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Books

American Standard of Living 1918-1988

by Clair Brown

Not an easy book to find, but it's worth the effort. According to Brown, the economic forces behind improved living standards include: mass production of goods with continuous automation of production; introduction of new goods and services as a result of technological innovation; development of credit and mass marketing systems; development of worldwide communication and information systems; and integration of the global economy.

The Good Old Days — They Were Terrible!

by Otto L. Bettmann

Filled with compelling images and fascinating facts, this book is an instant cure for nostalgia.

Material World: A Global Family Portrait

by Peter Menzel

Profiles of 30 "statistically average" families from different nations. The large family portraits are unforgettable. They show families outside their houses, surrounded by all their material possessions.

More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave

by Ruth Schwartz Cowan

Cowan argues that even after industrialization and the introduction of "labor-saving" devices, women were still spending as much time as ever keeping house.

Never Done: A History of American Housework

by Susan Strasser

The reaction of an online reviewer: "I dreamt life 100 years ago was so much better than today. So simple, so lovely . . . but Strasser's book blew that theory out of the water."

Nickel and Dimed

by Barbara Ehrenreich

Essayist and social critic Barbara Ehrenreich worked at a variety of low-wage jobs to get a

feel for what people go through when they try to make ends meet on \$6 to \$7 an hour.

Pursuing Happiness

by Stanley Lebergott

Here's what Washington Post book critic Jonathan Yardley said about *Pursuing Happiness*: "Writing with lucidity, wit, and forthrightness . . . Lebergott argues that the great American shopping spree is not mere self-indulgence but an essential part of what has been a remarkably successful pursuit of happiness."

Their Lives & Numbers: The Condition of Working People in Massachusetts, 1870-1900

edited by Henry F. Bedford

Interviews with people who worked in the mills and factories of Massachusetts during the late 19th century. Most of the interviews originally appeared in annual reports issued by the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, and they provide a good baseline for measuring the improvement in our material standard of living.

The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860

by George R. Taylor

Historians consider Taylor's book a classic. Here's an excerpt that will bring you back to reality when you're "exhausted" after a seven-hour drive on the interstate: In 1812, a wagon loaded with cotton cards and drawn by four horses took 75 days to travel from Worcester, MA to Charleston, SC.

Everyday Life in America Series

Sights, sounds, and smells of daily life instead of dates, battles, and "great men." The Everyday Life Series gives you a feel for what it would have been like to be you in a different time period.

- *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790-1840* by Jack Larkin
- *The Expansion of Everyday Life, 1860-1876* by Donald E. Sutherland
- *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915* by Thomas J. Schlereth
- *The Uncertainty of Everyday Life, 1915-1945* by Harvey Green

Articles

"Eliminating Child Labor," Miriam Wasserman, *Regional Review*, Quarter 2 2000 - Vol. 10, No. 2

<http://www.bos.frb.org/economic/nerr/rr2000/q2/kidlabor.htm>

"Today's debates on child labor and international trade echo arguments heard in the United States less than a century ago." (Note: If you're not on the mailing list for *Regional Review*, visit our web site and sign up. There's no charge.)

“Last 100 Years Show Growth of Luxury, Greed,” Cynthia Crossen, *The Wall Street Journal*, November 27, 2000
The evolution of holiday gift-giving, 1900 to 2000.

“Lessons Learned from the History of Social Indicators,” Clifford W. Cobb and Craig Rixford, *Redefining Progress*, November 1998 <http://www.rprogress.org/publications/pdf/SocIndHist.pdf> A highly readable piece on the use and gathering of social statistics.

“Living with a Computer,” James Fallows, *The Atlantic*, July 1982 <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/82jul/fallows.htm> Talk about changes in the quality of goods! In 1982, James Fallows was absolutely euphoric over his Processor Technology SOL-20 with its 48k RAM and 12-inch monitor.

“A (Mild) Defense of Luxury,” James B. Twitchell, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 15, 2002 <http://chronicle.com/free/v48/i27/27b00701.htm> Twitchell has fun making the case that “consuming the unnecessary” can be “liberating and democratic.”

“Whose Standard of Living?” Robert Fresco, *Newsday*, September 19, 2001 <http://future.newsday.com/9/ftop0919.htm> This article looks at Long Island families and comes to the conclusion that “prices rise, prices fall, but the gap between rich and poor is only likely to grow.”

“The Worldwide Standard of Living Since 1800,” Richard A. Easterlin, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Winter 2000
Access to the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* online archive is limited to members, but you might be able to find this article elsewhere on the web if you run a search.



“Standard of Living,” Catherine Hennessey <http://www.catherinehennessey.com/onestory.php3?number=66> (See *How do we measure “standard of living”?*)

Web Resources

America’s Housing: 1900-2010, Housing Facts, Figures and Trends, The National Association of Home Builders, http://www.nahb.com/housing_issues/facts.htm Includes a concise comparison of American housing in 1900, 1950, and 2000.

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“How Much Is That?” <http://www.eh.net/hmit/>
Two highlights:

- What is the Relative Value? Five Ways to Compare the Worth of a United States Dollar, 1789 - Present.
- Purchasing Power of the United States Dollar, 1665-2001

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Historical Atlas of Massachusetts by Richard W. Wilkie and Jack Tager, 1991 <http://www.geo.umass.edu/faculty/wilkie/Wilkie/maps.html>
Nice collection of maps and charts (in color!) — population distribution, transportation, communication, and much more.

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Human Development Report 2002, United Nations, <http://www.undp.org/hdro> (See *How do we measure “standard of living”?*)

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“Kitchen Debate” transcript, <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/14/documents/debate/>

“A Letter From the Future” <http://www2.jun.alaska.edu/edtech/tat/creating/creatop.html> A fun exercise, complete with guidelines for writing a good letter. (Part of an online course offered by the Educational Technology Program of the University of Alaska Southeast)

PBS: Public Broadcasting System

Three resources on the PBS web site:

- *The First Measured Century: An Illustrated Guide to Trends in America, 1900-2000*, <http://www.pbs.org/fmc/> The 20th century was the first to produce an extensive statistical record, and The First Measured Century uses that record to survey the extraordinary changes that took place in American life between 1900 and 2000. The web site features an online teachers guide, and, for those with time and patience, there's a free download of *The First Measured Century* book

- *Frontier House*, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/frontierhouse/> PBS cameras recorded the experiences of three contemporary American families as they tried to live as Montana homesteaders did in the 1880s. It wasn't always pretty. (Be sure to click on the Resources section.)

- *The 1900 House*, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/1900house/> A British family volunteered to live the way middle-class Londoners did in 1900: No shampoo, very little hot water, a temperamental oven, and corsets. It didn't look like fun. (The web site has online lesson plans.)

- *Primer on Productivity*, Industry Canada, <http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/SSG/pro0016e.html> (See **How do we measure “standard of living”?**)

- *Redefining Progress*, <http://www.rprogress.org> (See **How do we measure “standard of living”?**)

- *Teaching With Documents Lesson Plan — Photographs of Lewis Hine: Documentation of Child Labor*, National Archives, http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/lessons/hinephotographs/hine_photographs.html

The National Archives web site uses the photos of Lewis Hine as the basis for a lesson plan on child labor.

Worksheet on GDP and Standard of Living

Student Version: <http://www.bized.ac.uk/stafsup/options/works1.htm>

Teacher Version: <http://www.bized.ac.uk/stafsup/options/works2.htm>
Online worksheets that cover standard of living variables and serve as a basis for making comparisons between countries. The worksheets are straightforward and easy to use.

things to think about

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course, everything we use seems to come from someplace far away; not just outside New England, but outside the United States.

To get an idea of how much less local our lives have become, try this exercise: Go through your home and try to find ten consumer goods, apparel items, and foods that were produced within 50 miles of where you live. Not ten of each, but ten altogether. Chances are, you'll have a tough time finding five.

A Reality Check

Are you one of those romantics who thinks it would have been fun to live “back in the day”? Well, then this exercise is for you. You don't actually have to do these things; just think about them.

TASK ONE: When you wake in the morning, reach under your bed and remove the chamber pot brimming with “night soil.” Grasp it in both hands, take it outside, and dump it.

TASK TWO: Share a crowded trolley car with dozens of other people who bathe once a week and don't use deodorant. (Be sure to try this one on a humid summer day.)

TASK THREE: Spend an hour in an iron lung so that you can recall the days when people were terrified of polio.

TASK FOUR: Take all the screens off your windows so that mosquitoes and flies can easily find their way into your house.

TASK FIVE: If you live in the North, turn off your heat and hot water for the month of February. If you live in the South, try to make it through August without air conditioning.

TASK SIX: Ask your legislators to roll back the clean air laws so that we can once again see the air we breathe.

TASK SEVEN: If you're an older person, give up your Social Security and rely on your children for financial support.

TASK EIGHT: Kids, limit your television viewing to ABC, CBS, and NBC and listen only to AM radio.

We could go on and on, but you get the point.