

# RECENT TRENDS IN BIRTH RATES AMONG FOREIGN AND NATIVE-WHITE MARRIED WOMEN IN UP-STATE NEW YORK

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TEN or fifteen years ago it would have sounded absurd to say that there is probably little basic difference between the birth rates of foreign and native-white stocks in this country. That the foreign-born were very prolific was one of the arguments often stated in behalf of more rigid immigration restrictions. Now that such legislation has been effected there is little popular concern over birth rates of the foreign-born. The question has also been neglected by students of population partly because of the diminishing numerical importance of the foreign-born, but mainly because sufficient data are lacking. Nevertheless, an adequate and accurate comparison by nativity of recent fertility trends would throw much light on the nature of the recent declines of the general birth rate.

For purposes of such a comparison, the Annual Reports of the New York State Health Department provide unusually good data insofar as numbers of births are concerned. From this source it was possible to secure for each year from 1917 to 1934 the numbers of legitimate<sup>2</sup> births in New York State exclusive of New York City according to the color, nativity, and age of the mother. The accuracy of the rates presented in these pages depends in large part upon the accuracy of the population estimates,<sup>3</sup> and such

<sup>1</sup> From the Milbank Memorial Fund.

<sup>2</sup> The numbers of legitimate and illegitimate births were reported according to the age and nativity of the mother. In order to avoid the factor of differences in proportions married, the comparison was restricted to legitimate births to married women of the specified age groups.

<sup>3</sup> The numbers of married women by age and nativity were secured from the Federal Census reports for 1910, 1920, and 1930. The estimates of the numbers for inter-censal years were made by application of the arithmetic method. There are good reasons to believe, however, that the projection of the 1920-1930 changes of foreign or native population would lead to erroneous estimates. Net immigration into this country has

estimates are particularly hazardous for the foreign population in post-censal years.

In spite of the limitations, however, the rates presented here are at least suggestive of the incidence of the decline in the general birth rate and are indicative of present-day comparisons in the fertility levels of foreign and native populations. The data were plotted on semi-logarithmic scales in order to portray the rates of change rather than the absolute changes in fertility during the period under study.

It is commonplace knowledge that the general or "crude" birth rate has declined rapidly in recent years. In Up-State New York, the annual total number of births per 1,000 total population declined from 21.3 in 1920 to 14.1 in 1934, a decrease of approximately one-third. Our interest is to determine how much decline has taken place in the foreign-white as compared with the native-white population. Care must be taken, too, to ascertain how much of the decline in the fertility rate of the foreign population is real and not simply the automatic result of immigration curtailment. From the nonstandardized rates in Table 1 and Figure 1 it will be noted that the number of legitimate births per 1,000 foreign-born white married women of child-bearing age declined from 195 in 1920 to 81 in 1934, a decline of 58 per cent. The corresponding rates among native whites were 142 and 106, a decline of only 26 per cent. It also appeared probable that the increases of natives through inter-state migration were much less than those during the boom decade, 1920-1930. The following procedure was used in estimating the foreign and native populations in post-censal years:

It was possible to secure from the 1930 Census a five-year age distribution, by color and nativity, of the total single, married, widowed, and divorced females in Up-State New York. Assuming that there had been no losses or additions to the cohort of females 10-40 years of age in 1930, it was possible to say that those reported 10-14 years of age in 1930 would constitute the number 15-19 years of age in 1935, those reported as 15-19 in 1930 would be 20-24 in 1935, etcetera. Hence it was possible to build up an assumed age distribution as of 1935 for each nativity group. Average annual changes were then computed between the actual number within a specific age group in 1930 and the assumed number in 1935. From these data age distributions of females 15-44 were computed as of July 1, for successive years 1930-1934 inclusive. The numbers obtained were then restricted to married women by application of the proportions married in specific age and nativity groups as computed from the 1930 Federal Census reports for this area.

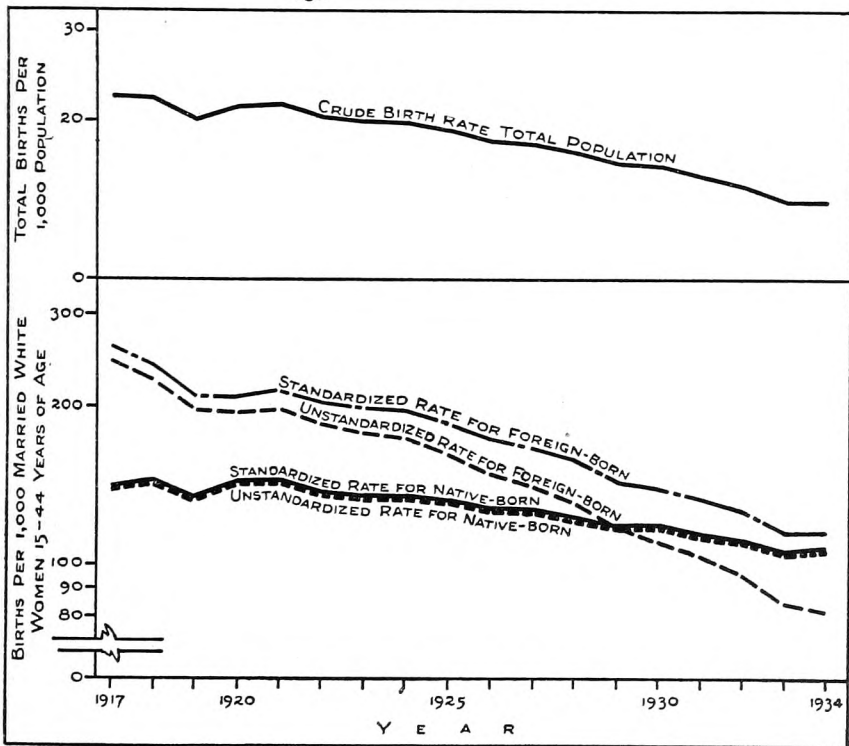
TYPE OF RATE AND NATIVITY OF WIVES	BIRTHS PER 1,000 WIVES		PER CENT DECLINE
	1920	1934	
<i>Nonstandardized Rates</i>			
Foreign	195	81	58.4
Native	142	106	25.6
Foreign per cent higher than native	+36.8	-23.5	
<i>Standardized Rates</i>			
Foreign	209	115	44.9
Native	144	107	25.9
Foreign per cent higher than native	+45.2	+7.9	

Table 1. Legitimate births per 1,000 married white women of child-bearing age in 1920 and 1934, by nativity, New York State exclusive of New York City.

per cent. On their face, the nonstandardized rates might appear to indicate that the fertility level of the foreign-born is now consid-

Fig. 1. Annual birth rates, Up-State New York, 1917-1934.

Upper Scale: Annual number of births per 1,000 total population.  
 Lower Scale: Nonstandardized and standardized birth rates per 1,000 foreign and native-white married women of child-bearing age.



AGE	FOREIGN-BORN		NATIVE	
	1920	1934	1920	1934
15-44	100.1	100.1	100.0	100.0
15-24	11.9	5.3	16.7	17.4
25-34	43.9	35.6	43.4	42.3
35-44	44.3	59.2	39.9	40.3

Table 2. Percentage age distribution of foreign-born and native married white females of child-bearing age, 1920 and 1934, New York State, exclusive of New York City.

erably lower than that of the native whites, and that it has been lower since the year 1929.

The fallacy of the above conclusion, however, is apparent from a comparison of the 1920 and 1934 age distributions of the foreign and native married women. Since immigration laws have gone into effect the existing foreign female population has been deprived of young married or marriageable recruits from abroad and consequently there has been a marked decrease in the proportions in the younger and more fertile age groups. From Table 2 it will be seen that while the age distribution of the native-white married women remained virtually unchanged from 1920 to 1934, there was a decided aging of the foreign group. Clearly, it is of basic importance to control the factor of age in comparisons of birth rates among foreign and native groups.

In Table 1 and Figure 1, birth rates standardized for age are presented for foreign and native-white married women of child-bearing age. The same age distribution has been used as a standard<sup>4</sup> for computation of rates for each nativity group and for each year under study. When ages are thus held constant, the two points of chief significance are: (1) The rate for the year of 1934 computed for foreign wives was only 8 per cent higher than that of native wives; (2) the rate of decline among the foreign wives from 1920 to 1934 was 45 per cent while that among native wives was only 26 per cent.

<sup>4</sup> The standard used was taken from the 1930 Census reports and is based on the age distribution of all urban white married females 15-44 years of age in the United States.

The birth rates among foreign and native women of the same specific age groups afford an additional valid comparison. As shown for three age groups in Table 3 and Figure 2, the comparisons yielded by these data are significant in two respects:

1. In 1920, the percentage excess of foreign birth rates over those of native groups in Up-State New York ranged from 18 per cent among the youngest women to 106 per cent among the oldest women. In 1934, the foreign excess ranged from 2 per cent among women 25-34 years of age to 21 per cent among women 35-44.

2. From 1920 to 1934, the rates of decline in the birth rates of foreign-born women of Up-State New York have been least (28 per cent) among the youngest and greatest (61 per cent) among the oldest. This association of rate of decline with age is also apparent to a much less degree among the native whites. The decrease in the annual birth rate among the native wives under 25 years of age was 23 per cent while that among the oldest group was 33 per cent.

In considering the above results several factors should be kept in mind. First of all, of course, is the uncertainty of the popula-

Table 3. Legitimate births per 1,000 married white women in 1920 and 1934, by age and nativity, New York State, exclusive of New York City.

AGE	BIRTHS PER 1,000 WIVES		PER CENT DECLINE
	1920	1934	
<i>Under 25</i>			
Foreign	375	271	27.6
Native	318	245	23.0
Foreign per cent higher than native	+17.9	+10.9	
<i>25-34</i>			
Foreign	240	121	49.7
Native	160	119	26.1
Foreign per cent higher than native	+49.7	+2.0	
<i>35-44</i>			
Foreign	102	40	60.5
Native	50	33	33.0
Foreign per cent higher than native	+105.5	+21.0	

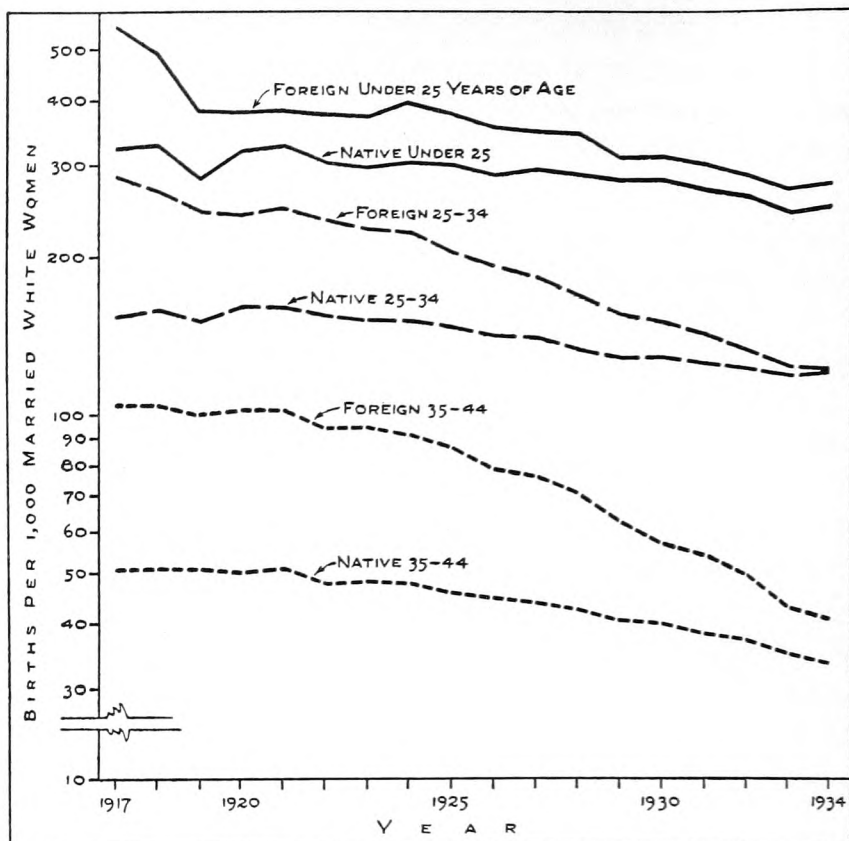


Fig. 2. Annual number of births per 1,000 married white women of specified age and nativity, Up-State New York, 1917-1934.

tion estimates in post-censal years. Next, age differences may persist as a result of the rather broad age groupings used. Then there are factors such as proportions residing in urban districts, proportions in the laboring classes, and proportions who are Catholics. All of the above factors, however, do not influence birth rates in the same direction; so their composite effect would probably not be large, especially insofar as comparisons of trends are concerned. Smaller but more refined bodies of data secured from field surveys in urban areas are now in the process of analysis. These will permit partial control of the above factors in age and nativity comparisons of fertility trends.

YEAR	NUMBER MARRIED WOMEN 15-44 YEARS OF AGE		ANNUAL BIRTH RATES PER 1,000 MARRIED WOMEN 15-44 YEARS OF AGE			
	Foreign	Native	NONSTANDARDIZED		STANDARDIZED	
			Foreign	Native	Foreign	Native
1917	152,358	469,126	242	140	260	142
1918	154,385	474,256	225	143	241	145
1919	156,413	479,384	197	132	210	133
1920	157,863	487,977	195	142	209	144
1921	158,731	500,028	197	144	213	145
1922	159,596	512,080	185	136	203	137
1923	160,461	524,132	178	134	198	135
1924	161,329	536,183	175	134	198	135
1925	162,195	548,235	162	131	186	132
1926	163,063	560,286	149	126	174	127
1927	163,928	572,338	141	126	167	127
1928	164,793	584,390	131	122	159	123
1929	165,661	596,441	117	117	144	118
1930	164,870	608,166	111	117	140	118
1931	159,114	618,830	103	113	133	114
1932	153,359	629,495	95	110	125	111
1933	147,604	640,157	84	105	115	105
1934	141,847	650,821	81	106	115	107

Appended Detailed Table A. Nonstandardized and standardized birth rates among foreign and native married white females 15-44 years of age, New York State, exclusive of New York City, 1917-1934.

YEAR	UNDER 25		25-34		35-44	
	Foreign-Born	Native	Foreign-Born	Native	Foreign-Born	Native
1917	557	322	285	154	103	50
1918	491	326	268	159	103	51
1919	379	280	244	150	99	50
1920	375	318	240	160	102	50
1921	379	325	248	160	102	51
1922	374	301	235	153	94	47
1923	369	294	225	152	94	48
1924	391	301	221	150	90	47
1925	372	297	203	146	86	45
1926	352	284	191	140	78	44
1927	344	291	181	139	76	43
1928	341	285	167	132	70	42
1929	306	277	153	127	62	40
1930	307	278	149	127	56	39
1931	298	264	140	124	53	38
1932	283	257	132	121	49	37
1933	263	239	122	117	42	35
1934	271	245	121	119	40	33

Appended Detailed Table B. Legitimate births per 1,000 married white females by age and nativity of mother, New York State, exclusive of New York City, 1917-1934.