

Decrease of 'right' births may cause lower standards

United Press International
WASHINGTON — Because the "right" people are not having babies now, children born to many other Americans may have a lower standard of living when they grow up, says a Georgetown University researcher.

The problem is not that "the wrong people are having children — it's that the right people are not having them," says Dr. Andre E. Hellegers, director of Georgetown's Joseph and Rose Kennedy Institute of Ethics.

The American middle and upper classes — those who can most afford to have children — are less likely to have them," he said in an interview.

They are the people most apt to produce children who will have adequate incomes as adults and contribute to the social security system, he added. Hellegers specializes in the biological and social problems of obstetrics.

He said the crunch will come because the number of older Americans is increasing and they are living longer than ever before, while the birth rate is declining. About three million babies are born yearly, compared with slightly more than four million a year in the late 1950s.

The problem facing the United States is the opposite of the population explosion in Third World countries, Hellegers said. Instead of too

many hungry children demanding care, there are too many older people in proportion to the work force.

"As a consequence, fewer people are becoming responsible for more people," he said. "Then the question is to look at the competency of those who will do the supporting."

Twenty percent of the children of today's smaller families will be born to teenagers, whose parenthood often interferes with continued schooling.

At the same time, professional couples or well-educated young adults who have been brought up with the concept of zero population growth are having fewer children or postponing them or deciding against parenthood.

Hellegers said the teenage birth rate has been decreasing for a decade and people over 20 are having even fewer children.

"The ability of these children of teenagers to make it into an advantageous economic grouping is highly questionable," he said. "This puts an even greater burden on the remaining children to contribute."

Hellegers expects the future to bring higher taxes and a lower standard of living unless affluent people produce enough children to support the so-called dependency burden or unless that dependency burden is decreased.



Battalion photo by Ed Cunniss

Glowing work

Students can be assured that Texas A&M University will be a well-lit campus, especially when men work on Saturday to repair a street lamp. Norman Gentry, with glasses, and Curtis Holder fix the light beside the bus stop in front of the Reed McDonald Building.

After Rockies, Mississippi was easy, says modern Huck Finn

United Press International
NEW ORLEANS — Compared with his sailing trip to the Pacific Ocean that included a 200-mile climb over the Rocky Mountains, Phil Babiak said his 1,300-mile trip down the Mississippi River from Louisville, Ky., in a 27-foot log raft was a snap.

Two years ago he rowed from North Dakota to the Pacific Ocean, with a hike over the Rockies. By comparison, the Mississippi River was an interstate highway, he said.

"We ran through the usual stuff you'd expect," Babiak said Sunday after stepping off his craft near Jackson Square in the French Quarter. "We got caught in an eddy, we got stuck on a tree floating in the river and there are some dikes in the river between Natchez, (Miss.), and Cairo, (Ill.)."

"We had some minor repairs to the raft and a tow boat broke up in front of us — the individual barges were floating free right at us — but it was okay."

Babiak, 20, made the last half of his trip with Paul Camuso, who jumped on the raft in Vicksburg, Miss. Camuso was part of a kayak expedition from Brockway, Pa., to New Orleans earlier this summer and when he passed Babiak in the river he signed up for the home stretch.

Babiak's original crewmate, Mark Stano, decided to call it quits at Vicksburg.

"He got tired of the way of life," Babiak said. "We had to stay in an 8-by-12-foot private cabin. We had a fire box on top where we cooked all our meals. We did it all without

motors. We had two sweeps, which were about 20-foot long oars." The trip started April 15.

Babiak said his next trip will be to the Virgin Islands for the start of an around-the-world cruise.

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'Rabbit' test finds disease treatment, not pregnancy

United Press International
LONDON — The case of the rigid rabbits is a classic example in which basic scientific research has surprisingly led to a treatment for the dreaded neuromuscular disease that may have helped cause the death of Greek shipping millionaire Aristotle Onassis.

Two British scientists brought this continuing story up to date in a paper prepared for delivery to the annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science at Bath.

Myasthenia gravis is a disease in which the patient suffers muscular weakness that is accentuated by exercise and can lead in severe cases to death by respiratory failure or choking.

There have been many theories to explain its action but the one that now appears to have been closest to the actuality was the suggestion by a British researcher in 1960 that it was an auto-immune disease in which the patient developed antibodies that attacked his own neuromuscular apparatus.

Dr. Roger Harrison and Dr. George C. Lunt of the University of Bath said it took 13 years for the proof of this theory to appear. This came with an unexpected observation in connection with studies into the mechanism by which nerve cells called neurones make contact with other nerve or muscle cells across the specialized junctions named synapses.

The chemical messenger involved in the contact is the molecule acetylcholine.

"It was the isolation of the acetylcholine receptor that led to the awakening of interest in myasthenia gravis," the doctors said.

The major problem of isolating acetylcholine receptors from mammalian muscles is getting enough of the substance for research. The Bay of Biscay electric fish proved invaluable because, although pharmacologically identical to mammalian muscle, its electric organ has 10,000 times more receptors.

There was another ally for the researchers in the venom of certain cobras which contain small proteins

that bond themselves so specifically to the acetylcholine receptors of their victims — paralyzing the skeletal muscles — that they can act as sensitive markers and play a vital role in the complex process of isolating the acetylcholine.

By the early 1970s, a number of laboratories had used this procedure and were engaged in determining the properties of the acetylcholine receptor. One experiment in the United States involved injecting purified receptor protein into rabbits. During this experiment the rabbits developed muscular paralysis and died.

The American researchers noted similarities between the paralysis of their rabbits and that of patients suffering from myasthenia gravis. They theorized the rabbits produced antibodies against the injections but these cross-reacted with their own receptors causing a neuromuscular block. If myasthenia gravis acted the same way, antibodies should be present in the blood of sufferers and in 90 percent of tests in Britain these were found.

The British then tried plasma exchange in which the blood of patients is cleared of antibodies by passing it through a continuous centrifuge. There have been sharp recoveries maintained for months.

But, the doctors cautioned, the

technique is not yet generally available because it is "time consuming, extremely expensive (it may have to be repeated four to eight times) and carries some risk to the patients."

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