

The Quality of Life of the American Consumer: the Whole Truth :

Why George Bush Won or Should Have -
Things are Pretty Good

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“They say these are not the best of times, but they’re the only times I’ve ever known”
Billy Joel, *Summer Highlands Falls*

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INTRODUCTION

We think that the American people can handle the truth. A famous humorist from the 19th century was once quoted as saying “as scarce as truth is, the supply has always been in excess of the demand”. We think that in the 21st century, the truth can still be found, but it is no longer is such great supply. Finding the truth can be a challenge of epic proportion because it too often is buried within a wide variety of other somewhat questionable statements, assertions and metaphors, making it difficult for people to know what to believe and what to ignore. Most people want to know about the trends that may impact and change their lives. Most people want to know the facts that have the potential to shape the perception of their world. Most people want to know the truth. This paper is dedicated to those people.

The truth we are addressing is not how we should all live our lives or what products to buy. This is not about some higher moral lesson that people should learn and follow as a guide to living. We would leave such matters to experts and gurus who specialize in the giving of advice. Instead, this is about understanding what kind of shape we are in as a country and as a people. Is this the best of times or is this the worst of times? That is a question that this paper will answer. This paper addresses how good or how bad things really are in our lives. Is it time to step back and count our blessings or pack our bags? And if it is something in between --- just how in between is it?

For years, America has been the destination of choice of millions of people who have looked to find a better life. People have come from all over the world at great personal sacrifice to seek the American dream. Almost everyone who is born here has stayed here to find his or her own place in the world.

The American dream is not defined as limited to a car in every garage. The ability to obtain possessions and consume all kinds of products and services has been a central element to the quality of our lives (and it is addressed in this paper). Consumption, however, occurs within a context. It occurs within a setting. People need to be sufficiently educated to make the most of their experience as a consumer. People need to feel that they can shop in an environment where they can take their purchases home in safety and not worry about how to safeguard the things that they buy. In effect, the quality of life of the American consumer is greatly shaped by the quality of all the important aspects that make life worth living and that make life easy to live.

But now, depending upon what one reads, watches or listens to, the American dream may no longer be relevant. While some say the dream is still alive, others speak about it as if it is something in the past and perhaps no longer attainable. Knowing what condition we find ourselves in today is critical to our future as consumers, marketers and citizens. How do we plan for our future if there is uncertainty about where we are today? At such a critical juncture in our history, we wanted to know the truth about circumstances of the American consumer. We wanted to seek the truth in a way that can help us and others determine if we are going in the right direction. Or, at the very least, we wanted to understand if the

American people would be moving into the future from a position of strength or weakness. We wanted to know if we are in the right place in ways that matter beyond consumption and that impact the quality of our lives.

Why the Truth is so Difficult to Find

Seeking the truth today about the quality of life in America is much more difficult than it has been in the past. This is due to several trends and influences. These influences greatly impact the news we receive which, in turn, shape our opinions about conditions in the country. Growing up in the 50s or 60s, we had far fewer product choices but more importantly, we had far fewer sources of information about the conditions around us. We do not want to focus on the quality of news reporting. That has been done to a great extent elsewhere in popular books and in scholarly journals. We do want to provide a sense of why obtaining the truth is so difficult and the role that news organizations have had in keeping us all accurately informed about the truth.

In the 50s and 60s, there were just three television networks. The Internet did not exist. Cable and satellite television were in the planning stages and had not yet developed. Today, we have a far different media and information environment. Today we have six broadcast television networks, over 200 cable and satellite programmers and an Internet with billions of pages that no one entity can even catalog in one place. With such a vast array of information sources, it is difficult to know where to begin to draw upon relevant information about conditions in our country unless one is a trained researcher. Even then, it is quite a challenge.

The amount of information available to the public is overwhelming. The challenge of living today and sorting through the barrage of information is made even worse due to problems concerning the accurate reporting of information. There have been many books on the subject of how the media is biased in one way or another in terms of which set of facts or information is presented to the public. William McGowan's book *Coloring the News*, Bernard Goldberg's book *Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distorts the News* and Eric Altman's book *What Liberal Media? The Truth About Bias and the News* all note the existence of the liberal or conservative press in one form or another. These authors and others like them do not agree on everything but they do suggest that the presentation of information to the public is subject to liberal or conservative biases.

These examples reflect intentional misrepresentation of the news by reporters. A potentially more pervasive problem is the inaccurate reporting of conditions in our country by reporters who are simply not good at what they do or who do not have the time and resources to do the job of reporting conditions accurately. The cause of this problem is easily understood when one examines the change in the media environment briefly summarized earlier and the way it relates to the presentation of news and information.

There are substantially greater news sources today than in the past. The number of highly trained reporters, however, has not grown with the increase of news outlets. Although there is not a comprehensive set of data to compute the ratio of reporters to news outlets, we strongly suspect that the lack of a sufficient number of highly trained reporters contributes to the problem. For example, a report published in 2001 in the American Journalism Review discussed a multi-year study and noted that there had been dramatic shrinkage in the number of reporters assigned to state capitals and to the Washington bureaucracies. This dramatic shrinkage has occurred at the same time that the number of news outlets has proliferated. One can conclude that these two trends – more news outlets but fewer reporters – have combined to contribute to a situation in which there are not enough reporters engaged in accurate reporting of the quality of life in our country.

Finally, the news industry also comes under the influence of Wall Street and its desires that companies meet quarterly profit objectives. This has resulted in the downsizing of newsrooms and the creation of starting salaries for journalists in many organizations as low as \$20,000. Clearly, these influences impact the amount of in-depth reporting on conditions in America.

Origins of this paper

Knowing what kind of shape we are in can have profound effects on marketers and consumers. If the glass is seen as more than half full, it can bring a sense of optimism that we can build on for our futures. This was the kind of optimism that some say was fueled by President Reagan and lifted the country as a result of his optimism and sense of all things possible. If the glass is seen as almost empty, it can lead to the kind of feelings of malaise that President Carter warned us about and which might keep us feeling stuck in despair and stagnation.

The authors of this paper come to the task of examining the quality of life in America with not just scientific training, but with a focus on what people want and what they do not want. The authors are marketing professors who spend much of their time researching how people feel about their lifestyles. This paper looks at the broader question of the quality of lives from a combination of scientific rigor with an appreciation for popular culture and what makes people tick. The world of marketing and consumers will not be ignored, as it is an important part of our daily life. But the broader sense of our world shapes what we will share with our readers.

It was an interest in this question in 1992 that one of the authors began researching the truth about how well Americans were doing. At the time, the research was originated by the research department of one of the largest advertising agencies on Madison Avenue. That work was grounded in seeking wisdom about what kind of marketing message should be crafted to the American people concerning the products and services of the agency's clients. The author wanted to know if the mood of the country was rooted in positive or negative conditions of our daily living. Many of the details of that work were kept

confidential to maintain the agency's competitive advantage in the marketplace, although reports were shared with agency personnel and key clients. A summary of the work was provided to the reporters that follow advertising business and ideas and as a result, it was the basis of a feature article in the New York Times advertising section.

Since that time, a number of other researchers, politicians, journalists and academicians have also examined this subject. They have all, in their own way, contributed to our knowledge about what is good and what is not so good in America. Some may have knowingly built on the original work publicized in 1992. Most came to their views quite independently. The difference with this paper and all the other discussions on the subject is that we intend to "cut to the chase". We will offer the reader a very easy to understand and straightforward look at the facts. We will not offer a set of politically motivated opinions as to what to do with our assessment. We trust the judgment of the American people to know what to do with the facts. We trust their judgment if they can only have access to objective facts!

So What Parts of the Quality of Life Will We Examine?

Most people, when asked about what are the parts of their life that matter will usually speak of relationships with other people. Family, friends, and often, their god are the frequent responses we receive from people as to what matters in life. Doing good work and leaving something behind also matters. When people are asked what makes life harder or easier, however, other factors come into focus. Matters related to the economy, crime in the streets, how clean the air is or how good our schools are frequently mentioned as very important to the quality of life in America. It is these factors that we will quickly explore.

We wanted this paper to examine the factors that most people can relate to and believe make their life easier or harder. The challenge is that there is no universal list that one can turn to in order to assess the conditions of life in our country. We learned about that challenge from reviewing the 1992 research. This time, however, we had some advantages that did not exist in 1992. First, we examined the process used then. In order to identify the factors that matter, the front pages of newspapers and coverage of the nightly news was examined closely to determine what topics were seen to be the frequent focus of the media. The advantage we had in 2004 that did not exist in 1992 is the availability of the Internet. In just a brief examination of how CNN, MSNBC, Fox News and other media outlets organize content for their respective websites, it is easy to determine what the media believes is important to capture the interest of the American people.

We were careful not to rely exclusively on the media as the guide to determining what we should examine more closely. We therefore next turned to the opinion polls conducted by respected pollsters such as Gallup, Harris Interactive and others. We wanted to review the opinion polls to know what the people think is important. Here there seemed to be enough agreement with our examination of the media to arrive at what should be the center of our focus. The following areas became the factors that we examined in depth:

1. Safety and Security
2. Education
3. Health
4. Economy
5. Equal Opportunity
6. Community and Connectedness
7. Environment

Each of these areas has been the subject of thousands of popular and scholarly books. Every day, there are probably hundreds of articles found in magazines and newspapers exploring some element of these important parts of our lives. This is not meant to be an exhaustive look at any one of these parts of our lives as may be found in the thousands of books and articles. Exhaustive examinations of any one of these topics can too often slow down analyses for people who want to see the big picture. Instead, this paper is designed to provide the reader with a quick assessment as to where we are better off than in the past or where the quality of life is no longer what it once was as defined by each of these areas.

To provide an understanding of how the quality of life may be different today than in the past, we took a very direct approach. We searched for 4 to 6 ways each can be measured. We searched for 4 to 6 very simple ways to telegraph how each has changed. We selected enough measures to be certain we included all-important elements but not so many as to lose focus as to what is really important.

The measures used to benchmark the quality of life were drawn from objective sources such as organizations affiliated with universities, institutes or governmental departments and bureaus. The rare occasion when we deviated from this standard occurred only when we believed a non-governmental authority had an important source of information that was not available elsewhere.

The time period we reviewed was chosen to satisfy two important considerations. First, we wanted to examine a period of time that is sufficiently recent so that most people alive in the United States today can remember what life was like “back then”. We also wanted a time period long enough to go back far enough to reflect the extensive changes that have taken place in our country. For the purposes of this review, we selected a time period of between 20 and 25 years.

The Plan of this Paper

The following pages will provide a look at each of the seven aspects of the quality of life we found to be so important. For each aspect of the quality of our life, a description of the changes and how the changes are determined is provided. This paper is intended to be presentation of the facts and our interpretation of these facts. The final section presents the authors’ interpretation of the entire set of circumstances that the American people confront

today. It includes our commentary about the quality of life and just how good things are and why the good life today cannot be taken for granted.

One final comment about annotation is necessary. After a brief description of each quality of life dimension, a set of measures is presented that reflects the area under examination. Two years or sets of years are compared to determine if life is better today or worse today. For each measure, notations appear at the far right column. If a “+” sign appears to the right, that denotes that the comparison of the two time periods reflects improvement for that measure. If a “-“sign appears, that denotes that the comparison of the two time periods reflects a deterioration for that measure.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

During the spring of 2004, two local New York City newspapers ran different headlines but each reflected the same thought. The first headline was “This isn’t a misprint: NO shootings in BX.” On the same day, the other newspaper ran with the headline “BRONX CHEER. Nobody shot over a span of nine days”. A variety of statistics were released that day which provided more detail. Items such as gun arrests were up and shootings were down had prominent placement throughout both articles. Mayor Bloomberg of New York City was quoted as saying “If I told you when I came into office that we’d be here today doing (announcing) this, you would have said impossible”.

Such news would normally be a cause for celebration except that our collective definition of safety and security has changed. Removing bad guys in our midst is still a priority for crime fighters. What has changed, however, is the definition of who a “bad guy” is and our feelings of safety. It is with that thought in mind that we began to examine all of the potential measures related to progress concerning our safety. We found five security related measures that reflect the quality of our lives. The set of measures provide an assessment of the crime rate. The FBI oversees a program called the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) system. The data is reported separately for each major type of violent crime and property crime. This is the source of data for those kinds of crime.

In addition to violent and property crime, hate crimes are another type of crime that has been the subject of greater attention. Hate crimes are now also part of the UCR system. Recording of hate crimes dates back to 1995. Here we broke one of rules. Although our data for hate crimes do not go back as far as the other areas, we believe that the nature of a hate crime is so opposed to what our country represents that its frequency must be reflected here.

Concern about safety is no longer driven exclusively by crime in the street or neighborhoods. Terrorism and the threat of terrorism, which some people consider one in the same, are now at the front of the line of our fears for our safety. In the interest of presenting an entire picture of what may be some of the most important information we could assemble, we have two sets of numbers to share in this area. The first directly addresses terrorist acts throughout the world. It consists of two kinds of data drawn from a report prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency and reported annually by the U. S. State Department. It provides the number of terrorist acts throughout the world and also the number of terrorist acts throughout the world that are directly against citizens of the United States. It is important to know that the most recent year available was 2003 but it has been revised, and it is the revised data that is provided in this paper.

Almost everyone would say that wars are bad. Even a war in a remote location of the world can spin out of control as we have seen in both Bosnia and Afghanistan. Recognizing that, we have included in this section the data on how many wars have been fought in each year of the period we are reviewing. This information is reported annually in *Vital Signs*, a

book published by the Worldwatch Institute. It includes a compendium of data from a wide variety of sources. The data that tracks wars in the *Vital Signs* report originates from the Institute for Political Science at the University of Hamburg.

MEASURES

(+ = improvement; - = deterioration)

MEASURES	BASE YEAR	DATA	MOST RECENT YEAR	DATA	CHANGE
Violent Crime	1980	596.6 (per 100,000)	2002	494.6 (per 100,000)	+
Property Crime	1980	4,442.5 (per 100,000)	2002	3,624.1 (per 100,000)	+
Hate Crime	1995	3.02 (per 100,000)	2002	2.59 (per 100,000)	+
Acts of International Terrorism	1980	499	2003	208	+
Wars	1980	37	2002	28	+

OUR INTERPRETATION:

With much of the data indicating that we have witnessed an improvement over the previous 20 years, we conclude that the United States has become a safer place for the average person. We understand that the threat of terrorism and the consequences of even one act of terror can offset all of the gains in every other area. To be clear, we do not suggest that there is not substantial work left to do to make every person feel safe. More about our feelings on this subject and all other subjects will be addressed in the concluding section of this paper.

EDUCATION

Education is often a hot topic for conversation in the U. S. We have so many choices for education, public schools, charter schools, and private schools and then choices within those categories. When you are considering housing, one of the things you think about is the local school system. People will accept high housing prices in order to live in a town where there is a history of high scores on educational tests and a large number of high school seniors graduating and going to college. As was told to me, “education is what you put into it.”

Politicians talk about schools and education. President Bush has initiated the No Child Left Behind law in June 2003 which requires all states to create programs to make sure that all children “become proficient at reading and math.” Others like former mayor Rudy Giuliani have supported the idea of allowing parents to send their children to better schools within the school system if the local school was not up to the parents’ standards. Politicians work to put more into our educational system standards so that our students, graduates, scientists, and companies can compete around the world. Education is what you put into it.

In America, you can have a better life than your parents had if you are able to take advantage of educational opportunities. The Roper Poll has found over the years that Americans place a high emphasis on desiring opportunities for education and self-improvement. In a 2002 poll asking if the public has a choice between tax cuts and focused spending for improvements to roads, bridges and schools, 53% of the participants preferred spending on infrastructure than have money returned through tax cuts. In 1999, the public said that teacher salary increases should be based on educational test score improvements rather than other factors like seniority.

With all the focus on education and the outcomes of education, how well is the American public educated. A recent headline railed “What Johnny Won’t Read.” Reportedly a national student by the National Education Association found that the amount of time spent reading by the American public is decreasing and that book sales for the past 20 years have been flat. And yet, literacy levels in the U. S. have continued to climb over the past 20 years (literacy as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics as “using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential). So how can these two pieces of information be so divergent? It turns out that the study decided to define reading materials very narrowly. It used only fiction, poetry and plays as the reading materials of choice and did not consider nonfiction, nor did the study include reading on the Internet. In fact, the study found that time spent surfing the Web had been a major contributor in the decline of reading. But as Charles McGrath said in the article, what is surfing the “Net” but reading?

MEASURES

(+ = improvement; - = deterioration)

MEASURES	BASE YEAR	DATA	MOST RECENT YEAR	DATA	CHANGE
LITERACY	1969	99%	2000	97%	-
GRADUATES					
College	1970	8,581,000	2000	15,312,000	+
Graduate School	1985	1,830,000	2000	2,416,000	+
Professional School	1985	74,000	2000	80,000	+

OUR INTERPRETATION:

While the literacy rate has indications of a small decrease, from 1979, it may be a reflection of the increase in the number of immigrants from non-English speaking countries. The trend is one that should be tracked when the new 2003 adult literacy survey is published. As far as higher education and graduation rates, there is a constant increase in numbers of people graduating with baccalaureate, Master's and Ph.D. and professional degrees.

HEALTH

There is a common American saying – “if you have your health, you have everything.” We heard that repeated over and over in the course of this research. For those whose health is threatened or had been in danger or had family members who had faced some difficult health situation, the boundaries of their lives had shrunk in on them. The range of choices for living arrangements, jobs, or even free time had been curtailed. Those who had survived a life threatening event were universally thrilled with being alive, glad to be able to see a new day and were reminding all to live each day to the fullest. The state of health, illness, health care and insurance are important issues in the U. S.

There are also acute illnesses that many of us can weather fairly well with treatment, but which may kill those whose immune systems are not fully developed or which have been compromised. These diseases may be controllable with vaccines like smallpox, measles, mumps and the other previously common childhood diseases or the diseases may remain under study for future treatment and cure.

There is both good and bad news in health areas. The good news is that we have made enormous strides in combating some illnesses like measles, mumps, chicken pox, as well as cancer, heart disease and strokes. Commonly, the illness needs to be reportable nationwide in its incidence. Once measured, its reported rating often rises for a while and then research results start to accumulate and we see the incidence rates as well as death rates from the disease decrease. Cancer is starting to be considered as a chronic illness rather than a killer depending on the type of cancer. Alzheimer’s disease has research being heavily funded to slow its progression, maintain people at their mental capacities when diagnosed and eventually a cure or prevention method.

We have seen great decreases in infant mortality for all races. Since 1980 to the present, the death rates have decreased by 50%. We have not been able to eliminate any reported causes of infant mortality, but we have been able to build our treatments against the illnesses and misadventures of birth. Life expectancies have risen to between 68.5 years for Black males to 80.1 years for Caucasian women.

Part of the reason that life times are longer is that more Americans have some form of health insurance although there are almost 41 million in the U.S. who do not have health insurance. Traffic fatalities continue to drop as roads are improved with new materials and safety features are added to the roads and to cars such as roadway railings and car air bags, anti-lock brakes, and others. Essentially, we are healthier today as long as we can use the medical treatments that exist and the medications that are available for treatments.

In 1970 there were 20 infant deaths per 1000 while in 2001 there were only 6.8. In 1970 there were 47.4 cases of measles per 1000 children, and 0.1 in 2001. In 1975 there were 154.20 cases of chicken pox for every 100 children, 22.5 in 2001.

MEASURES
(+ = improvement; - = deterioration)

MEASURES	BASE YEAR	DATA	MOST RECENT YEAR	DATA	CHANGE
Infant Mortality	1980	Deaths per 1000 births 12.6	2001	6.8	+
White	1980	10.9	2001	5.7	+
African American	1980	22.2	2001	14	+
Blacks and Other Minorities	1980	20.2	2001	11.3	+
Life Expenctancy					
White Men	1980	70.7yrs	2000	77yrs	+
White Women	1980	78.1	2000	80.1	+
Black Men	1980	65.3	2000	68.3	+
Black Women	1980	73.6	2000	75.2	+
Diseases					
Measles	1970	47.40 per 1000	2001	0.10	+
Mumps	1970	105 per 1000	2001	0.30	+
Chicken Pox	1975	154.20 per 1000	2001	22.5 per 1000	+
AIDS	1993	103,691	2001	45,104	+
Breast Cancer	1975 - 1990	+0.4% deaths	1991 - 2001	-2.3% deaths	+
All Cancer	1975-1982	+0.5%	1983-1990	-0.3%	+

OUR INTERPRETATION:

We are much healthier today than we have been at any time in the past. Our life expectancy has increased while deaths from diseases have fallen. Cancer is now discussed as an illness to live with rather than die from. The level of infant mortality continues to fall, although there is a continued need to reduce the number of infant deaths for Black and minority families. The incidence of childhood diseases has been drastically reduced with the emergence of vaccines.

THE ECONOMY

It is said that the success of the first Clinton presidential campaign of 1992 was partially due to the singular focus of its message. What has now become a familiar refrain “it’s the economy, stupid” continues to resonate in reports about what is the ultimate test for what is important in our society. Healthcare, the environment, safety and other important aspects of our lives draw our attention. As issues we need to address, however, these topics cannot be fully addressed without the resources generated by a strong economy. Marketing professionals may risk being accused of putting commercial interests before all other components of life when we note that the economy is probably one of the more important influences in our day to day living. What is not easily argued by all who oppose such a material focus is this: without money in the bank, without financial resources, most people are without any quality of life. And as a society, without resources, we cannot address our other quality of life issues.

Determining what the important measures are that reflect our progress concerning the economy is quite challenging because we had hundreds of measures from which to choose. We settled on the ones that are most frequently reported on in the media and which also provide a logical sense of economic well-being. First, we examined employment data. Our view is that people need to have jobs in order to pay their bills. It is that simple. The expression “a recession is when my neighbor is out of work, but a depression is when I am out of work” applies here. Our employment data has been drawn from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

What people pay for the goods and services they purchase is also a constant topic of conversation almost anytime that the economy is discussed. Noting how much more it appears things cost today as opposed to the “good old days” is a very important barometer of our lives. We include in this paper a measure of inflation termed the Consumer Price Index that is also drawn from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Two other measures were highly relevant to this work. One is productivity number. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports out many variations of this number. We choose the nonfarm output per hour given that our economy is no longer a farming economy. This number is important because it demonstrates through year-to-year changes (usually increases) if we are continuing to make strides in improving our production, in effect making more goods and services available through productivity enhancements. The other number we believed necessary to round out our thinking in this area is the incidence of home ownership. Most people would agree that owning ones residence is integral to the pursuit and achievement of the American Dream. This number has been drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau.

MEASURES

(+ = improvement; - = deterioration)

MEASURES	BASE YEAR	DATA	MOST RECENT YEAR	DATA	CHANGE
Unemployment rate	1980	1.6%	2003	3.4%	-
Consumer Price Index	1980	13.5%	2003	2.3%	+
Productivity Change	1980	7.2%	2003	6.0%	-
Homeownership Rate	1980	65.6%	2003	68.3%	+

OUR INTERPRETATION:

All of this data indicates that we have witnessed an improvement over the previous 20 years across the board. We conclude that the United States economy is stronger now than it was in the past. Very importantly, it is strong on the measures that impact households individually and on the measures that continue to build on our standard of living.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

(+ = improvement; - = deterioration)

America is supposed to be the land of equal opportunity, the explosion of the Internet and digitalization and yet we have articles in the Wall Street Journal about the digital divide – the fact that at least 50% families with annual incomes of less than \$35,000 do not have access to computers and fewer have credit cards. While this may not sound earth shattering, it means that they have no recourse to online information or to the online B 2 C or C 2 C economic environment.

More traditional areas of inequality revolve around gender and race. Women have wanted equal opportunities with men since Abigail Adams reminded her husband to remember the women of the country when the Constitution was being drafted. It was not until the 21st amendment that women earned the right to vote.

Women have been allowed to be educated since the United States began, although the average level of education was usually lower than that for men until fairly recently. In 1970, 5,044,000 men earned a college diploma while only 3,537,000 women earned a college degree. In 1982 parity was reached. For more than 20 years women have constituted at least 50% of the college enrollments. By 2001, the number of women enrolled in colleges was higher than men by 34%. As job and career opportunities have opened for women, more women have chosen to earn the degrees that are the basis for those careers. We have also seen a burgeoning of college enrollments for Black Americans and Hispanic Americans. Between 1975 and 2000, college enrollments for Black men rose 21% and rose 90% for Black women. The increase in college enrollment for Hispanic men rose 88% between 1975 and 2000 which is impressive. However, the largest increase in college enrollment was for Hispanic women who rose 348% between 1975 and 2000. Liberalization of cultural norms as well as programs focusing on the needs of minority candidates has helped.

However, disparity between incomes based on gender as well as race remains in our society.. By 2001, men who have earned a bachelors degree had an average income of \$63,354, while women with a bachelor's degree earned an average income of \$36,913. Both men's and women's salaries have increased at least 100% between 1970 and 2001. The problem is that women's average salaries are roughly 50% of men's average salaries.

Race continues to be a dividing factor in average salaries. Asian Americans have the highest average incomes since they have been included in national statistics in 1987. Black Americans earn 66% of the 2001 average White American salary while Hispanics earn 75% of that same annual income.

There are companies and entire categories of careers which continue to discriminate. Morgan Stanley has shown us during the summer of 2004 that there continues to be sexual harassment on Wall Street. An attitude that women have to expect men to use "male talk" all day in the work environment has been supported, as well as physical harassment and

glass ceilings where women have not been promoted above a certain managerial level. In 2002, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission had 1,256 charges of compensation discrimination filed and was able to adjudicate 1,182 of the cases and recovered \$10.3 million for the plaintiffs in those cases. In 2003, the number of charges had dropped to 1,167.

MESASURES

(+ = improvement; - = deterioration)

MEASURES	BASE YEAR	DATA	MOST RECENT YEAR	DATA	CHANGE
College Degrees- Men	1970	5,044,000	2001	5,300,000	+
Women	1970	3,537,000	2001	7,080,000	+
Black American Men	1975	523,000	2000	635,000	+
Black American Women	1975	577,000	2000	1,095,000	+
Hispanic Men	1975	218,000	2000	627,100	+
Hispanic Women	1975	193,000	2000	863,700	+
Salaries – Men	1970	In 2001 Dollars \$31,531	2001	\$63,354	+
Women	1970	\$17,819	2001	\$36,913	+
White Americans	1970	\$35,814	2001	\$44,517	+
Black Americans – Men and Women	1970	\$21,969	2001	\$29,470	+
Hispanic Men and Women	1975	\$24,557	2001	\$33,565	+
Asian Americans	1987	\$48,022	2001	\$53,635	+
EEOC Wage Charges	1992	1294	2003	1167	+

OUR INTERPRETATION:

On the whole, there have been incredible improvements in the availability of educational opportunities and as our statistics show, our population has been taking advantage of changes in programs as well as increasing openness in admissions. The tremendous increase in the number of Hispanic women in college is emblematic of how much Americans value education. Although women and minorities remain in lower level jobs and careers, in general, there is an increasing base of educated women and minorities from which to find new managerial talent. We will have to wait and see what the next 20 years brings in terms of change.

COMMUNITY AND CONNECTEDNESS

Senator Joe Biden was a guest on the popular talk radio show *Imus in the Morning* in July of 2004. During the interview, he observed that people throughout the country are ready to participate. He believed that the people want to be a part of making our country better than it is today. This sentiment has been expressed before. President George H. Bush reflected this thinking in his initiative “1000 Points of Light” and Senator Hillary Clinton expressed this ideal in her book *It Takes a Village*.

Not everyone believes, however, that we live in a world today where people want to help each other. In the late 1800s, French sociologist, Emile Durkheim defined the concept of Anomie, a condition in which people are no longer connected to each other and social bonds are impersonal. Such feelings lead to deviant behavior and depression and for many, even suicide. We believe having a sense of how well connected we are can contribute to our understanding of the quality of life.

Understanding what measures reflect community and connectedness was one of the bigger challenges of this undertaking. It required imagination and creativity to identify key measures. We have found five that we think, taken together, provide a benchmark for this area. First, we examined the individual contributions that people make to charitable causes. This charitable donation data comes from *Giving USA* and the estimates for the population comes from the Census Bureau. This data is adjusted for inflation and expressed in 2001 dollars. Next, we include data on volunteerism. Here, there is not as precise a set of measures as we would like, but we provide two measures. One consists of surveys from the Independent Sector that polled people on whether they volunteered during their high school years and then compared people over age cohorts (high school years presented here are an estimate). The other comes from the Census that has surveyed people in two successive years, asking them if they volunteered “last year”.

Voter participation is another area that reflects the degree people are participating in society. For this data, we draw on an academic study that examines this data after adjusting for immigration patterns. It reflects National Turnout Rates drawn from a study by McDonald and Popkin, published in the *American Political Science Review*, 2001. The final set of data has to do with organ donation. People can donate to others a wide variety of organs, including kidneys, livers and lungs. This data has been accessed from the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network. Clearly, such donations reflect a very high level of sacrifice to benefit others.

MEASURES

(+ = improvement; - = deterioration)

MEASURES	BASE YEAR	DATA	MOST RECENT YEAR	DATA	CHANGE
Charitable Contributions	1981	\$30.37 (per person)	2001	\$57.28 (per person)	+
Volunteering in High School	1977 to 1981	55.7%	1992 to 1996	67.0%	+
Volunteering Last Year	2003	27.4%	2003	28.8%	+
Voter Participation	1980	54.7%	2000	55.6%	+
Organ Donation	1988	5,904	2003	13,270	+

OUR INTERPRETATION:

This data indicates that we are experiencing increases in behavior that suggests higher levels of community and connectedness. Interestingly, unlike those other areas that we have examined, the measures used here are quite varied because the concept of community and connectedness is quite broad and not as tightly defined. Our conclusion is that, regardless of the broad nature of this area of our lives, we are more involved in our communities and more connected to our fellow Americans than in the past.

ENVIRONMENT

Our environment, our world: what are we doing with it, what are we doing to it, what have we done to it and how well are we reducing injuries that we give to the environment? In terms of hot topics on the minds of the American public, the environment is tied for tenth place along with taxes, the gap between rich and poor in the U. S., the trade deficit, among others. However, when asked specifically about water and air quality issues, Roper Polls found that 36% of the people said that threats to air and water were very serious and major changes needed to be made.

The air we breathe and the water we drink sustain us on this planet. What we do in one corner of our country often affects the weather, air, drinking water in another part of the country. President George Bush has supported several of the pro-environment executive orders that were put into place by his predecessor, President Clinton such as requiring 3,600 more manufacturers to report their toxic lead releases into our air. Due to requirements for scrubbers on power plants and the building of newer power plants to replace those with outdated equipment and procedures, we have been able to reduce lead levels to amounts that are minute. We need to continue to look at the other components of air pollution such as carbon monoxide which is created from our burning of petrochemicals. As we can convert from oil and gas to wind, solar and hydrogen fuel cells, we may be able to reduce the levels of carbon monoxide in the air. Either that or we can become involved in a massive tree planting campaign, since trees take up carbon monoxide in their respiration system.

Senator Clinton has been involved in New York State in helping to fund studies to uncover any links between environmental pollution and breast cancer. We have seen illnesses develop in the rescuers from Ground Zero which would appear to be derived from the pollution from the destruction. While we guard against future attacks, we also have to consider what our country's follow-up actions will be for clean-up should the unthinkable occur.

The oceans experience an additional set of insults each year, oil spills. As you can see from the table, the number of spills each year is being reduced, but not close to the zero tolerance level that is needed to safeguard the health of the oceans, the wildlife and our lives. As the oceans try to clean themselves of the oil, fish die and our food sources are diminished. The good news is that the amount of oil reported spilled has decreased dramatically from 1973 to 2000 (11,054 down to 8,354).

MEASURES

(+ = improvement; - = deterioration)

MEASURES	BASE YEAR	DATA	MOST RECENT YEAR	DATA	CHANGE
WATER POLLUTION					
Fecal Coliform above 200 cells per 100 mil/	1980	31	1995	35	-
Dissolved Oxygen below 5 mg per liter	1980	5	1995	1	+
Oil Spills	1973	11,054	2000	8354	+
AIR POLLUTION					
Carbon Monoxide parts per million	1985	6.97	2001	3.2	+
Lead micrograms of pollutants per cubic meter of air	1985	1.5	2001	0.06	+
Ozone ppm	1985	0.12	2001	0.101	+

OUR INTERPRETATION:

The history of both air and water pollution is that first problems need to be identified, measurements taken, then remedial steps put into force to reduce the pollutant stream. From the chart, it can be seen that the use of scrubbers and other cleaning techniques have been effective in reducing lead pollution. The worldwide distress at the oil spill in Prince William Sound by the Exxon Valdez brought to corporate attention the importance of clean water for the public. Oil companies have put better shipping methods in place, better supervision and municipalities have improved their own emergency response methods for treating oil spills when they do occur.

A POINT OF VIEW

Every important aspect of our lives is better today than it has been in the past. Compared to measurements taken over the previous 20 years, all indicators that reflect the quality of life have improved. Our economy is stronger. We are living longer. Our air and water is cleaner. Our educational system is better. Our cities are safer. People from all walks of life are being provided more opportunities to achieve the American Dream than ever before. And we are more involved as a people in our country than ever before.

Given that our lives are so much better today than in the past, why was this election so close? Why was it a dead heat for so long? Why was it too close to call right up to election night? We think the answers to these questions have enormous implications for people everywhere in our roles as both citizens and consumers. To be clear from the outset, we will offer some answers but provide them with the caveat that our answers are based on our best sense of how people react to the conditions of their lives. We will offer these answers within the context of suggestions on further research that will be necessary to derive a complete understanding of this phenomenon where life is good but we are never satisfied with it.

At the outset, we wish to be clear about one very important thing: our leaders and our collective leadership at all levels of government deserve credit for stewardship that has taken us to the place where we are today. We include in the set of leaders not just the current administration but all the administrations for the previous 30 to 40 years. We believe that the quality of life cannot be changed through the flip of a switch, but rather, is the result of many years of policy planning and actions taken to make life better for all of us as citizens and consumers. Therefore, we believe that the American people should thank Republican and Democratic leaders alike, since both parties have presided over this remarkable state of affairs.

That having been said, why does it appear we are not satisfied with the way things are today? This is a complex question with many strains and nuance associated with the answer. First, from all the data we have observed, most people are very happy today. We expect to report on this in a subsequent edition of this paper. Most people, when asked the question “are you happy” will say “yes, for the most part, I am happy”. But when you ask them about their opinion concerning other people, they generally answer, “I think people are not happy with their lives”. Our opinion is that this contradictory set of opinions is due to the images on television news programs and on the front pages of major newspapers. To grab the attention of the American people, the media tends to emphasize the unusual, the scary, the dangerous and the threats around us. While important, perhaps, to know about these things, one will conclude that the world around us is falling apart. Clearly, this is not the case.

Politicians, wanting to be elected, jump on the bad news bandwagon when they are not in power to disparage the people who are in power. Since at any point in time, at least half of all politicians (actually, probably many more) are not in power, it is not surprising that they

keep the bad news front and center for our consumption to great effect. The world of marketing also has people who seek to unseat the incumbent. Brand managers at companies are always looking for ways to encourage a consumer to switch from a competitor's product. The difference however is that competition in the marketplace seems to be governed by more rules and regulations as to how to fight "fair" than competition among people who would lead us as presidents, governors and senators. Perhaps political competition should be subject to the same rules and regulations that govern marketing and advertising professionals.

Another contributing explanation is linked to the adjustments we make as conditions get better or get worse. We are a very resilient people. Indeed, it has been said that the human species itself adjusts quite well to all conditions. Therefore, no matter how much better our lives may be today, we have already adjusted to them and now take our current conditions for granted.

We do not want to make light of the condition that Americans confront today. We understand that the high levels of quality in life are threatened by a variety of threats, trends and other influences that have enormous potential impact on our lives. One terrorist incident can turn everything around in a very short amount of time. Technology can impact advances made to date. Outsourcing can erode the economic base that is the foundation of progress in so many other areas.

To aid understanding of our lives as citizens and consumers, the work begun with this paper will continue. Future research initiatives will extend the examination of the macro factors addressed in this current paper. Importantly, we will also address how the American people feel and think about the macro issues in several key ways. We will look at issues and key industry sectors of interest to consumers and marketers alike. We will also continue to place our examinations within the context of the macro changes that constrain what is or is not possible in the marketplace of products and ideas.

One final observation is necessary before closing. We think that the notion of a self-fulfilling prophecy is currently operating within our great country. If we think life is not very good, than expectations will shape our lives to where the quality of life will be negatively impacted. We know that living conditions are at record levels. We know that most people probably do not understand this is the case. Although we should not take anything for granted, we should stop and smell the roses on occasion. Although we should continue to search how to make things better, we should take a moment to take in the moment. For these are the best of times.