



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on December 31, 2014

## Human Progress Is Accelerating, Says Cato

The Cato Institute [continues to update](#) its Human Progress website with sources from around the world showing graphically the enormous progress human beings have made in every conceivable area of their lives, especially over the last 50 years.

From communications to the environment, from housing to transportation, there's a data set that shows how far the human race has come in a very short period of time.



Cato's primary purpose in continuing to develop its HumanProgress.org website, already remarkably robust, is to dispel the common myth that things are getting worse, and at an accelerating rate:

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Unfortunately, there is often a wide gap between the reality and public perception [of that reality], including that of many policymakers, scholars ... and intelligent lay persons. To make matters worse, the media emphasizes bad news, while ignoring many positive long-term trends.

We hope to help in correcting [those] misperceptions...

After all, the mainstream media bombards its audience with an ever-increasing and discouraging litany of disasters, both instant and pending: wars, hunger, child labor, sex trafficking, and poverty. There's the drop in oil prices, global warming (or cooling), monetary instability, police overreach, excessive government regulation of the economy. and courts rewriting the Constitution or ignoring it altogether. There's the towering derivatives market bubble which, at an estimated \$700 trillion, threatens to send the world economy back to the Dark Ages. And so on.

And yet —

Life expectancy all across the world has improved astonishingly, even in the dark continent of Africa. Life expectancies there as recently as 1950 were just 40 years but now are touching 60. Across the globe life expectancies have increased from 46 years in 1950 to nearly 70.

Globally, incomes have skyrocketed *by a factor of 20* over the last two centuries while in America incomes *increased five times during the 20<sup>th</sup> century alone*, while life expectancies increased in this country by 28 years to nearly 80.

The murder rate, according to Professor Steven Pinker, a contributor to the website, "in medieval Europe was more than thirty times what it is today."

China's gross domestic product, usually assumed to be the fastest growing in the world at 17 times since 1960, is way behind the growth in Thailand's GDP, which is 22 times larger today than it was in 1960. Average incomes for more than half the world's population have tripled or more since then.

This has caused a dramatic fall in world poverty levels as a result, with the authors estimating that in just the five years between 2005 and 2010, "the total number of poor people around the world fell by nearly half a billion ... [a] reduction of this magnitude ... unparalleled in history."



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The Internet, cell phones, and falling prices of air travel are connecting more people than ever before, even in poorer countries. More children are attending school, HIV/AIDS rates have stabilized, and cancer rates have started to fall. Workers are working fewer hours and suffering fewer injuries.

Professional economist and armchair optimist Mark Perry serves on the board at HumanProgress.org. Every Christmas Perry pulls out a copy of the Sears catalog from 50 years earlier and compares the products and prices consumers paid then with what's available today. This year, a week before Christmas, Perry noted with increasing astonishment just how far the average American consumer has come:

For an American consumer or household spending \$750 in 1964, they would have been able to purchase [a] 21-inch color TV/entertainment center from the Sears Christmas catalog....

An American consumer or household spending that same amount of inflation-adjusted dollars today (about \$5,600) would be able to furnish their entire kitchen with 5 brand-new appliances (refrigerator, gas stove and oven, washer, dryer, and freezer) and buy 7 state-of-the-art electronic items for their home (a Toshiba Satellite 14" laptop computer, a Garmin 5 Inch GPS, a Canon EOS Rebel T5 DSLR Camera, a Sony 1,000 Watt, 5.1-Channel 3D Smart Blu-Ray Home Theater System, a Sharp 50 inch LED HDTV, an Apple iPod Touch 32GB MP3 Player, and an Apple iPhone 6 [with 2-year contract]).

And of course, even a billionaire in 1964 wouldn't have been able to purchase many of the items that even a teenager can afford today, e.g. laptop computer, GPS, iPhone, digital camera.

The authors behind HumanProgress.org tried to answer the question: Why all the negative news? Why the disposition to view things darkly? As economist Julian Simon put it:

Humanity's condition will improve in just about every material way ... [but] humans will continue to sit around complaining about everything getting worse.

The authors offered numerous reasons for the latent negativity that reigns even in the light of this amazing human progress, including the elite's control of the mainstream media which reflects their anti-capitalist mentality.

Michael Snyder has made a living out of harvesting the dark side of human nature, writing for his Economic Collapse blog for years. On Monday Snyder joined the chorus of naysayers commenting on current affairs:

According to Gallup, once again this year Hillary Clinton is the most admired woman in America and Barack Obama is the most admired man in America.

I don't know what that says about our nation, but it can't be good.

After shredding the supposed good news contained in the latest announcement that the economy had grown at an annual rate of 5 percent in the third quarter, Snyder patronized his audience by appealing to their dark side:

Anyone with even a minimal amount of intelligence should be able to see the massive financial bubbles that the central banks of the world have created, and anyone with even a minimal amount of intelligence should be able to see that we are heading for a massive financial implosion which will be extraordinarily painful.

Snyder's apocalyptic book *The Beginning of the End* taps into the same negative mindset, noting that



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It is a time of unprecedented economic collapse, deep political corruption, accelerating social decay, out-of-control rioting in the cities and great natural disasters...

A great storm is coming to America, and time is quickly running out.

Snyder is hopeful, of course, that there will still be enough time left for his audience to log onto Amazon.com (which didn't even exist 10 years ago) using their MasterCard (which didn't exist until 1966) to pay for and download his book on their Kindles (which were first introduced in November, 2007 at \$399 each, and are now available for just over \$100) in order to read about the end of Western civilization!

There will always be bad news. The solution, as noted in the Holy Scriptures (Philippians 4:8), is to focus on the good:

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing: fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely and admirable.

Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

*A graduate of an Ivy League school and a former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American magazine and blogs frequently at [www.LightFromTheRight.com](http://www.LightFromTheRight.com), primarily on economics and politics. He can be reached at*

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