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New Book Tells America's History by the Numbers

THE FIRST MEASURED CENTURY: An Illustrated Guide to Trends in America, 1900–2000 (AEI Press; December 11, 2000) reveals America's history by the numbers. Authors Theodore Caplow, Louis Hicks, and Ben J. Wattenberg bring America's last century to life

through data—the accumulated social measurement and statistical inquiry that tells us what happened to ordinary citizens. More than anecdotes about great events and personalities—the Titanic, Lindbergh, Pearl Harbor, Einstein, and Madonna—these data let us see the changing panorama of the American twentieth century in a new and often surprising way.

“THE FIRST MEASURED CENTURY is arguably the first statistical profile of the American nation that is a joy to read.... This is a public service of the first order. And more. Most of us know a good many things that just aren't so. Here is a wondrously noninvasive way of getting things straight for a change.”

– Daniel Patrick Moynihan

Unfolding Trends Explored

Do parents spend less time with their children today than parents did years ago? (No, more.) Are we a rootless society? (We move less often.) Are we reading less? (No, more.) What do Americans think of premarital sex? (More approving). Extramarital sex? (Less approving.) Has driving on the nation's highways become more dangerous? (No, safer.)

The First Measured Century examines fifteen areas of American life: population, work, education, family, living arrangements, religion, leisure, health, money, politics, government, crime, transportation, business, and communications. Unfolding trends within each area are explained in one-page essays and facing-page colored charts. The carefully verified data were drawn extensively from the U.S. Census Bureau and other governmental sources, private sector sources, and the findings of a new “Middletown IV” survey commissioned for this project.

This illustrated volume, the first of its kind, is published in conjunction with the three-hour PBS television prime-time special of the same name, hosted by Ben Wattenberg, airing nationally on December 20 at 8:30 p.m. Throughout the book, extensive data are used to explore both change and continuity in America, and to dispel widely accepted notions about social change. In fact, the data in the 300-page book provide the foundation for the PBS documentary.

Return to Middletown

A special feature of *The First Measured Century* is the inclusion of the first published results from the new “Middletown IV” study. Conducted in 1999, “Middletown IV” was built on Robert and Helen Lynd’s landmark sociological study of a typical American community in the 1920s. The Lynd’s “Middletown” study was the first to employ modern survey methods to examine an entire city. In 1978, Theodore Caplow led a team of social scientists that replicated and extended the Lynd’s original work. In 1999, the First Measured Century Project commissioned a partial replication of the “Middletown” study to gather long-term data on certain topics not covered by official statistics. The research team, again directed by Professor Caplow, used the same survey instruments in the same place with the same wording as the Lynds used seventy-five years earlier. These surveys provide the longest series of public opinion data in the world.

There is nothing like a fact. And this volume speaks volumes about what has happened to every day America in the twentieth century.”

-- Daniel J. Boorstin, Librarian of Congress Emeritus; author, The Seekers.

Measuring America

During the twentieth century, Americans became the most energetic measurers of social life that ever lived. We measured the size of our population and our territory, and we pioneered the measurement of facets of American life that had never been systematically counted before, including crime, sex, food, fun, religion, and work. This tradition of counting and measuring spread to virtually every nook and cranny of our national life. The numbers that fill the news—the Consumer Price Index, the Gross National Product, the unemployment rate, the rate of teenage pregnancy, the poverty rate, the number of millionaires under age thirty, and the dozens of other statistics—shaped public discourse and defined twentieth-century America.

The First Measured Century is a rich, compelling source of information for everyone who wants to understand American society—past, present, and future.

Theodore Caplow is the Commonwealth Professor of Sociology at the University of Virginia and the author of more than 20 books. **Louis Hicks** is an associate professor of Sociology at St. Mary’s College of Maryland. **Ben J. Wattenberg**, who writes a syndicated column appearing in 200 newspapers, is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. He is the host of the weekly PBS series, *Think Tank with Ben Wattenberg*. The AEI Press is a division of the American Enterprise Institute.

Historical time lines, an interactive trends poll with charts and graphs, extensive transcripts from the PBS documentary, a discussion forum, and more are available at the interactive website www.pbs.org/fmc.

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By Theodore Caplow, Louis Hicks, and Ben Wattenberg

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