

The survey says . . .

Are things better or worse than they used to be? Take this survey to learn more about the differences in living standards over time.



July 4, 1893, Medford, Massachusetts. Courtesy of Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

This survey can help you figure out if you believe things are better or worse than they used to be.

Part 1. What do you think?

Part 1 has no right or wrong answers.

1. American life is physically easier than it was in 1900.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree somewhat
- ☐ Disagree somewhat
- ☐ Strongly disagree

2. Americans are happier now than they were in 1900.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree somewhat
- ☐ Disagree somewhat
- ☐ Strongly disagree

3. Americans are happier now than they were in 1960.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree somewhat
- ☐ Disagree somewhat
- ☐ Strongly disagree

4. The next generation of Americans will live better than we do.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree somewhat
- ☐ Disagree somewhat
- ☐ Strongly disagree

5. On the whole, how satisfied are you with the life you lead?

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Fairly satisfied
- ☐ Not very satisfied
- ☐ Not at all satisfied

Part 2. Just the facts

The next 12 questions highlight some of the ways in which everyday life has changed over the years. (The answers are on page 24.)

1. In 2000, more than 99 percent of all U.S. households had electricity. In 1900, the number was approximately ___ percent.

- A. 3
- B. 13
- C. 23
- D. 33

2. In 1900, approximately ___ percent of all births in the U.S. took place in hospitals.

- A. 5
- B. 25
- C. 45
- D. 65

3. In 1900, fewer than 6 percent of married American women worked outside the home. By the year 2000, the number had risen to just over — percent.

- A. 30
- B. 40
- C. 50
- D. 60

4. Without running water, housewives in the late 1800s had to haul — gallons a year into the kitchen, laundry, and bath.

- A. 1,000
- B. 5,000
- C. 10,000
- D. 20,000

5. In 1900 the average American workweek was — hours.

- A. 69
- B. 59
- C. 49
- D. 39

6. Today, it takes approximately 4 hours to drive from Boston to New York. In 1800, the trip took just over — by stagecoach.

- A. one day
- B. two days
- C. three days
- D. four days

7. In 1929, Americans spent 23.5 percent of their disposable household income on food (groceries and meals eaten away from home). In 2002, we spent approximately — percent.

- A. 5
- B. 10
- C. 20
- D. 30

8. In 1920, Americans slept an average of 8.8 hours per night. In 2000, we averaged — hours per night.

- A. 5.9
- B. 6.9
- C. 7.9
- D. 8.9

9. In 1990, there were approximately 5.3 million cell phone subscribers in the U.S. By the end of 2004, there were approximately — million.

- A. 8.5
- B. 18.5
- C. 80.5
- D. 180.5

10. Almost 20 million American kids attended high school proms in 2003. They spent an average of \$638 each — or more than \$1200 per couple. Question: In how many of the world's 208 countries did people have an average annual income of \$1200 or less in 2003?

- A. 20
- B. 40
- C. 60
- D. 80

11. The percentage of America's grade-school children that walked or pedaled a bike to class went from 60 percent in the 1960s to — percent in 2003.

- A. 13
- B. 23
- C. 33
- D. 43

12. According to the web site toiletpaperworld.com, which one of the following items was NOT used as "toilet paper" in early America?

- A. leaves
- B. corncobs
- C. mussel shells
- D. the frayed end of an old anchor cable



Courtesy of Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

Answers to “Just the Facts”

Question 1

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the correct answer is **3 percent**.

Think about that for a minute, and then try this exercise: Go through your living space and list all the things that require electric power; then try to imagine how different your life would be without each item.

Example: Electric refrigerator. Without it you would need to shop for food every day, leaving you less time to do other things. Food would take a bigger bite out of your household income because you'd be buying smaller quantities and throwing more food away. You'd also face greater risk of illness from eating spoiled food.

Question 2

In 1900, only **5 percent** of all U.S. births took place in hospitals — no epidural anesthesia and no sophisticated equipment to deal with complications. (Source: *Lying-In: A History of Childbirth in America*, Richard W. Wertz and Dorothy C. Wertz, Yale University Press, 1989)

Question 3

By the end of the 20th century, **more than 60 percent** of married American women were part of the paid labor force. The figure is even higher for single women: 68.9 percent. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2004-2005*, Table 578)

There's still an earnings gap between men and women: In 1998, women earned only 74 percent as much as men. But more different types of jobs are open to women than ever before. And think about this: As recently as the 1970s, major metropolitan daily newspapers still had separate “Help Wanted” sections for women.

Question 4

Believe it or not, the correct answer is **10,000 gallons** a year. That's a lot of water, but it averages out to just 27 gallons a day for the entire household. Today, a four-person household in the U.S. uses an average of 350 gallons a day, or 127,750 gallons a year. And you thought it was tough carrying two or three jugs of Poland Spring Water. (Sources: *Pursuing Happiness*, by Stanley Lebergott; and American Water Works Association)

Question 5

In 1900, the average American workweek was **59 hours**—10-hour days during the week and slightly shorter hours on Saturday. Today the average workweek hovers around 40 hours, but there's debate as to how meaningful that number really is. In recent years, employees have been feeling increased pressure to work unpaid overtime, especially in the services sector and non-unionized industries.

Question 6

In 1800, the trip from Boston to New York took **just over three days** by stagecoach. The coach had neither heat nor air conditioning, no suspension to ease the bumps, and most passengers probably hadn't had a bath since Adam was in rags.

Question 7

This may surprise you, but in 2002, Americans spent **10.1 percent** of their disposable household income on food: 5.4 percent for groceries and 4.7 percent on meals eaten away from home. (Source: USDA/Economic Research Service)

Question 8

According to the National Sleep Foundation, “Before Thomas Edison's invention of the light bulb, people slept an average of 10 hours a night; today Americans average **6.9 hours** of sleep on weeknights and 7.5 hours per night on weekends.” So, if you're feeling tired, that may be why.

Question 9

According to the Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association, there were **approximately 180.5 million** cell phone subscribers in the United States at the end of 2004. (There are no figures on how many of them were using their minutes to do anything other than order a pizza or create a public nuisance.)

Question 10

People in **80** of the world's 208 countries make less in a year than the average American teen couple spends on prom night. Which isn't to say that the people in those 80 countries would be any better off if American kids skipped prom night. But the figures give us something to think about. (Source: Conde Nast as reported in “Teens spending billions for prom magic,” CNN.com, May 27, 2003)

Question 11

The correct answer is **13 percent**. And maybe that's an indication that (1) traffic is a lot heavier than it used to be, and (2) parents may have become more fearful of letting their kids venture out alone and unsupervised. (Source: *Bicycling* magazine)

Question 12

Leaves, corncobs, mussel shells, the frayed end of an old anchor cable—none of these options sound very appealing, but the correct answer is **“the frayed end of an old anchor cable.”** And technically, “all of the above” would have been a correct answer because, although the anchor cable wasn't used in early America, it was used by Portuguese and Spanish sailors. At least that's what toiletpaperworld.com says.