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RESOURCES

Note: Many of these listings appeared in our Winter 2003 issue, but we thought they were worth repeating.

Books

American Standard of Living 1918-1988, 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 the following: 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.

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

The First Measured Century: An Illustrated Guide to Trends in America, 1900-2000, Theodore Caplow, Louis Hicks, and Ben J. Wattenberg <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.

The Good Old Days -- They Were Terrible! Otto L. Bettmann — Filled with compelling images and fascinating facts, this book is an instant cure for nostalgia.

Historical Atlas of Massachusetts, 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.

Material World: A Global Family Portrait, 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, 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, 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, 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.

The Paradox of Choice, Barry Schwartz — More choices means greater freedom, right? Maybe not says Barry Schwartz.

Pursuing Happiness, 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, 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.”

Articles

“America the Richest — Depending on How You Count,” David Francis, *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 1, 2004

Maybe some of our ambivalence over whether or not we're “better off” stems from our tendency to equate standard of living with quality of life. They are not the same. This article explains the major differences.

“Don't Blame Wal-Mart,” Robert Reich, *The New York Times*, February 28, 2005

These days, a lot of things might seem to be beyond our control, but the economic, political, and social choices we make can still have an impact. Two sample quotes from Robert Reich's article:

- “The fact is, today's economy offers us a Faustian bargain: it can give consumers deals largely because it hammers workers and communities.”
- “The problem is, the choices we make in the market don't fully reflect our values as workers or as citizens. I didn't want our community bookstore to close . . . yet I still bought lots of books from Amazon.com. In addition, we may not see the larger bargain when our own job or community isn't directly at stake. I don't like what's happening to airline workers, but I still try for the cheapest fare I can get.”

“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.”

“How Not to Buy Happiness,” Robert Frank, *Daedalus*, Vol. 133, Issue 2, The MIT Press

<http://mitpress.mit.edu/catalog/item/default.asp?type=6&tid=14403>

In this essay Robert Frank contends that “gains in happiness that might have been expected to result from growth in absolute income have not materialized because of the ways in which people in affluent societies have generally spent their incomes.”



Boston Public Library, Courtesy of Boston Public Library.

“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.

“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.”

“Standard of Living,” Catherine Hennessey
 Ms. Hennessey was not pleased when a study reported that all 50 U.S. states and every

Canadian province except Newfoundland enjoyed a higher standard of living than her home province of Prince Edward Island.
<http://www.catherinehennessy.com/onestory.php3?number=66>

“Suddenly Rich, Poor Old Ireland Seems Bewildered,” Lizette Alvarez, *The New York Times*, February 2, 2005.

An interesting perspective on the ambivalence that often follows sudden prosperity. A sample quote echoes what many in the U.S. have been saying about American life over the past 40 years: “Many of us recoil at the vulgar fest that is much of modern Ireland, [Irish government official] Ms. O’Reilly begins, before going on to cite its plunge into materialism, foul language, random violence, moral poverty and the culture of immediate gratification.”

“The World’s Best Country,” Laza Kekic

The Economist Intelligence Unit’s quality-of-life index ranks more than 100 countries by overall “quality of life” and “standard of living.” It includes an explanation of the determinants used in the rankings.
http://www.economist.com/theworldin/international/displayStory.cfm?story_id=3372495&d=2005

“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.

Papers, Studies, and Speeches

“EU versus USA,” Fredrik Bergstrom and Robert Gidehag, published by Timbro, 2004

Timbro is a Swedish research organization that compared 15 members of the European Union with the 50 American states and found that in the majority of EU countries GDP per capita was lower than in most of the individual American states.

<http://www.timbro.com/euvsusa/>

“Imagining the Future – An Irish Perspective,” address by Emily O’Reilly, delivered at the 7th Annual Ceifin Conference, November 3, 2004

<http://www.charleville.com/food.htm>

“Quality of Life in Europe: Life Satisfaction in an Enlarged Europe,” published by European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, March 2004

http://www.eurofound.eu.int/living/qual_life/satisfaction.htm

More 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.

“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

“Overwork in America: When the Way We Work Becomes Too Much,” Ellen Galinsky, James T. Bond, Stacy S. Kim, Lois Backon, Erin Brownfield, Kelly Sakai

<http://familiesandwork.org>

Public Broadcasting System

Two resources on the PBS web site:

• *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.)

“Teaching With Documents Lesson Plan—Photographs of Lewis Hine: Documentation of Child Labor,” National Archives

http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/lessons/hinephotographs/hinephotographs.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.

Answer to: What Is It?

This is an early 19th century toasting iron.

Even those of you with minimal kitchen skills can make toast. All you need to do is check the setting on your toaster, drop in two slices of bread, and in a matter of minutes you have toast. If you’re a “retro grouch,” you can bake your own bread and slice it, but, remember, you’re doing that because you want to, not because you have to.

But as you can see by looking at the early 19th century iron, making toast wasn’t always so simple a task. You had to:

1. Bake your own bread. (Even in 1900, only 25 percent of the bread consumed in the United States was commercially baked.)
2. Make sure that the fire in your fireplace was at the proper strength.
3. Stand there and watch the toast to be sure it didn’t burn.
4. And then, if you wanted to spread butter or jam on your toast, you needed to think of it well in advance because you had to make it yourself.

Phew! Let’s not even think about what it would take to make a grilled cheese sandwich.



Courtesy of Memorial Hall Museum, Deerfield, Massachusetts.