

Motley Fool Columnist: Why Americans Should Stop Whining and Be Thankful

Last year, prompted by [Louis C.K.'s bit on the Conan O'Brien show](#), Morgan Housel at the *Motley Fool* put together a list titled ["50 Reasons We're Living Through the Greatest Period in World History."](#)

Below are his first 10 reasons:

1. U.S. life expectancy at birth was 39 years in 1800, 49 years in 1900, 68 years in 1950, and 79 years today. The average newborn today can expect to live an entire generation longer than his great-grandparents could.

*2. A flu pandemic in 1918 infected 500 million people and killed as many as 100 million. In his book *The Great Influenza*, John Barry describes the illness as if "someone were hammering a wedge into your skull just behind the eyes, and body aches so intense they felt like bones breaking." Today, you can go to Safeway and get a flu shot. It costs 15 bucks. You might feel a little poke.*

3. In 1950, 23 people per 100,000 Americans died each year in traffic accidents, according to the Census Bureau. That fell to 11 per 100,000 by 2009. If the traffic mortality rate had not declined, 37,800 more Americans would have died last year than actually did. In the time it will take you to read this article, one American is alive who would have died in a car accident 60 years ago.

4. In 1949, *Popular Mechanics* magazine made the bold prediction that someday a computer could weigh less than 1 ton. I wrote this sentence on an iPad that weighs 0.73 pounds.

5. The average American now retires at age 62. One hundred years ago, the average American died at age 51. Enjoy your golden years – your ancestors didn't get any of them.

6. In his 1770s book *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith wrote: "It is not uncommon in the highlands of Scotland for a mother who has borne 20 children not to have 2 alive." Infant mortality in America has dropped from 58 per 1,000 births in 1933 to less than six per 1,000 births in 2010, according to the World Health Organization. There are about 11,000 births in America each day, so this improvement means more than 200,000 infants now survive each year who wouldn't have 80 years ago. That's like adding a city the size of Boise, Idaho, every year.

7. America averaged 20,919 murders per year in the 1990s, and 16,211 per year in the 2000s, according to the FBI. If the murder rate had not fallen, 47,000 more Americans would have been killed in the last decade than actually were. That's

more than the population of Biloxi, Miss.

8. Despite a surge in airline travel, there were half as many fatal plane accidents in 2012 than there were in 1960, according to the Aviation Safety Network.

9. No one has died from a new nuclear weapon attack since 1945. If you went back to 1950 and asked the world's smartest political scientists, they would have told you the odds of seeing that happen would be close to 0%. You don't have to be very imaginative to think that the most important news story of the past 70 years is what didn't happen. Congratulations, world.

10. People worry that the U.S. economy will end up stagnant like Japan's. Next time you hear that, [remember that](#) unemployment in Japan hasn't been above 5.6% in the past 25 years, its government corruption ranking has consistently improved, incomes per capita adjusted for purchasing power have grown at a decent rate, and life expectancy has risen by nearly five years. I can think of worse scenarios.

The next 40 reasons continue with this same line of argument. Housel assumes that Americans are "living through the greatest period in world history" because we are *materially* better off than people of the past and most people of the present.

I think Housel is correct that Americans could stand to be

more grateful for their prosperity, though we should consider the costs of that prosperity for other people around the world.

We should also consider what Louis C.K. said in his bit:
“Everything is amazing right now, and nobody’s happy.”

Perhaps something more is needed...