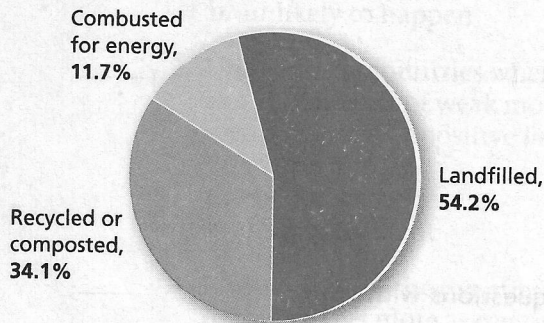


## A HISTORY OF ABUNDANCE

- 1 Although the population of the United States accounts for only about 5 percent of the total population of the world, Americans use up more than 20 percent of the world's energy per year, generating about four and a half pounds of trash and garbage per person each day.

### WHAT HAPPENS TO STUFF WE THROW AWAY?



Based on the 2010 Municipal Solid Waste Characterization Report

Only a country that has great abundance could afford to throw so much away. America has sometimes been criticized as a “throw-away” country, a land where there is so much abundance that people are sometimes viewed as wasteful. Scholars like David Potter, an American historian, believe that the abundant material wealth of the United States has been a major factor in the development of the American character.

- 2 This abundance is the gift of nature. In what is now the continental United States, there are more than 3 million square miles of land. When the European settlers first arrived in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, much of this land was rich, fertile farmland, with an abundance of trees and animals. There were relatively few Native Americans living on this land, and they had neither the weapons nor the organization necessary to keep the European settlers out. Never again can human beings discover such a large area

of rich, unfarmed land, with such a small population and such great undeveloped natural resources.

- 3 But it would be a mistake to say that the abundant natural resources of North America were the only reason why the United States became a wealthy nation. The beliefs, determination, and hard work of the early settlers were equally important.
- 4 In the aristocratic European nations the settlers left behind, the material wealth and comforts of the ruling classes were guaranteed by their birth. Therefore, as Tocqueville said, the wealthy took these things for granted and assumed they would always have their wealth and social status. The poor people in those aristocratic nations also did not concern themselves with wealth, since they knew that they had little hope of becoming wealthy or changing their status.
- 5 In the early years of the United States, however, wealth and social position were not permanently determined at birth. The idea of equality of opportunity in America made the level of material wealth of both the rich and the poor much less certain. At any time, the rich might lose some of their wealth and the poor might increase theirs. Therefore, all classes in American society thought about protecting their material possessions and looked for ways to acquire more. Tocqueville believed that this was not so much a matter of greed; rather, it was a matter of their insecurity. People might be naturally insecure if their material wealth, and that of their children, could change so rapidly either upward or downward during a lifetime, or even a single generation. Tocqueville concluded that it was extremely important both to rich Americans and poor Americans to increase their personal wealth and material

comforts. Therefore, the entire population joined in the task of increasing the nation's material abundance as quickly as possible.

- 6 Tocqueville visited the United States fifty years after the nation had won its independence from England. He was impressed with the great progress made in such a short time. Although the country was still in an early stage of development, and there was not much money available for investment, the United States had already made great progress in both trading and manufacturing. It had already become the world's second leading sea power and had constructed the longest railroads in the world. Tocqueville worried, however, about the effect of all this material success. In such a society, materialism could be made into a moral value in itself rather than a means to an end.
- 7 Tocqueville's concern, to a large extent, became a reality. In the process of creating a land of abundance, Americans began to judge themselves by materialistic standards. Unlike many countries where the love of material things was seen as a vice or a mark of weak moral character, in the United States it was seen as a virtue, a positive incentive to work hard, and a reward for successful efforts.
- 8 Traditionally, the people of the United States have been proud of their nation's ability to produce material wealth so that they could maintain a high standard of living. This helps to explain why Americans use materialistic standards not only to judge themselves as individuals, but also to judge themselves as a nation. And the opportunity to share in the good life has attracted immigrants to the United States for generations.

### From Producers to Consumers

- 9 The emphasis on producing wealth and maintaining a high standard of living developed over a period of time. In the

1700s and 1800s, most Americans thought of themselves more as producers than consumers. As farmers they produced food and many of their own household goods, and later as factory workers they produced manufactured goods. It was not until the twentieth century that Americans began to think of themselves more as consumers than as producers. This image change is probably due to the coming of mass advertising, made possible by the beginning of radio broadcasts in the 1920s and the spread of television programming in the 1950s. In the 1920s, businesses agreed to pay for, or sponsor, radio programs that would run short commercials advertising their products. Companies were able to reach large numbers of Americans at one time to convince them to buy their products; the emphasis was now on consuming.

- 10 The development of mass advertising continued with television, and by the end of the 1960s, scholars had begun to study the effect of mass advertising on American society. Historian David Potter observed that mass advertising in the United States had become so important in size and influence that it should be viewed as an institution, such as the school or the church. One effect of advertising was that sponsors had some control over the content of television programs. If businesses did not like the content, they could withdraw their sponsorship. A second effect was that advertising techniques were so successful that over time they began to be used to change Americans' attitudes, behavior, and beliefs. For example, the government ran ads to urge teenagers not to use drugs; charities had ads to ask for donations; and politicians paid to advertise their campaigns. In the 2012 presidential election, candidates spent a total of more than \$900 million on TV ads alone, with most of the money spent in states where the race was competitive.



11 Advertising money follows the consumer as well as the voter. Today, almost all homes in the United States have at least one television set (the average household has more than two), and the family TV is in use about eight hours a day. Some estimates are that the average American sees about 50,000 commercials



Times Square, New York—the city that never sleeps

a year. When popular events such as the Super Bowl are on, mass advertising may reach 50 million or more viewers during a single program. In addition to radio and television, there are ads in magazines and newspapers, and marketers try to reach people outside their homes with ads everywhere. By 2007, many Americans felt mass advertising was out of control. A *New York Times* article, “Anywhere the Eye Can See, It’s Likely to See an Ad,” talked about the (then) new video screens in New York taxicabs and public elevators, and the new, ever-changing digital billboards. New York City’s Times Square is the best-known and most spectacular example of American outdoor advertising, with its huge digital billboards that have ads showing 24 hours a day.

12 And then came the Internet. By 2008, more than 75 percent of homes in the United States had a computer, and over the next few years, Americans abandoned their desktops for laptops, tablets, and smartphones. Over 80 percent of adults 18 and older now use the Internet, and the numbers continue to grow. This use of digital media has had a profound effect on advertising: it has changed the emphasis from mass advertising to target

marketing. That is, advertisers are now creating ads for individual users on the Internet, using digital information about their use of digital media. Perhaps mass advertising has reached the point when most consumers simply ignore most of the ads, and businesses have learned that they can reach consumers better by appealing to their individual buying habits and other aspects of their lives. Some aspects that target marketers consider are geographic location and climate, gender, age, income, and education, as well as people’s values, attitudes, and lifestyles.

### What American Consumers Like

13 People in the advertising business, and others who study American society, are interested in the question: *What does the American consumer like?* Max Lerner, a well-known scholar who has studied American society, has said that American consumers are particularly fond of three things: comfort, cleanliness, and novelty.

14 Lerner believes that the American love of comfort perhaps goes back to the frontier experience, where life was tough and there were very few comforts. This experience may have created a strong desire in the

pioneers and their children for goods that would make life more comfortable. Today, the Americans' love of comfort is seen in the way they furnish their homes, design their cars, and travel. How Americans choose a new mattress for their bed is an example of the American love of comfort.



Bath time for the family dog

Many Americans will go to a store where beds are set up and lie down on several mattresses to see which is the most comfortable.

- 15 Cleanliness is also highly valued by Americans. Perhaps their Puritan heritage has played some role in their desire for cleanliness. The Puritans, a strict Protestant church group whose members were among the first settlers of America, stressed the need to cleanse<sup>1</sup> the body of dirt and of all evil tendencies, which for them included sexual desire. The saying "Cleanliness is next to godliness" reflects the belief of most Americans that it is important to keep not only their bodies, but also their clothes, their houses, their cars, and even their pets clean and smelling good. Indeed, many Americans are offended by anyone who does not follow their accepted standards of cleanliness.
- 16 Marketing to American consumers requires an awareness of their desire for cleanliness. In his book, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*, Charles Duhigg tells of Proctor & Gamble's (P&G) experience marketing Febreze, a spray that makes things smell

good. Febreze actually destroys the molecules of odors, and P&G was sure it would be a great seller. Their ads focused on how their product could eliminate, not just cover up, bad smells—even pet smells. To their shock, the product didn't sell. After analyzing the behavior of potential customers, they discovered that people didn't want to be reminded that their houses smelled bad and therefore needed Febreze. P&G changed their ad campaign completely. Instead of marketing it as a cleaning product, they presented it as a reward for when the cleaning was finished: "Who wants to admit their house stinks? . . . On the other hand, lots of people crave a nice smell after they've spent thirty minutes cleaning. . . . Within a year, customers had spent more than \$230 million on the product." Sometime later, P&G began reminding customers that Febreze also gets rid of odors.

- 17 Along with cleanliness and comfort, Americans love having things that are new and different. Perhaps this love of novelty is reinforced by their pride in their inventiveness. Americans have always

<sup>1</sup>cleanse: to make something completely clean



been interested in inventing new products and improving old ones. Advertisements encourage people to get rid of old products and try new ones, whether the old ones still work or not. And if they cannot afford to buy something now, advertisers encourage consumers to charge it on a credit card—"Buy now—pay later."

- 18 In addition to the three qualities that Lerner mentions, there is a fourth quality that American consumers like very much—convenience. In the late 1900s, there was a dramatic increase in such labor-saving devices as automatic washing machines, clothes dryers, dishwashers, food processors, microwave ovens, garbage disposals, and power lawn mowers. Today, all of these, and many more, are found in a typical suburban home. The American desire for convenience also created the concept of *fast-food* restaurants such as McDonald's and KFC, which are now found in every city and almost every small town in the United States, and are now exported all over the world. For those who prefer to prepare their food at home, American grocery stores are full of convenience foods that are packaged and ready to cook, or are even precooked.
- 19 Like microwaves and dishwashers, fast-food restaurants and convenience foods save the American consumer time that would otherwise be spent fixing meals or cleaning up. These conveniences, however, do not cause Americans to be less busy. Women now make up more than one-half of the American workforce, and the majority of mothers with children under the age of eighteen work outside the home. With both parents employed, children eat a lot of take-out food, a significant contributor to childhood obesity.<sup>2</sup> These conveniences reflect not so much a leisurely lifestyle as a busy one in which

even minutes of time are too valuable to be wasted. Alexis de Tocqueville was one of the first to see in this a curious paradox<sup>3</sup> in the American character. He observed that Americans were so busy working to acquire comforts and conveniences that they were unable to relax and to enjoy leisure time when they had it. Today, as in Tocqueville's time, many Americans have what one medical doctor has called "the hurry sickness."

### An Abundance of Technology

- 20 Technological devices that can engage us 24 hours a day have increased the pace of life in the United States, and they have changed the way we receive and exchange information. For example, computers and other digital devices have changed our television viewing habits. By 2003, the majority of American homes had either cable or satellite TV. Consequently, in addition to the broadcast networks—ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox—most Americans can now choose from hundreds of TV channels. There is everything from 24-hour news to movies, children's programs, reality shows, sports, and games, and there are many specialty channels that focus on cooking, home improvement, music, travel, history, drama, comedy, public affairs, entertainment news, and lifestyles. There are also public TV networks offering educational and cultural programs, supported by contributions from viewers, donations from private companies and foundations, and government grants.
- 21 The result of all these choices is that the TV viewing audience has become more fragmented, with a smaller percentage watching any given program. This means that mass advertisers must also use other ways to reach the buying public. Some companies pay for product placement in

<sup>2</sup> *obesity: the condition of being too heavy in a way that is dangerous to your health*

<sup>3</sup> *paradox: a situation that seems strange because it involves two ideas or qualities that are opposite or very different*

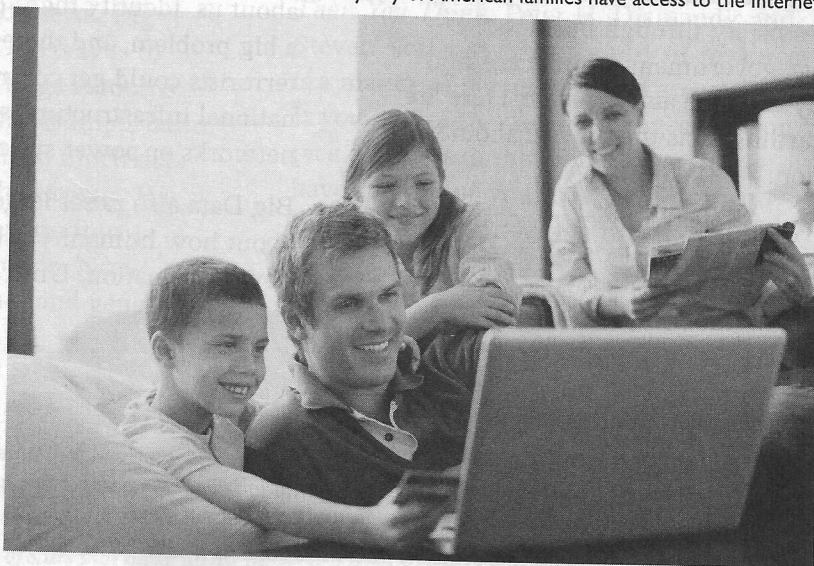
TV shows and movies—the hero drinking a Coke, for example, and many companies are doing target marketing. Most large companies do extensive market research to find individuals who are most likely to buy their products. They then focus on delivering their ads to these individuals, often using the Internet and other direct-marketing techniques.

22 Advertising money is going to the Internet also because more and more Americans are online instead of watching TV at all. Increasingly, Americans are using their computer, smartphone, tablet, or other digital device—instead of television—to get their news and entertainment. This is especially true of the Millennials, young people who came of age at the start of the new millennium, the year 2000. Because they are such a desirable market group, advertising money is especially targeting them on the Internet. Traditional sources of news such as TV, newspapers, and news magazines have lost advertising revenue with serious consequences. Many big city papers have gone out of business because there are not enough readers to attract the advertisers needed to pay publishing costs. Some news magazines have gone to online publishing only. The problem is that much of the advertising money in papers and news magazines traditionally went to support the covering of news events. News reporters worked on stories for months to gather and analyze details of complicated and important stories. With a loss of advertising revenue, news organizations have had to downsize, employing fewer staff reporters. As a result, in American media

it is sometimes difficult to get in-depth coverage and analysis of news in the United States and around the world.

23 The Internet and the 24-hour cable news networks have created a desire for instant reporting and explanation of news events, sometimes leading to factual mistakes or the wrong interpretation of what is happening. Sometimes the news can be superficial and even silly. A great deal of time and attention is paid to the lives of celebrities, for example, resulting in a mixture of news and entertainment sometimes called “newsertainment” or “infotainment.” However, the Internet can also be a source of valuable news reports by eyewitnesses of events around the world, although it may be difficult to verify the accuracy of videos taken on iPhones. Another aspect of the Internet is that individuals can customize, or personalize, the news they receive about current events, and they can set up their own news sites or blogs. Increasingly social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, and others are informing and shaping the opinions of their users, as more and more Americans spend more and more time online.

The majority of American families have access to the Internet.





## An Abundance of Knowledge: Big Data

24 The first time most Americans heard the term *Big Data* was probably during the 2012 presidential election. President Obama's campaign had purchased huge quantities of digital information on prospective voters. This Big Data, collected from many sources and then carefully analyzed, allowed the Obama team to run the presidential campaign in a whole new way, with such a deep understanding of their potential voters that they could win them over vote by vote. In doing this, the campaign "overturned the long dominance of TV advertising in U.S. politics and created something new in the world: a national campaign run like a local ward election, where the interests of individual voters were known and addressed," according to *MIT Technology Review*.

25 Rick Smolan and Jennifer Erwitte have written a large "coffee table" book called *The Human Face of Big Data*. Smolan and Erwitte say that some people define Big Data as more information than can fit on a personal computer. Others say that it is more than just the quantity of the information—it is also the tools that allow us to see patterns and make use of the knowledge. "Big Data is an extraordinary knowledge revolution that is sweeping, almost invisibly, through business, academia, government, health care, and everyday life," the authors state. Here are some startling facts they reveal about this revolution:

*The average person today processes more data in a single day than a person in the 1500s did in an entire lifetime.*

<sup>4</sup> *sonogram: an image of an unborn baby inside its mother's body*

<sup>5</sup> *exhaust: a gas or stream that is produced when a machine is working*

<sup>6</sup> *identity theft: a crime in which someone steals personal information about another person, such as a bank account number, and uses this information to deceive other people and get money or goods*

<sup>7</sup> *defense: the act of protecting something or someone from attack or destruction*

According to *BabyCenter.com*, today one in three children born in the United States already have [sic] an online presence (usually in the form of a sonogram<sup>4</sup>) before they are born. That number grows to 92 percent by the time they are two. . . . with a third of all children's photos and information posted online within weeks of their birth.

*Each of us now leaves a trail of digital exhaust,<sup>5</sup> an infinite stream of phone records, texts, browser histories, GPS data, and other information that will live on forever.*

26 This supply of Big Data about us raises important personal questions. What happens to all this information? What will it mean to have a complete digital record of our lives from before birth to death? How will this information about us be stored? Who owns our personal information, and who decides how it can be used? Some of these questions are already being debated. For example, who owns the photos we post or store on the Internet? There are also questions about how the government and law enforcement agencies can use our personal information. What can governments do with it? What about the police? And, of course, there is already a concern about criminals and terrorists having access to knowledge about us. Identity theft<sup>6</sup> on the Internet is a big problem, and there are worries that terrorists could get control of important national infrastructure, such as defense<sup>7</sup> networks or power systems.

27 Big Data also raises larger questions about how humanity uses all this new information. Until the coming

of computers, the human race often suffered from a lack of knowledge; now many believe we have too much of it. Every 18 months computing power doubles, and the amount of knowledge we have is increasing exponentially. ( $1+1=2+2=4+4=8+8=16$ , and so on.) This incredible<sup>8</sup> limitless<sup>9</sup> supply of information is a double-edge sword—it cuts both ways. That is, it has both positive and negative effects. On the positive side, it enables us to solve important problems and can bring many benefits to humanity. On the negative side, it can overwhelm us and may even cause us to make poor decisions. Brain research reveals that when we try to process too much information, the decision-making part of our brain actually shuts down. We then focus on the last piece of information and forget important facts that came before. Research shows that we then make bad decisions that are more affected by our emotions. What we should do is stop, do something else, and let our subconscious<sup>10</sup> mind sort through the data for us. Our subconscious mind evaluates the data, sees connections, and makes creative use of the knowledge. When we return to the task, our brains can then see what is important and enable us to make good decisions.

28 In order to be valuable and useful, Big Data has to be managed. One way is to rely on experts to analyze large amounts of data and then tell us what is important. The problem is that there is so much data that it overwhelms even the experts. We no longer just load information into a computer and tell it what to do. Now computers talk to each other and generate

their own new information. This has created new ways of processing data some call “crowdsience,”<sup>11</sup> or “citizenscience.” In *Reinventing Discovery: The New Era of Networked Science*, Michael Nielsen explains how scientists can collaborate online to solve complex problems. And they can multiply their efforts by engaging the general public to sort through masses of information. For example, Galaxy<sup>12</sup> Zoo enables people to classify galaxies on their smartphones, enlarging what Nielsen calls the collective intelligence. In fact, a citizen scientist discovered a whole new classification of galaxies.

### Redefining American Abundance

29 The United States has always come from a culture of abundance, not scarcity. Bono, the rock star/activist, observed that Americans avoided the “curse of natural resources” that some developing nations now face. Americans learned how to develop the enormous natural resources on their continent and use them “not just to build a modern society but also to feed and supply the world.” Now Americans are redefining their abundance as a powerful supply of ideas that can help bring solutions to the problems of the world. In *Abundance: The Future Is Better Than You Think*, Peter H. Diamandis and Steven Kotler say that scarcity of resources is a matter of perspective and accessibility. If you have a tree full of oranges and you pick all the fruit that you can reach, you have run out of your source of oranges. But if someone invents a ladder, you have access to a new supply.

<sup>8</sup> *incredible*: difficult to believe

<sup>9</sup> *limitless*: without a limit or end

<sup>10</sup> *subconscious*: the part of your mind that has thoughts and feelings that you do not always realize that you have

<sup>11</sup> *crowdsience*—a group of people work together to solve a scientific problem or do scientific research. The group may be a few people, or it may involve thousands.

<sup>12</sup> *galaxy*—any of the large groups of stars that make up the universe



30 A good example of this is the development of the controversial technology of “fracking.” This allows drilling companies to get oil and natural gas from underground supplies in the United States that had not been previously accessible. The supplies of gas and oil are so vast that in 2012, the International Energy Agency projected that by 2020 the United States would become the world’s leading oil producer. However, environmental groups are afraid of what this technique will do to the water supply and the ecology of the areas where this is being done.

31 Diamandis, Kotler, and others detail the ways that Americans can join with individuals around the world to find innovative solutions for providing clean water, enough food, and adequate shelter to everyone. Diamandis and Kotler refer to the populations of the world who lack basic necessities as “the rising billion.” With the spread of mobile phones around the world, anyone anywhere will have the opportunity to join in creating a world of shared abundance. They define abundance:

*Abundance is not about providing everyone on this planet with a life of luxury<sup>13</sup>—rather it’s about providing all with a life of possibility. To be able to live such a life requires having the basics covered and then some. . . . Today most poverty-stricken Americans have a television, telephone, electricity, running water, and indoor plumbing.*

32 Definitions of poverty and abundance may be relative, as Diamandis and Kotler suggest. But there is probably universal agreement about the basics that everyone needs: clean water, enough food, and adequate shelter. The sharing of Big Data and networking technology gives us the tools to meet these basic needs and bring “a life of abundant possibility” to

all. This will not happen automatically. There are many obstacles to overcome—pollution of the environment, scarcities of food and clean water, and bad decisions by government leaders or even human greed—but the good news is that there are individuals around the world who are dedicated to making it happen.

33 We began by explaining where the American ideal of abundance came from historically, and how it has affected the development of the United States. In contrast to most nations, Americans have traditionally believed that the wealth of their country was like an ever-expanding pie. Instead of the rich getting a larger piece and the poor getting a smaller one, the pie would continue to expand to provide large pieces for everyone. Most important, there would always be enough pie for all. The belief in the continuing heritage of abundance made Americans an optimistic people with confidence that human problems could be solved. It greatly reduced the conflict between the rich and poor that has torn many other nations apart. Perhaps most important, the belief in an always growing abundance gave strong support to such basic national values as freedom, self-reliance, equality of opportunity, competition, and hard work. It seemed to Americans that their high standard of living was a reward for practicing these values.

34 Today, some Americans worry that their economic pie may not continue to expand. But individuals like Diamandis and Kotler say that the revolution in Big Data and new tools to use and share the knowledge are the new face of American abundance. We will simply make more pies.

<sup>13</sup> luxury: very great comfort and pleasure, such as you get from expensive food, beautiful things, etc.