

Minnesota Legislative Commission on the Economic Status of Women

A Century of Change: U.S. Women 1900-1998

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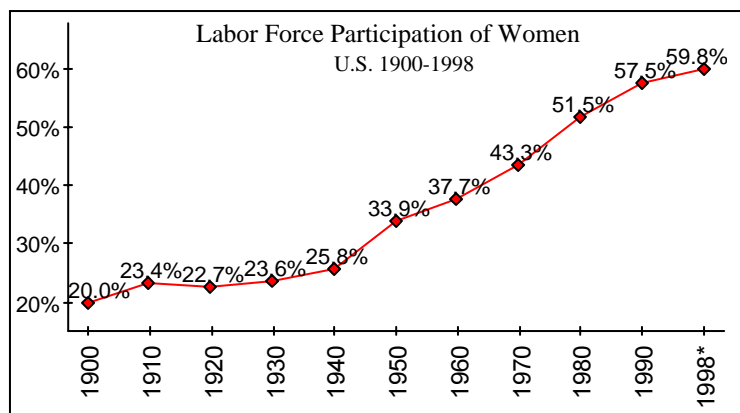
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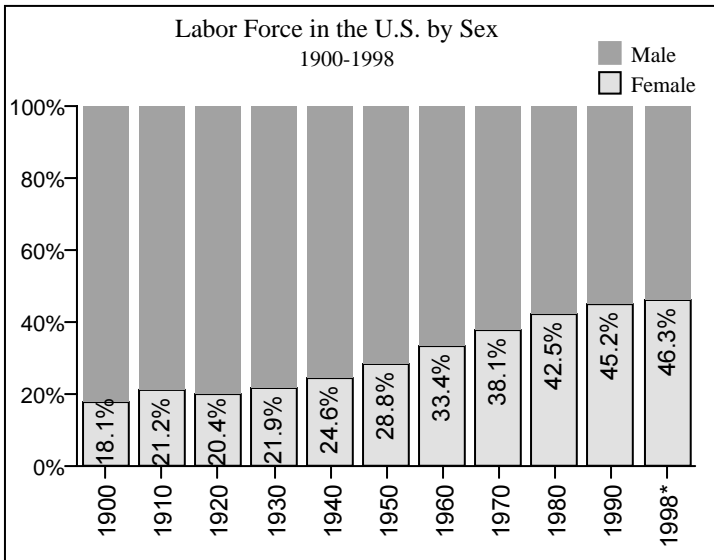
Data in this Newsletter compiled from:

U.S. Bureau of the Census, Decennial Census
Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1999
Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970.
Current Population Survey (CPS)

*Notes: Years with * indicate estimated data from CPS.
Data not available for all years.*



One of the most dramatic changes this century has been the increased participation of women (age 16 and over) in the nation's workforce. The proportion of women in the workforce tripled through the century. In 1900, 1 in 5 (20.0%) were in the labor force. In 1998, the proportion had increased to 3 in 5 (59.8%).



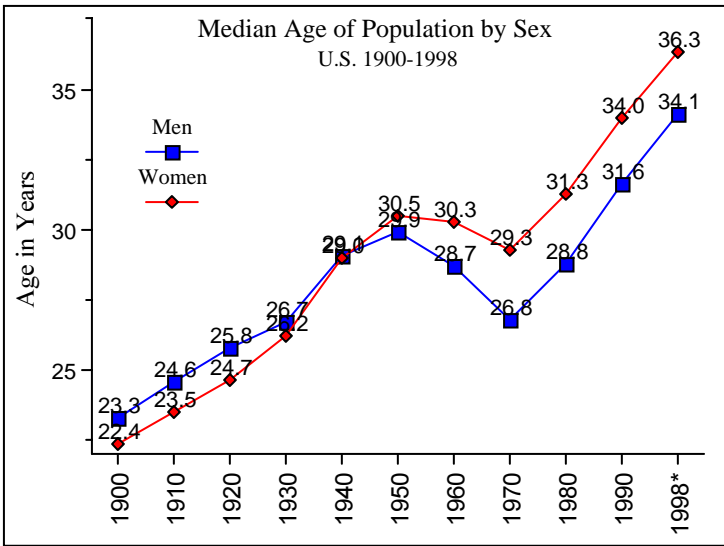
Labor Force by Sex

The composition of the labor force has changed over the century. In 1900, less than one-fifth (18.1%) of the labor force was women. By 1960, women were one-third (33.4%) of the labor force. Towards the close of the century, the percent of the labor force comprised by women had continued to increase and edged closer to the 50 percent mark (46.3% in 1998).

Leading Occupations of Employed Women

Over the decades, the categories of occupations and distribution of women in them have changed. In 1910 and 1930 the leading occupational category of employed women was “other servants”. In 1950, “stenographers, typists and secretaries” was the top category. Since 1970, “secretaries” has been the leading occupation of employed women. In 1998, nearly 1 in 20 (4.7%) employed women were classified in the occupational category of “secretaries” and the ten leading occupations accounted for under one-third (30.0%) of employed women.

1910	1930	1950	1970	1990	1998
Other Servants	Other Servants	Stenographers, Typists & Secretaries	Secretaries	Secretaries	Secretaries
Home Farm Laborers	School Teachers	Other Clerical Workers	Sales Clerks, Retail Trade, Housekeepers	Cashiers	Cashiers
Laundresses (not in laundry)	Stenographers & Typists	Saleswomen	Bookkeepers	Bookkeepers, Accounting and Auditing Clerks	Managers and Administrators
School Teachers	Other Clerks (except clerks in stores)	Private Household Workers	Elementary School Teachers	Registered Nurses	Sales Supervisors and Proprietors
Dressmakers & Seamstresses (not in factory)	Saleswomen	Teachers (elementary school)	Typists	Nursing Aides, Orderlies and Attendants	Registered Nurses
Farm Laborers (working out)	Farm Laborers (unpaid family workers)	Waitresses	Waitresses	Elementary School Teachers	Nursing Aides, Orderlies and Attendants
Cooks	Bookkeepers & Cashiers	Bookkeepers	Sewers and Stitchers	Waiters and Waitresses	Elementary School Teachers
Stenographers & Typewriters	Laundresses (not in laundry)	Sewers & Stickers (in factories)	Registered Nurses	Sales Workers, Other Commodities	Bookkeepers, Accounting and Auditing Clerks
Farmers	Trained Nurses	Nurses, Registered	Cashiers	Child Care Workers	Waiters & Waitresses
Saleswomen (stores)	Other Cooks	Telephone Operators	Private household Cleaners and Servants	Cooks, except short order	Sales Workers, other commodities



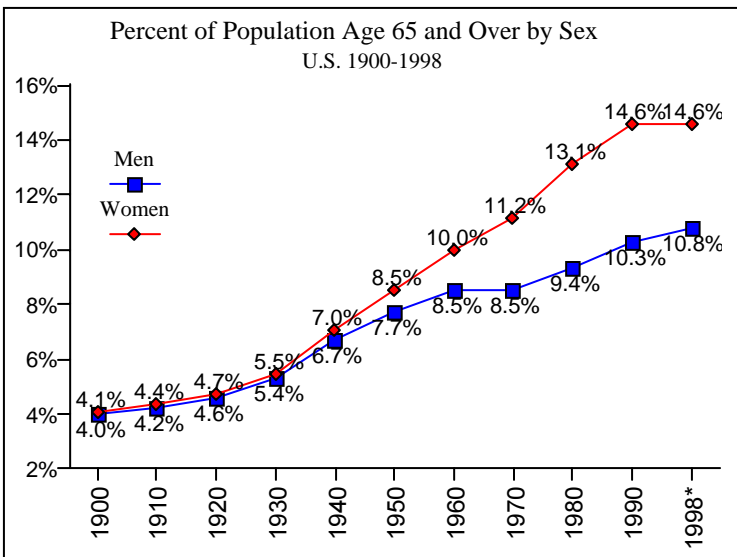
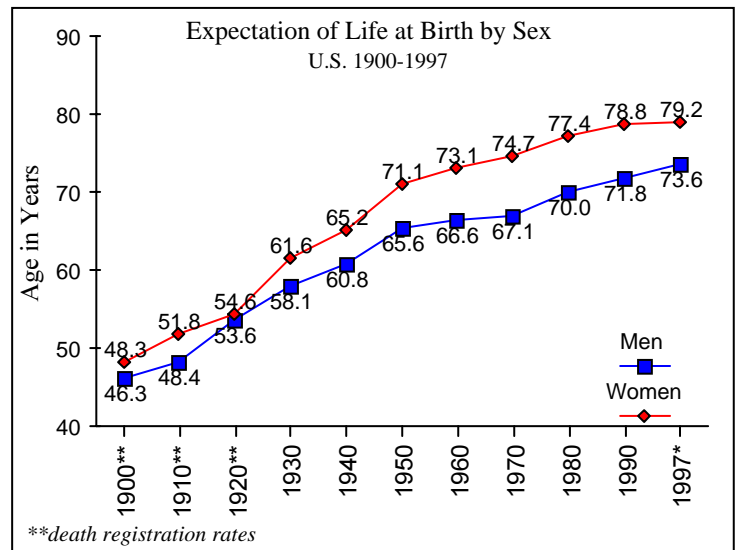
Median Age of Population

Our population became older during the last century. For women, the median age changed from 22.4 years in 1900 to 36.3 years in 1998, an increase of 13.9 years. For men, the median age changed from 23.3 years to 34.1 years, an increase of 10.8 years during the same time span.

Expectation of Life at Birth

Life expectancy at birth for women increased from 48.3 years in 1900 to 79.2 years in 1997. This was an increase of over 30 years (30.9 years).

Men experienced a similar increase in life expectancy, from 46.3 years at the beginning of the century to 73.6 years in 1997. This reflected an increase of 27.3 years.

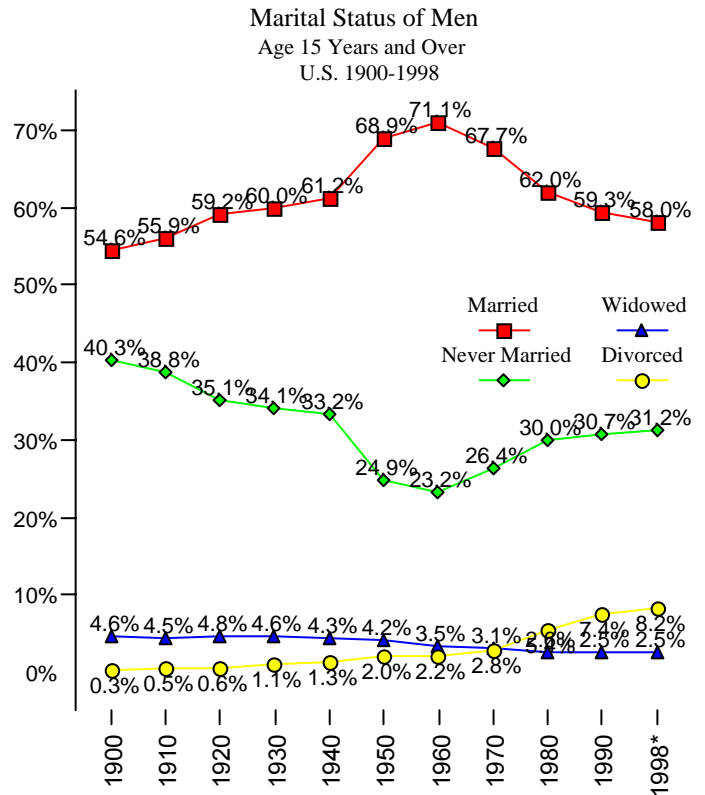
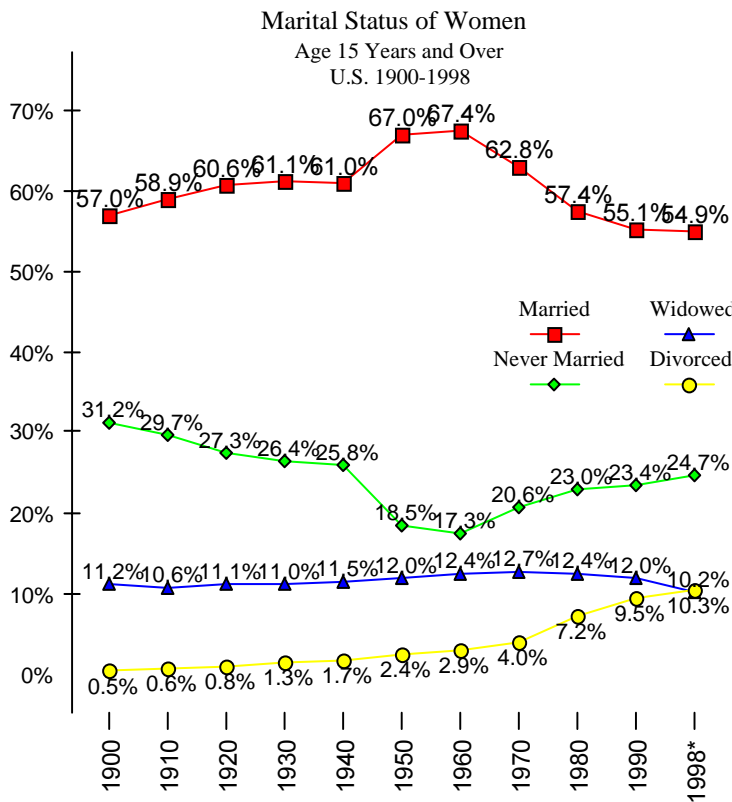


Age 65 and Over

The proportion of the population age 65 and over has greatly expanded in the last century. For women, the percent has more than tripled, from 4.1 percent in 1900 to 14.6 percent in 1998.

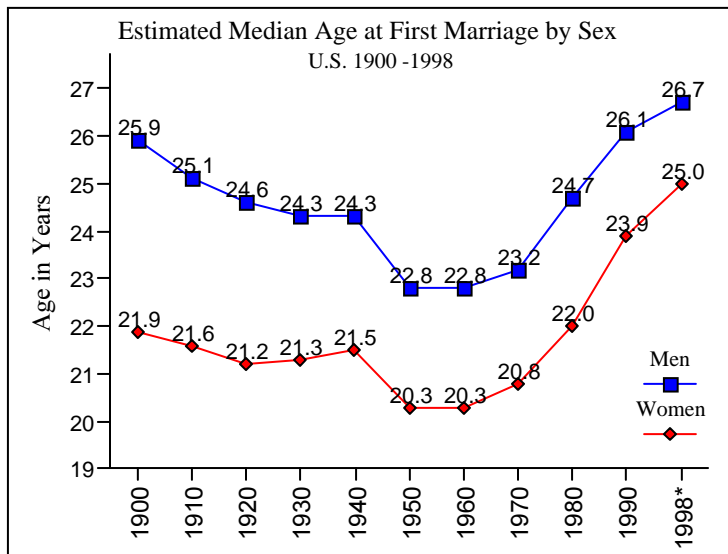
The proportion of men age 65 and over has also increased, but not as dramatically. Men have seen an increase from 4.0 percent in 1900 to 10.8 percent in 1998.

Marital Status



The proportion of U.S. women and men (age 15 and over) who are married, single (never married), widowed or divorced has changed during this century.

- The highest levels of married and the lowest levels of never married women and men occurred in 1950 and 1960.
- Divorce has become more widespread. Less than 1 percent were divorced in 1900, compared with 10.3 percent for women and 8.2 percent for men in 1998.
- Larger proportions of women were widowed than men throughout the century.

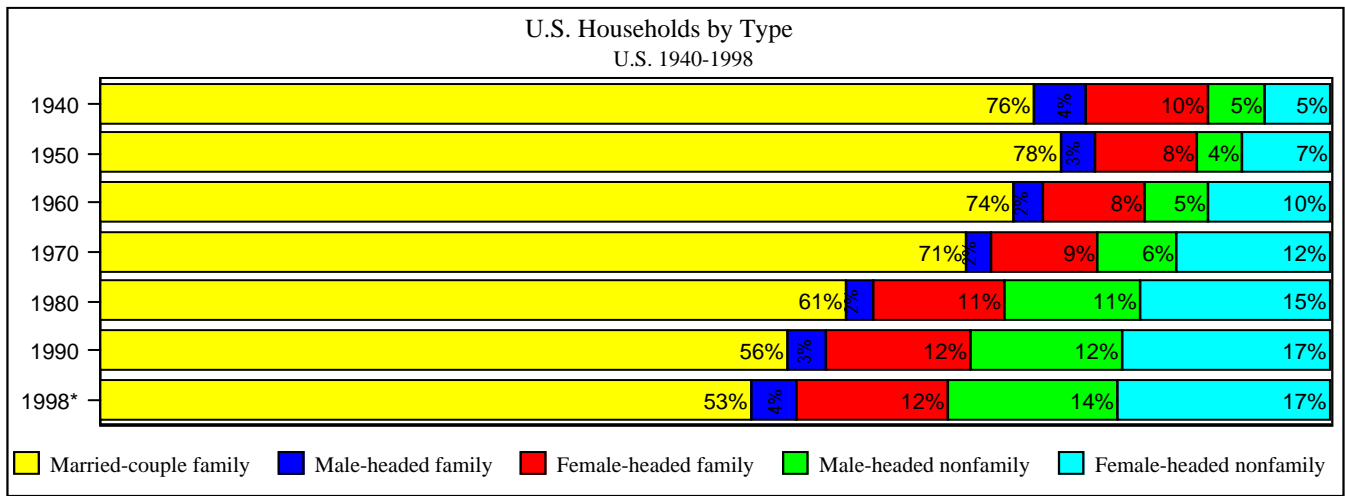


Median Age at First Marriage

The estimated median age at first marriage for women has varied across the 20th century. At the beginning of the century, the age was 21.9 years and for the next four decades it remained relatively stable. In 1950 and 1960, the age dropped and was at its lowest levels. In the most recent decades, the median age of first marriage for women has increased, and was 25.0 years in 1998.

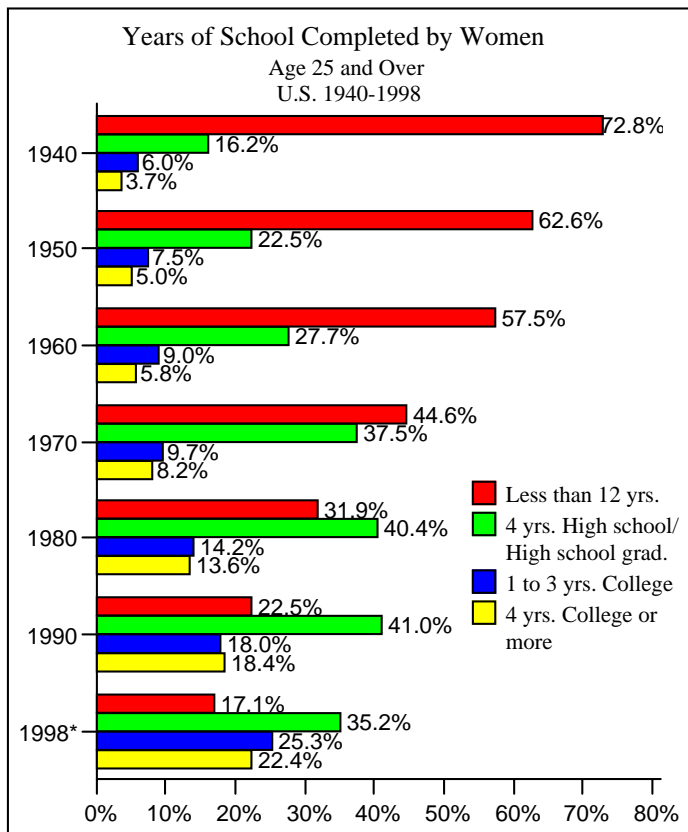
The median age of first marriage for men has been higher than for women throughout the century. The age was also lowest for men in 1950 and 1960.

Households by Type



The composition of U.S. households has changed through the 20th century. The percent of married-couple families increased from 1940 to 1950, but has decreased every decade since. For example, in 1950 almost four out of five (78%) households were married-couple families (with or without children). In 1998, just over one-half (53%) of households were this type. From 1940 to present, the percentage of female-headed family households has ranged from 8 to 12 percent. The percentage of male-headed family households has ranged from 2 to 4 percent.

The overall proportion of non-family households (unrelated individuals living together or individuals living alone) increased from 1940 to 1998. In 1940, non-family households comprised 1 in 10 households. In 1998, over 3 in 10 (31%) households were non-family households. Since 1950, the majority of non-family households have been female-headed.



Years of School Completed

In 1940, approximately 1 in 4 (25.9%) women age 25 and over had at least a high school diploma. By 1970, the percentage achieving this level of educational attainment had more than doubled and over one-half (55.4%) of women had a high school diploma or more.

The trend of increased educational attainment for women continued throughout the century and in 1998, over 4 in 5 (82.9%) of U.S. women had a high school diploma or more.

Note: 1940 and 1950 cumulative totals are less than 100% because data are missing from persons who did not report on years of school completed.