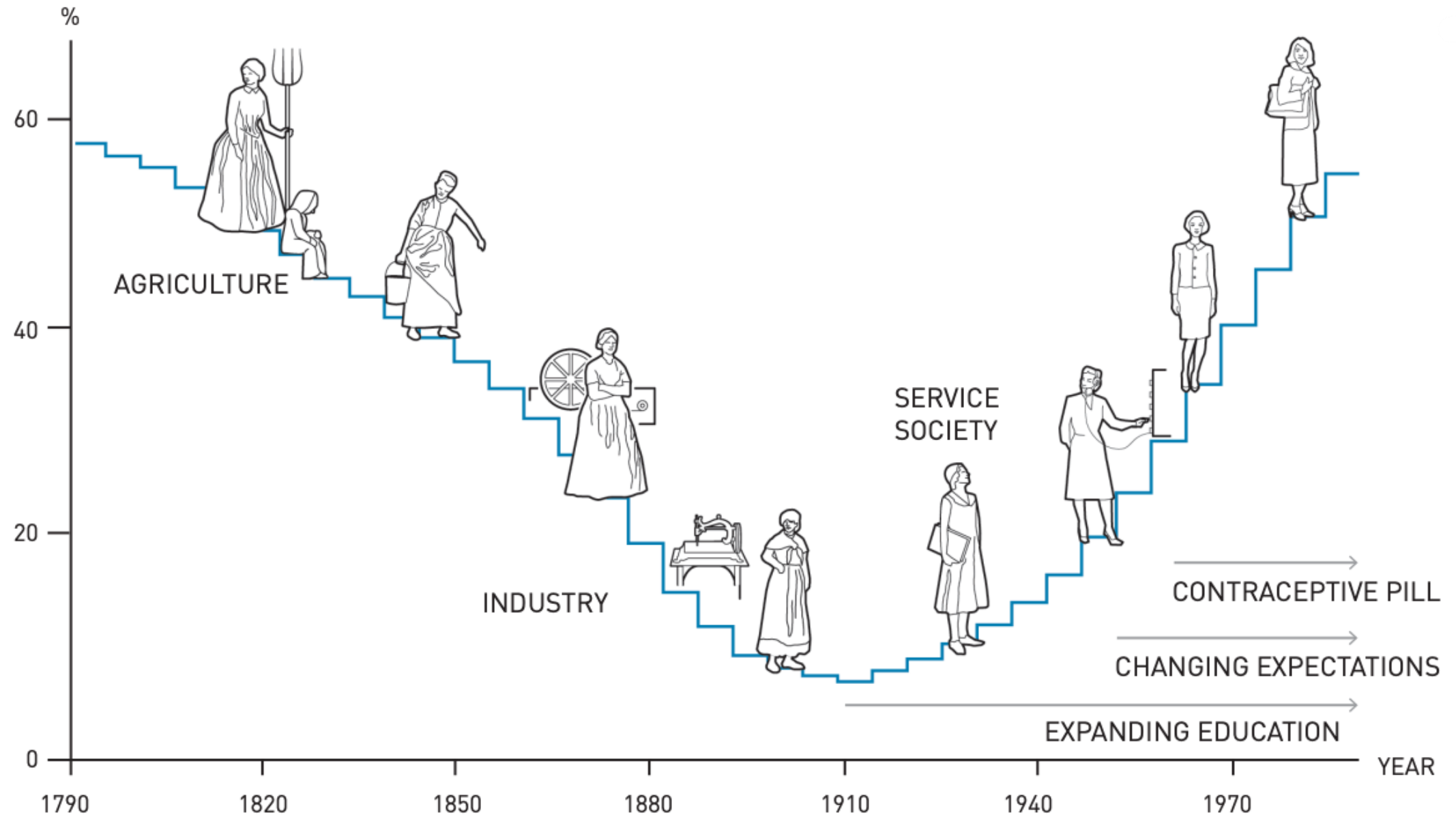
*The Second Shift*, a groundbreaking study of working women's domestic labor by sociologist Arlie Hochschild, was published in 1989.

"Having a job [makes] you no less of a mother; you still had to do all of that sh\*t, too."

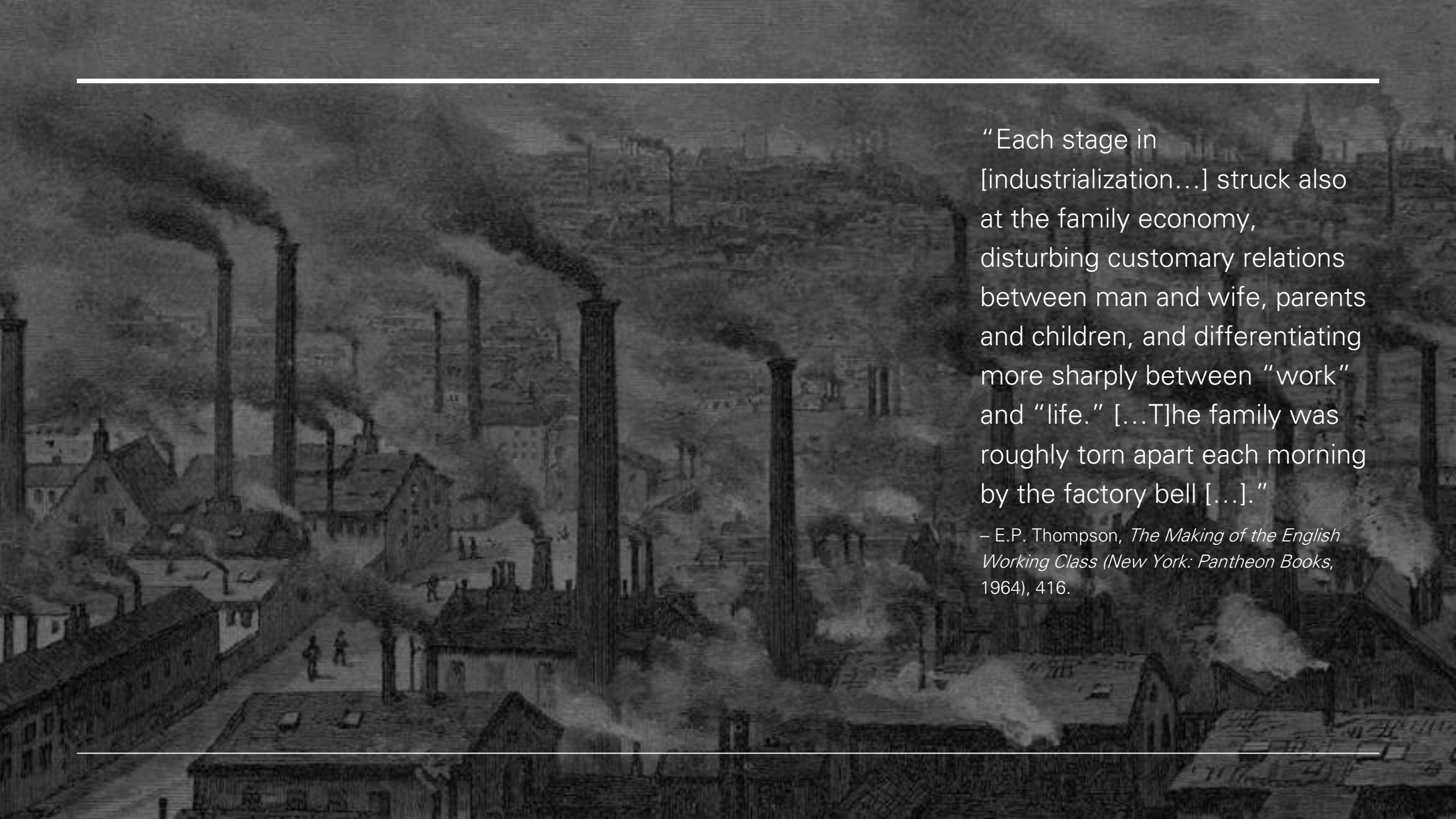
From Taffy Brodesser-Akner, *Fleishman is in Trouble* (Random House, 2019)



# MARRIED WOMEN IN WORK



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“Each stage in [industrialization...] struck also at the family economy, disturbing customary relations between man and wife, parents and children, and differentiating more sharply between “work” and “life.” [...T]he family was roughly torn apart each morning by the factory bell [...].”

– E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 416.

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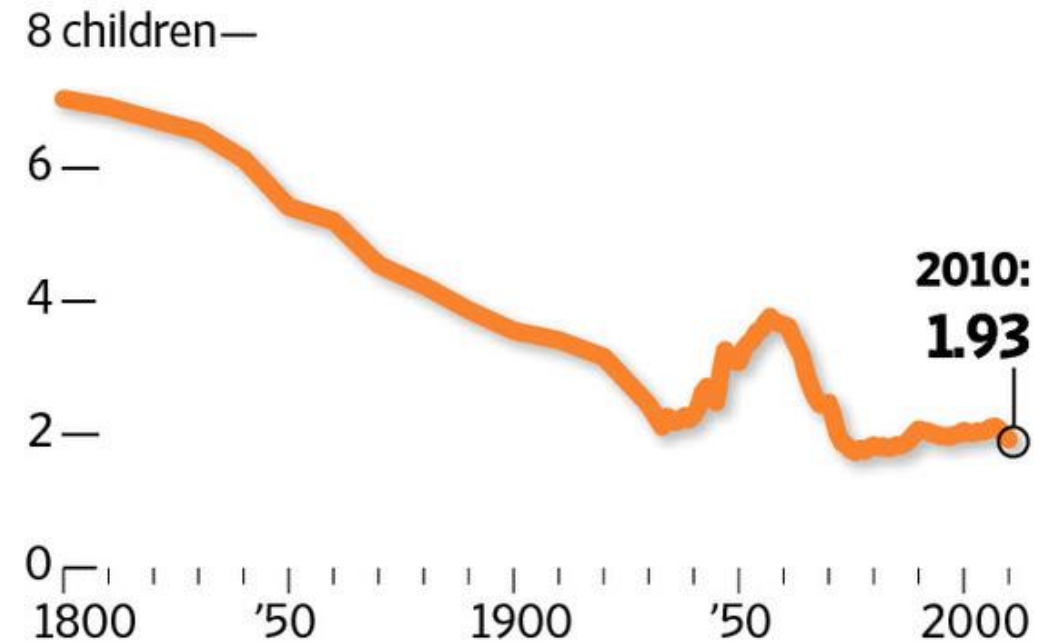


# Nineteenth Century Demographic Transition

- Between the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, fertility fell sharply across the Northern Hemisphere, from Europe to Japan to the United States.
  - In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both England and France cut their fertility rates by 30 percent.
  - By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, fertility in England was half what it was at the century's start.

(Sources: Simon Szreter and Eilidh Garrett, "Reproduction, Compositional Demography, and Economic Growth: Family Planning in England Long Before the Fertility Decline," *Population and Development Review* 26, no. 1 (March 2000): 57; Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890–1970: The Maternal Dilemma* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 11.)

## Average number of children per woman in the U.S.



Sources: Michael R. Haines, Colgate University;  
National Center for Health Statistics  
The Wall Street Journal

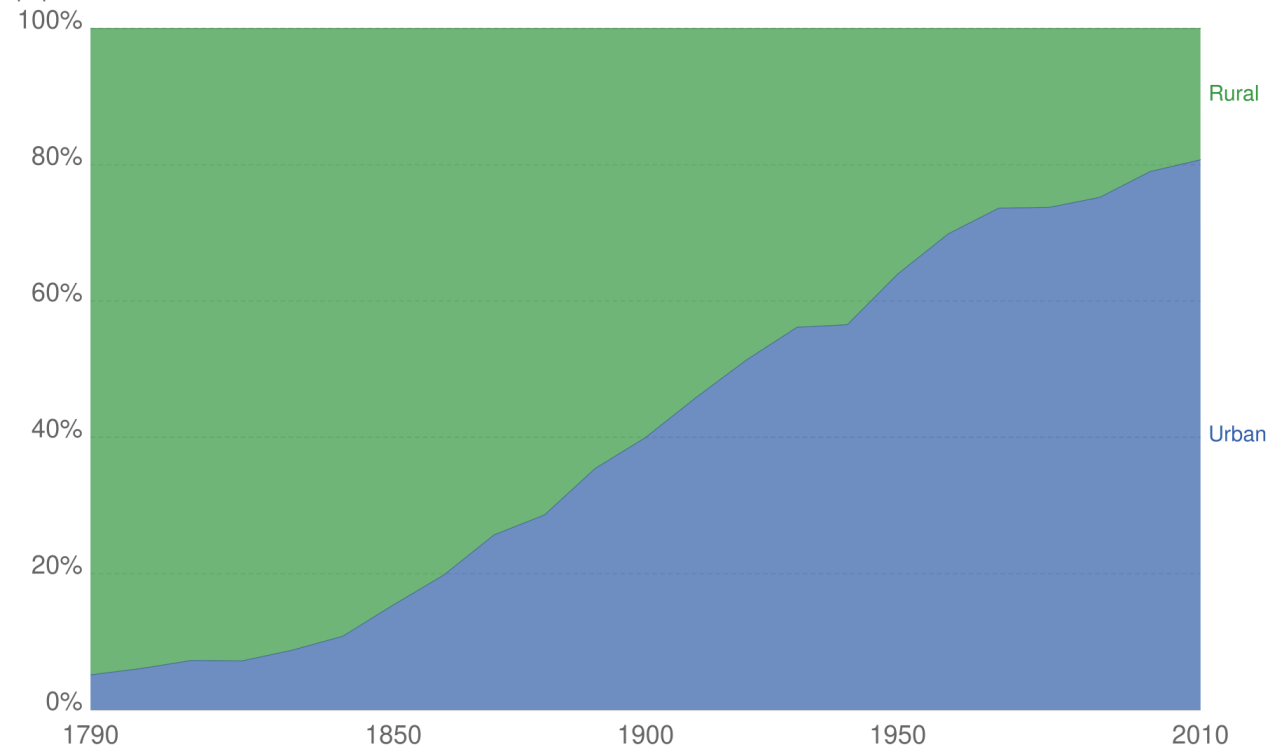


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# Urbanization and Industrialization in 19<sup>th</sup> Century United States

## Urban and rural populations in the United States

Figure illustrates the size of the rural and urban populations in the United States over time. The US Census Bureau's population threshold of an urban place changes over time. The rural population is defined as any population outside urban areas. See the source tab for further information.

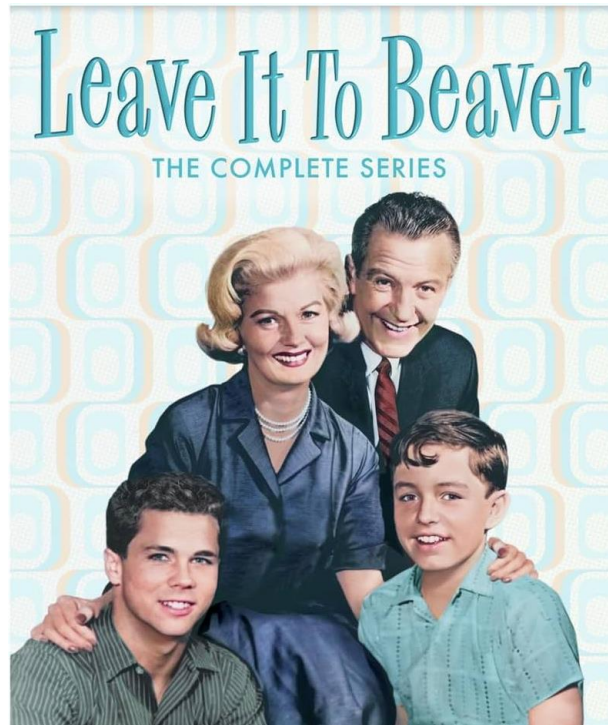


Source: US Census Bureau (2010)

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# The “breadwinner-homemaker” family model



*Leave it to Beaver, 1957-1963*



*The Brady Bunch, 1969-1974*

- Mothers remaining home while fathers worked became increasingly important in distinguishing between working class and middle class families
- “Gentlemen may employ their hours of business in almost any degrading occupation, and, if they but have the means of supporting a respectable establishment at home, may be gentlemen still. While, if a lady but touch any article, no matter how delicate, in the way of trade, she loses caste, and ceases to be a lady.”  
- Sarah Stickney Ellis, one of Britain’s primary authorities on domesticity, 1839.
- In the post-WWII period, the “traditional” breadwinner-homemaker family became even more idealized in American and western culture.

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# Policies limiting mothers' workforce participation

- 1972 – United States President Richard Nixon vetoed the Comprehensive Childcare Development Act because it “would commit the vast moral authority of the National Government to the side of communal approaches to child rearing over against the family-centered approach.”
  - In the United States, women could be fired from their jobs when they became pregnant until the Pregnancy Discrimination Act was passed in 1974.
  - As recently as 2002, just 11 % of Americans said it was appropriate for mothers of young children to work full time.
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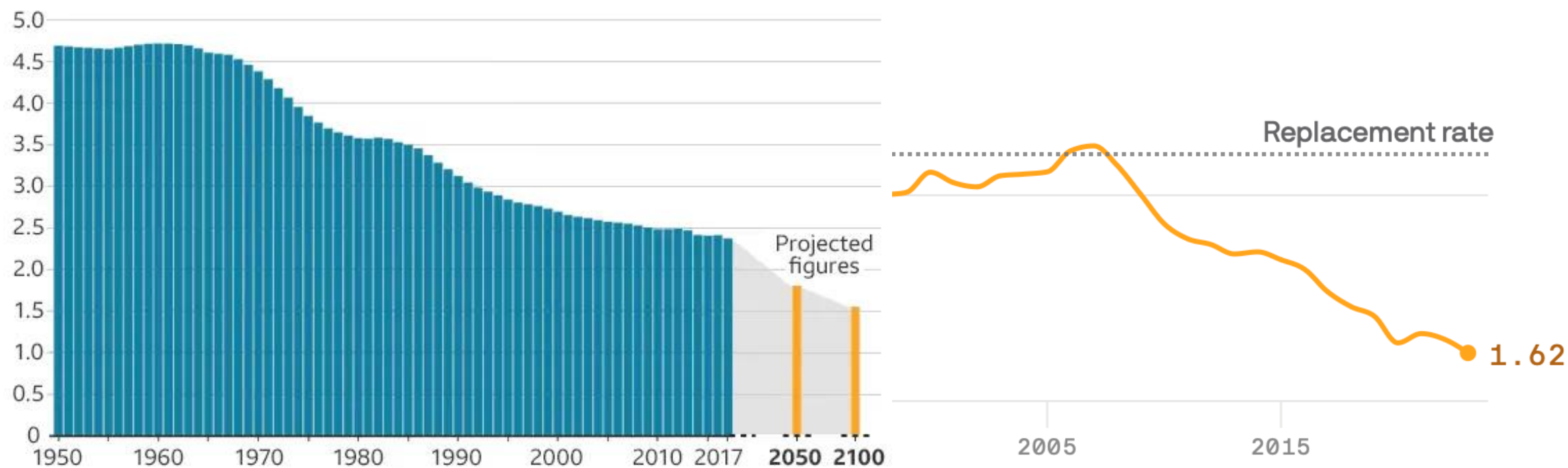


# Annual U.S. total fertility rate, 1965 to 2023

3.0

## Women are having fewer children

Global fertility rate (livebirths per woman)

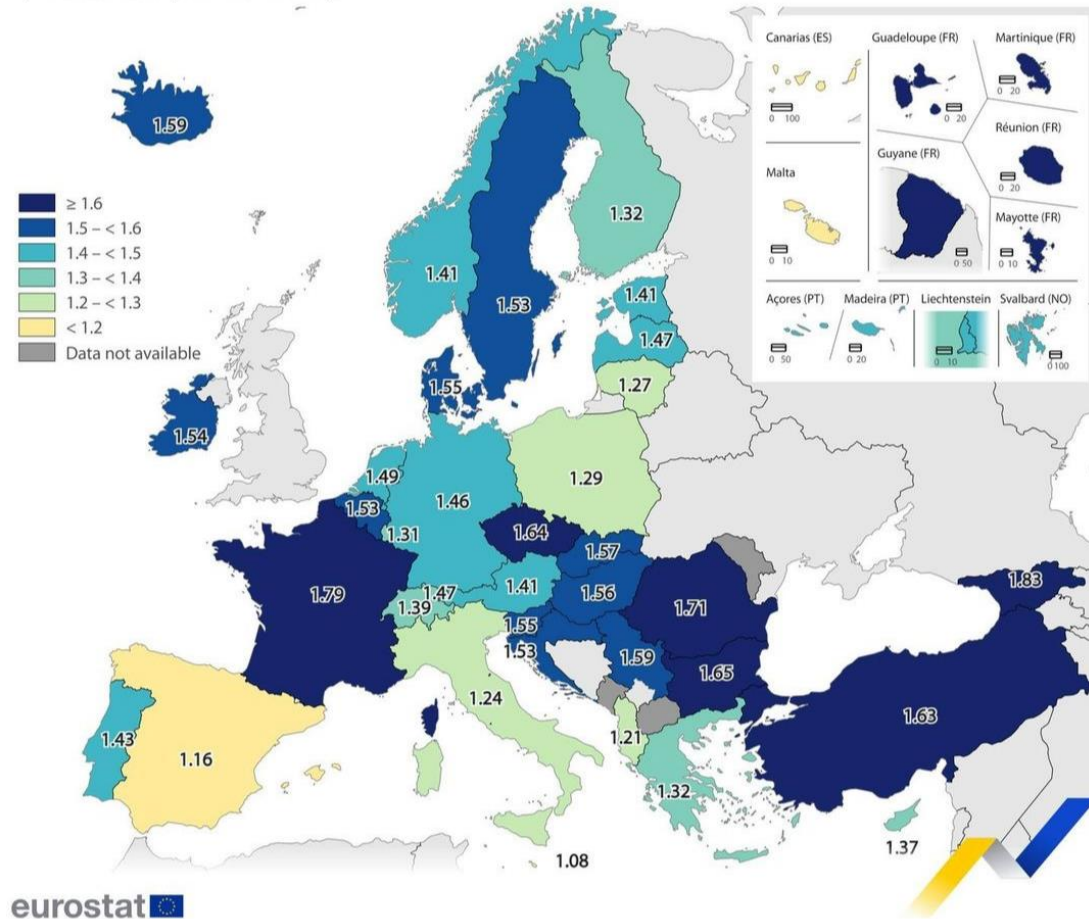


# Good news: in Europe today, fertility is *higher* in countries where more women work

In countries with supportive policies for working mothers, like France and the Scandinavian countries, fertility rates are higher than in countries with less supportive policies, such as Italy, Spain, and Portugal.

(Source: Ann Chemin, "France's Baby Boom Secret: Get Women into Work and Ditch Rigid Family Norms," *The Guardian*, March 21, 2015.)

Total fertility rate, 2022  
(live births per woman)



eurostat

Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, and Poland: break in time series for 2022.  
Source dataset: demo\_find

Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © UN-FAO © Turkstat  
Cartography: Eurostat – IMAGE, 03/2024

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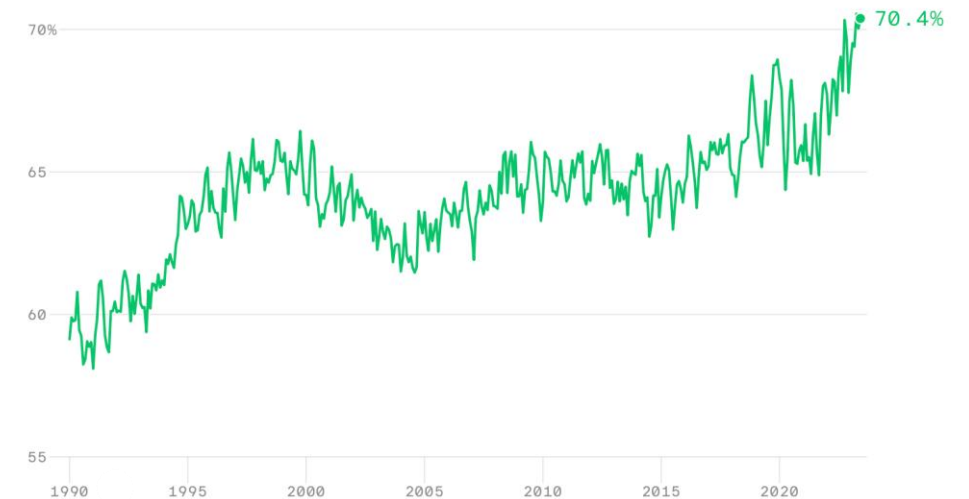
# More good news: in the US, labor force participation for mothers of young children is *up* since the COVID-19 pandemic

- In June 2023, 70.4% of women with children under 5 were in the workforce — compared to a peak of 68.9% before the pandemic.
- More research needs to be done, but it looks like a big factor is remote work, which enabled more women to stay attached to the workforce.
- Women who were highly educated, and more likely to work from home, were among those more likely to be in the workforce now than pre-pandemic.

(Source: Lauren Bauer and Sarah Yu Wang, “Prime-age women are going above and beyond in the labor market recovery,” Hamilton Project at Brookings, August 30, 2023.)

Labor force participation rate for mothers with kids under age 5

Monthly; January 1990 to June 2023



Data: Lauren Bauer, the Hamilton Project at Brookings; Note: Includes all mothers whose youngest child is under 5. Chart: Axios Visuals

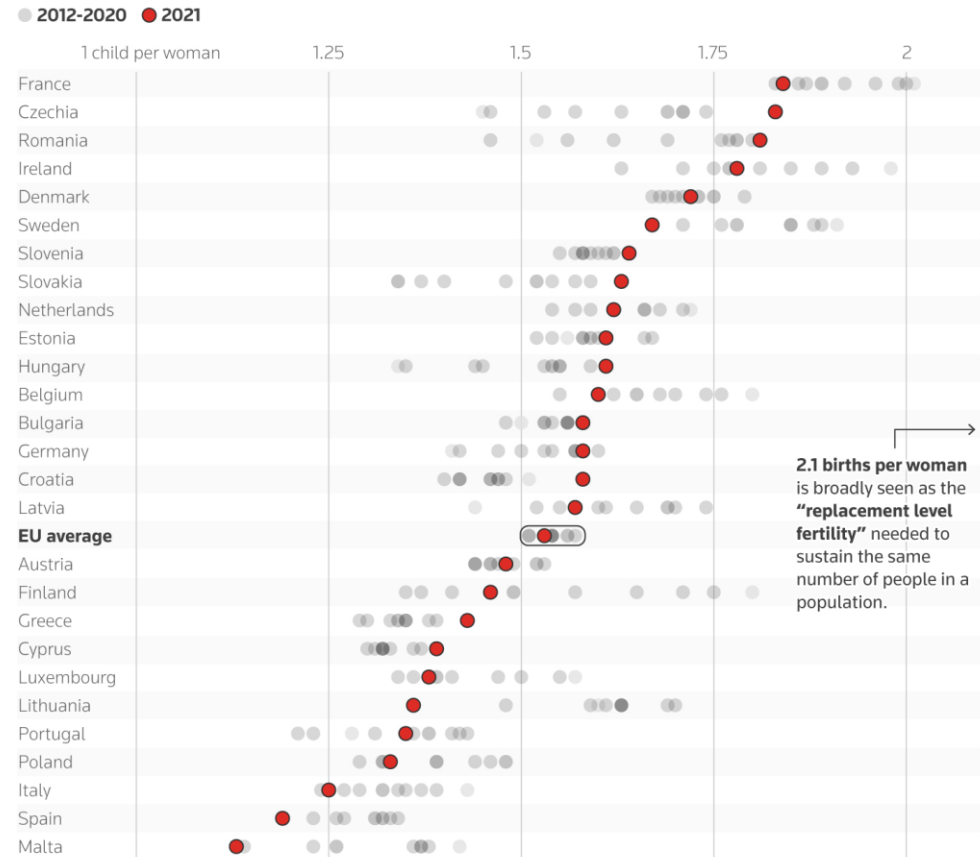


# Less good news: policies don't seem to reverse fertility trends

Even in countries lauded for supportive policies for working mothers (such as Sweden and France), fertility has fallen over the past decade.

## Despite some gains, EU struggles to raise birth rate

Average number of children per woman in European Union countries



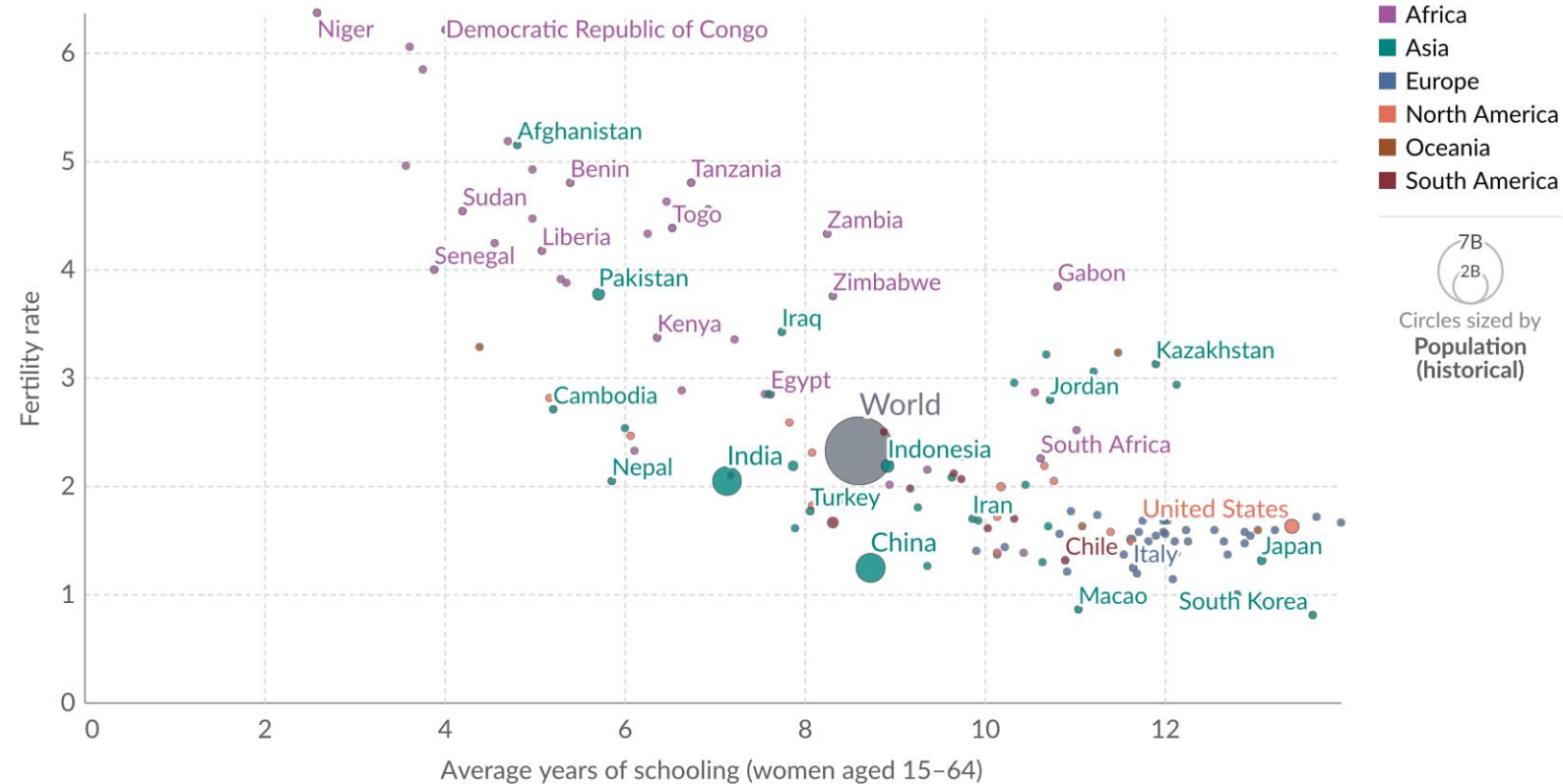
Note: Latest available data as of 2021.

Source: Eurostat

Prinz Magtulis • Feb. 7, 2024 | REUTERS

# Women's educational attainment vs. fertility rate, 2020

The fertility rate<sup>1</sup>, expressed as the number of children per woman, is based on age-specific fertility rates in one particular year. Educational attainment is the average number of years of formal education received by women between the ages of 15 and 64.



**Data source:** UN, World Population Prospects (2024); Barro and Lee (2015); Lee and Lee (2016)  
OurWorldinData.org/fertility-rate | CC BY

**1. Fertility rate:** The total fertility rate is a period metric. It summarizes fertility rates across all age groups in one particular year. For a given year, the total fertility rate represents the average number of children that would be born to a hypothetical woman if she (1) lived to the end of her childbearing years, and (2) experienced the same age-specific fertility rates throughout her whole reproductive life as the age-specific fertility rates seen in that particular year. It is different from the actual average number of children that women have. The fertility rate should not be confused with biological fertility, which is about the ability of a person to conceive. Read more: Fertility rate

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# Better news: policies (at the company and national level) may be able to solve “the happiness gap”

For the past 30 years, studies have repeatedly shown that people without children are happier than parents in the US and many developed countries.

In the United States, parents report themselves to be 12% less happy than people without children.

“The emotional rewards of having children are overshadowed by the stress associated with contemporary parenthood.”

Policies such as affordable childcare and paid time off for illness and vacation can fully erase the happiness gap.

In France, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, countries that have these policies and more, researchers found parents are happier than non-parents by as much as 8%.

“The policy context of nations explains up to 100% of the parenthood disadvantage” in happiness.

Source: Jennifer Glass, Robin W. Simon, and Matthew A. Andersson, “Parenthood and Happiness: Effects of Work-Family Reconciliation Policies in 22 OECD Countries,” *American Journal of Sociology* 122 no. 3 (November 2016).

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CS164490

I'M AFRAID YOU'LL HAVE TO STAY LATE TONIGHT,  
I WANT YOU TO ATTEND THIS TALK ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE



**Thank you!**