

## II.C.3. A SURVEY OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY MOVEMENT

### ***II.C.3.a. Introduction***

The voluntary simplicity movement arose in close association with the counterculture and environmental movements of the late 1960's and early 1970's. It valued moderation over excess, spiritual development over material consumption, cooperation over competition, and nature over technology. In the United States the movement peaked in the mid-1970's, declined, and was quiescent through the 1980's. In the early 1990's voluntary simplicity became a focus of renewed interest. Some observers linked this straightforwardly to the resurgence of environmental activism that began in 1988. Others believed it was a pragmatic response to the recession and economic restructuring of the early 1990's. For still others it was a response to psychic stress associated with rapid technological change, social fragmentation, and the relentless expansion of consumerist values into all domains of human life. Today the prospects for the voluntary simplicity movement are uncertain. With strong and steady economic growth, a shortage of ecological disasters and growing acceptance of high-tech social norms, the movement might fade once more. If any of these conditions should become problematic, interest in voluntary simplicity could grow.<sup>1 2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There is a long literature on voluntary simplicity. A good history is David Shi's *The Simple Life* (1985). Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) and Richard Gregg's *The Value of Voluntary Simplicity* (1936) are foundational. Duane Elgin's *Voluntary Simplicity* (1981) set the tone for the current movement. Many of the environmentalist and Green texts listed in Box IIC-1 advocate one aspect or another of voluntary simplicity. With revived interest in the early 1990's came many new books, including Amy Saltzman's *Downshifting: Reinventing Success on a Slower Track* (1991), Amy Dacyczyn's *Tightwad Gazette* (1993), Cecile Andrews' *The Circle of Simplicity* (1997), and Jerome M. Segal's *Graceful Simplicity: Towards a Philosophy and Politics of Simple Living* (1999). Periodicals include *The Simple Living Journal*, *In Context*, and *Yes! A Journal of Positive Futures*.

<sup>2</sup> There are many varieties of voluntary simplicity. Amitai Etzioni (1998) distinguished three: "downshifter", who maintain high income and consumption patterns, even if they scale back a bit or adopt a simplicity of style; "strong simplifiers," who give up high income careers and live at markedly reduced levels of consumption, but who do not necessarily see themselves as part of a social movement, and who may hold any number of social and political views; and "simple living movement activists" who likewise live on low incomes, but who see voluntary simplicity as part of a wider vision of planetary sustainability.

In September 1998 a major conference on voluntary simplicity was held in Los Angeles, California. More than 750 attendees heard numerous speakers address many aspects of voluntary simplicity. Nearly half the attendees signed up to participate in voluntary simplicity discussion and support groups in their local areas. The conference agenda is shown in **II C-26**.

### **II.C.3.b. The Survey**

I conducted a survey of attendees at this conference. I had three purposes in mind. First, I wanted to find out what the notion of voluntary simplicity meant to people involved in that movement. Second, I wanted to find out what sorts of people were attracted to the idea of voluntary simplicity. Third, I wanted to find out how participants in the voluntary simplicity movement reconciled competing values concerning consumption, equity, ecological sustainability and economic growth.

This section reports results of the survey. It focuses especially on the third purpose just noted. We saw in Section II.C.2 that while most people are supportive of environmental protection, they are reluctant to pay very much for it, and even more reluctant to consider reducing income or consumption in the aggregate as a way of helping lessen the impact of economic activity on the environment. I figured that participants at the Voluntary Simplicity conference would be much more receptive to the idea of cutting back consumption. I figured further that participants at this conference were likely to have given more thought to the many ways in which values and behaviors concerning consumption, the environment, equity and growth inter-relate with one another. Thus, I thought, any opinions concerning these issues held by attendees at this conference might represent the edge of the envelope of social and political practicability. That is to say, I thought it unlikely that some other sample of Americans would call for *lower* levels of future economic growth, or *lower* preferred levels of household consumption, than would participants at a conference such as this one. The values endorsed by

**BOX IIC-26. THE VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY CONFERENCE**

Here is the program for the conference “*No Purchase Necessary: Building the Voluntary Simplicity Movement*,” held on September 19, 1998 at the University of Southern California. It was organized by Seeds of Simplicity, a non-profit education organization. \*

*Conference Program*

- 9:00 Welcome/Introduction by Carol Benson Holst, Seeds of Simplicity  
9:05 Event Parameters by Michael Beck, Seeds of Simplicity  
9:10 Welcome by Tom Shelley, Tom Shelley Enterprises  
9:15 Cecile Andrews, Duane Elgin and Ellen Funari -  
A Visioning Conversation: Why Are We Here?  
9:40 Ed Begley, Jr. - How Much is Enough?  
10:00 Audience Forum Janet Luhrs Booksigning  
10:30 BREAK  
10:4 Panel: “The Best Things in Life Aren’t Things”  
Duane Elgin - Voluntary Simplicity: Indicator of Global Change  
Mary Kalifon - Children, Families, and Simplicity  
Rev. Peter Moore-Kochlacs - Faith and Simplicity Connections  
Julie Ozanne - A Consuming Passion  
Susan Salterberg - Simplifying for Wellness  
12:00 Audience Forum Cecile Andrews Booksigning  
12:30 LUNCH PBS Special, *Escape from Affluenza*  
1:30 Remarks by John de Graaf, Co-Producer of the *Affluenza* series  
1:40 Kalle Lasn - Action Goals: Buy Nothing Day  
2:00 Panel: “Taking Action on Simplicity in Your Life.”  
Cecile Andrews - Advancing Simplicity Circles  
Michael Fogler - Un-Jobbing  
Janet Luhrs - The Simple Living Guide  
Carol Pimentel - Your Money or Your Life  
Dave Wampler - Voluntary Simplicity in Cyberspace  
3:15 Audience Forum Duane Elgin Booksigning  
3:45 BREAK  
4:00 Panel: “Taking Action on Simplicity in Your Group”  
Lois Arkin - LA Eco-Village  
Kevin Finney - Environmentalists Seize the Day  
Julie Russell - Eco-Home Network  
May Webber - Ithaca Eco-Village  
Rod Gorney - Simplicity and the Human Community  
5:15 Audience Forum Michael Fogler Booksigning  
5:30 Wrap Up by Ellen Funari

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\* P.O. Box 9955, Glendale, CA 91226; 818-247-4332; [www.sl.net.com/cip/seeds](http://www.sl.net.com/cip/seeds)

attendees at this conference might thus serve as a set of constraints on the long-range, global scenarios developed in the dissertation, especially those that envision lower rates of economic growth.

The survey form I developed is shown in **IIC-27**. It was distributed along with the conference program. Of the 750 or so participants, 255 (34%) returned completed forms. Although the response was high there is no guarantee that it represented a random sample. Thus the results given in the sections that follow apply to the 255 *respondents*, and not necessarily to the 750 *participants*.<sup>3</sup>

### **II.C.3.c. Survey Results**

#### ***1. What does voluntary simplicity mean to the respondents?***

**Box IIC-28** displays a sample of responses to the first question in the survey, “*In just a few words, what does ‘voluntary simplicity’ mean to you?*” A great many of the responses touch on one or more of these three themes:

- 1) reducing consumption, reducing spending, living within means
- 2) having a rich inner life and peace of mind; spirituality; consciousness
- 3) living in harmony with the earth

Two additional themes appear repeatedly but not as frequently as the first three:

- 4) resisting materialist/consumerist/competitive values imposed by society; asserting personal autonomy
- 5) spending more time with family and friends, building community

The first theme is instrumental/pragmatic in nature. The second theme is psychological/spiritual. The third theme contains both instrumental/pragmatic and

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<sup>3</sup> To the extent that we want to learn anything about people who are *attracted* to the notion of voluntary simplicity, i.e., the population of conference attendees, the non-randomness of the survey responses is a disadvantage. For some of the other things we want to learn, however, the non-randomness might actually be an advantage. We might suppose that the 255 survey respondents represent a particularly committed, articulate sub-group of the 750 participants, whose responses to the survey questions might reflect greater engagement with the issues at hand. However, this is speculation.

**BOX IIC-27. SIMPLICITY SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE**

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA at Berkeley

**VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY SURVEY**

distributed at the Seeds of Simplicity Conference, 9/19/98

This survey is part of a doctoral research project concerning Voluntary Simplicity. The investigator is Rich Hayes, a student in the U.C. Berkeley Energy and Resources Program. The results of this survey will also be used by Seeds of Simplicity. Participation in this survey is voluntary. No personal identifying information is requested, and we ask that you do not write your name, address, or other identifying information anywhere on this sheet. University regulations only allow persons 18 years of age or older to participate in this survey. We'd like you to answer all questions, but this is not a requirement. Drop the completed sheets in one of the two **BIG BOXES** labeled "SURVEY!" by the **Exit Doors**. If you would like copies of the survey results, or other information about the survey, contact Rich Hayes by phone (415-566-0849) or email (rhayes@socrates.berkeley.edu). Thank you so much!

**I. Voluntary Simplicity**

1. In just a few words, what does "voluntary simplicity" mean to you?
  
2. What do you think are the one or two most important things you could do to significantly make your life more simple than it is right now?

**II. You and Your Household**

1. Are you married or not married? Married \_\_\_\_ Not Married \_\_\_\_
2. Do you own your own home? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_
3. How many people are in your household? (Include yourself as 1) \_\_\_\_
4. How many people in your household are children 17 years old or younger? \_\_\_\_
5. What is the total number of cars owned by people in your household? \_\_\_\_
6. Roughly, how many hours a week do you, personally, spend watching television? \_\_\_\_

**III. General**

1. City & State of residence \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_
2. Occupation \_\_\_\_\_
3. Highest level of schooling: some high school \_\_\_\_ high school diploma \_\_\_\_ some college \_\_\_\_  
four-year college degree \_\_\_\_ professional/post-graduate degree \_\_\_\_
4. Political Party Registration: Republican \_\_\_\_ Democrat \_\_\_\_ Green \_\_\_\_ Libertarian \_\_\_\_  
Peace & Freedom \_\_\_\_ other \_\_\_\_\_ unaffiliated \_\_\_\_ not registered \_\_\_\_

**IV. Money**

1. In the part of the state in which you live, what would you say is the minimum annual household income, before taxes, currently necessary to support a household of four people, including two children of high-school age, at each of these levels:
  - a. "Just enough to get by": \$ \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. "Enough to live in reasonable comfort and security": \$ \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. "Much more than enough", i.e., the income level that might be considered "too much": \$ \_\_\_\_\_
2. Roughly, what was your before-tax annual household income last year, from all sources? \$ \_\_\_\_\_
3. Roughly, how much did you put into savings last year, or otherwise not spend? \$ \_\_\_\_\_
4. Roughly, what level of annual household income do you expect to be living at, during the period of your life when you and the members of your household are earning their highest total income? (Assume, for this question, that price levels remain roughly as they are today.) \$ \_\_\_\_\_
5. If you had to live on an annual household income 20% below the level you lived on last year, what steps would you take to do this?

over, please →

BOX IIC-27 (cont'd.)

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*simplicity survey (cont.)*

6. After you (and your spouse or partner, if any) have both retired, how much annual household income would you like to be able to live on? (If you're already retired you can skip this question.) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**V. The Level and Distribution of Income**

In 1996 the before-tax annual incomes of American families with heads in the 45-54 age-range were as follows:

The bottom 20% of these families had an average annual income of about \$18,100.

The middle 20% of these families had an average annual income of about \$58,600.

The top 20% of these families had an average annual income of about \$147,000.

What levels of income for families with heads in the 45-55 age-range do you believe would be consistent with sustainability and fairness, and might be aspired to, over the coming century, as goals for our country? (Assume that price levels remain roughly as they are today.) Just put a dollar value in the spaces below:

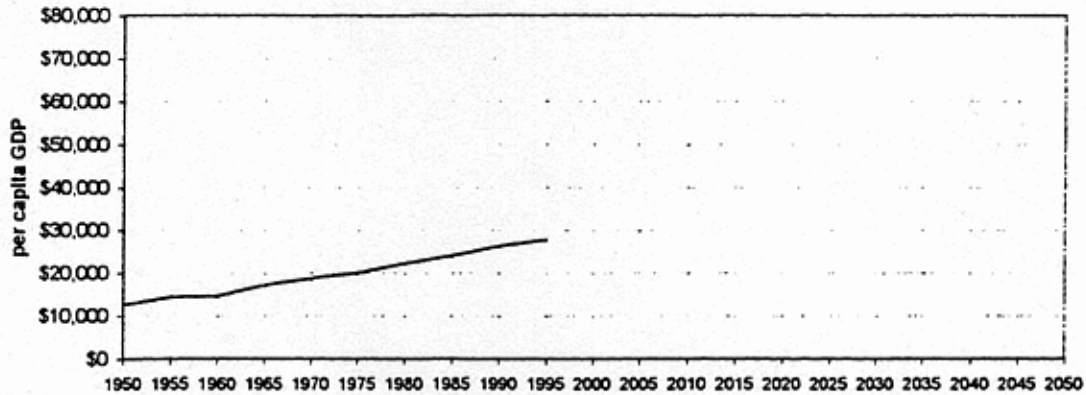
The bottom 20% of these families would have an average annual income of about \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

The middle 20% of these families would have an average annual income of about \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

The top 20% of these families would have an average annual income of about \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

**VI. Economic Growth**

The chart below shows the path along which per capita GDP (Gross Domestic Product) has changed in the United States over the 45 years between 1950 and 1995. The dollar values are adjusted for inflation, so they show real purchasing power. With your pen or pencil, sketch the path of *future* per capita GDP change, between 1995 and 2050, that you believe is desirable and achievable. Just sketch a straight or curved or wavy line.



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**VII. Conference Evaluation:** To help Seeds of Simplicity evaluate this conference, please answer this question: "Keeping in mind that volunteers paid for this event, and that no break-out space was possible, what did you find valuable about this conference, what could have been done better, and what else might be done to support people interested in voluntary simplicity?"

That's it! When finished, please drop this sheet in one of the two **BIG BOXES** marked **SURVEY!** at the **Exit Doors**. Thank you very much!

**BOX IIC-28. THE MEANING OF “VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY”**

The first question on the Simple Living Survey was:

*In just a few words, what does “voluntary simplicity” mean to you?*

Here are the verbatim responses taken from the first and every fifth survey form (52 responses = 20.4% of responses). The original numbering of the survey forms was random.

1. spending wisely; creating with raw materials; respecting the earth; seeking a rich inner life
5. “smell the roses”
10. reduce stress—let serenity take precedence
15. reducing consumption; getting rid of unnecessary activities-daily life; allowing time for intimacy, spirituality, relaxation; questioning corporate dominance of world economy & politics.
20. ...that one is choosing sanity.
25. enjoying your life, not too concerned about other things and just being plain happy and contented.
30. my choice of life style using less.
35. living in ways to have as little impact on the Earth as practicable. Living in community.
40. consciousness of what’s really important.
45. being at peace with what I do and what I have.
50. not consuming, living simply, not buying processed goods, not shopping, riding my bike.
55. having the time to enjoy life, friends/family and the things you have.
60. living consciously, sustainably—both for the earth, future generations and myself.
65. choosing to have less stuff.
70. not being a slave to your possessions.
75. living within my means while maintaining a high quality of life.
80. it means being comfortable with who you are and having peace of mind.
85. living with less stuff and less money.
90. everything in Janet Luhr’s books! Less “stuff” & not worrying about having too little \$\$.
95. purposeful living simply with few resources and control over my life as much as possible; “downsizing.”
100. consciously exercising better stewardship of resources.
105. choosing to reduce consumption of material things and peripheral unwanted complications in life to enjoy it more and help heal the planet. Sustainability.
110. choosing to live a conservation lifestyle.
115. simplifying one’s life through reducing consumption, waste & stress. Increasing the healthy aspects such and diet & fun.
120. hey check it out. You never know how you might change.
125. living in a way that has little impact on the planet and great (positive)impact on my community; taking the needs of humanity into consideration as I make choices for my family, especially with regard to consumerism.
130. choosing quality of life over quality of possessions.
135. learning to live consciously, deliberately, richly, by reducing the habits, patterns or things that distract us from what is most meaningful to us.
140. scaling back

[More =>]

BOX IIC-28 (cont..)

145. deep abiding warm nurturing respect for people, nature and things around me. It is attention.
150. spending less money. Acquiring less “stuff”
155. dropping out of the “keeping up with” syndrome and happily doing with less.
160. living below one’s means, with purpose or on purpose.
165. enjoying life does not involve buying and spending.
170. living in harmony with earth and all living things.
175. always to have a soulful (?) life and life from the inside out.
180. living with materialism within your needs rather than wants.
185. slowing down, reducing consuming
190. simplify life as much as possible; give extra cash to charity.
195. making choices to unclutter my life in mental and physical ways.
200. having what I need and sharing what I have.
205. a desire to de-complicate many of today’s self-imposed regimens and not follow fashion.
210. looking at what is most important to me in my life and trying to center my lifestyle around it. also living in harmony with the earth as much as I can.
215. (not answered)
220. focus on meaningful activities in life; reduce consumer consumption.
225. peaceful living, living with integrity, purpose, intent joy and living lightly.
230. consuming less; being environmentally conscious, recycling everything!
235. enjoying what is most important to me—eliminating what is not essential—becoming comfortable with choices.
240. downsizing consumption; preserving the environment; regaining or sustaining spirituality & promoting gender equity.
245. creating a community of conscious care for people, the earth and spirit.
250. being conscious in my life of how my actions affect the earth, others, & my children. Also, paring down in order to have more of what matters.
255. choosing to “not buy into” values dictated by others. Rather, living by my own values.

psychological/spiritual elements. The fourth and fifth themes are social, or social-psychological, in nature.<sup>4</sup>

**Box IIC-29** displays a sample of answers to the second question, “*What are the one or two most important things you could do to significantly make your life more simple than it is right now?*” The answers given suggest four repeated themes:

- 1) get rid of things, sell things, reduce clutter
- 2) work less, consume less, travel less, commute less
- 3) increase attention to family, friends, community
- 4) increase attention to art, spirituality, nature

The first and second themes are of a pragmatic/instrumental nature and emphasize stock reduction and flow reduction, respectively. The third and fourth themes concern social, psychological, and spiritual activities.

## ***2. Who is attracted to the notion of voluntary simplicity?***

**Boxes IIC-30 and IIC-31** show aggregate results for selected items included in the survey, and compares them with comparable values for the general populations of Los Angeles County, California and the United States.

Broadly, the survey respondents were middle-aged, middle-class and highly educated.<sup>5</sup> Over two-thirds were women. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents were in their 40’s or 50’s; for Los Angeles County as a whole these age groups comprise only 28% of the population age 20 and over. Only 8% of the respondents were in their ‘20’s; for LA County the figure is 27 %.

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<sup>4</sup> I tried to estimate quantitatively the frequency with which these themes were mentioned by respondents. However, many items mentioned could be categorized in more than one way. Further, the themes themselves are subjective constructs, and a more careful content analysis might reveal different conceptual clusters. To report my results as part of the main text would be premature. That said, my estimate of the frequency with which each of the themes were mentioned, or implied, by the 52 respondents listed in Box 3 is as follows: Reducing consumption, etc: 54%; Having a rich inner life and peace of mind, etc: 33%; Living in harmony with the earth: 27%; Resisting consumerist values, etc: 23%; Spending time with family, friends, in community, etc: 12%.

<sup>5</sup> Based on past experience I expected conference attendees to be predominantly non-Latino Caucasian, and did not ask that race or ethnicity be identified on the survey form. At the conference I estimated that perhaps 5-10% of attendees were non-Caucasian or Latino.

**BOX IIC-29. MAKING YOUR LIFE MORE SIMPLE**

Here is a random sample of 36 responses (14 % of all responses) to Survey Question #2: *What do you think are the one or two most important things you could do to significantly make your life more simple than it is right now?*

5. work less (commute less) & more concentration on my art work.
10. go back to my parent's roots—Ireland--and take those of my eight (8) children who are interested with me. And interface with those who never left.
15. cut activities by 2/3
25. a stable job with a good salary, so that I can help my family and my friends/relatives/also people in need. Be a big help in saving the environment (and also protecting it.)
30. stay at home more.
35. sell business stuff (trucks & equipment); dispose of a bunch of personal "stuff".
40. my life is pretty simple right now.
45. get rid of the things in the "get rid of" storage.
55. live in a city that is planned for people (not cars) & has great public transportation; work less hours.
60. plan time to include doing fun or just nothing; grade fewer papers.
65. buy less stuff; clear out clutter
75. make my email work.
80. stop buying fast food. Bring healthy lunches to work. I would save \$\$\$!!
85. have fewer and less expensive hobbies; have a smaller house; work instead of being unemployed.
90. don't worry too much.
100. sell the R.V.
105. understand what I enjoy and what I do for the wrong reasons; scrutinize my spending habits.
110. move closer to work; to work on simplifying my own life; to help others to do the same.
115. stop eating at restaurants & drive less & grow my own food.
120. simple or simpleton. Know the difference.
125. recycle more; pay off debt; stop "charging."
140. travel less
145. stay out of malls; limit TV watching; manipulate homemaking resources appropriately so that I don't have to spend hours cleaning on the weekend; fix meals and eat at home 5 nights (at least) a week.
150. get rid of credit cards (and debts)
160. reduce clutter, junk in my home; scrutinize my spending.
165. get rid of excessive stuff; enjoy life with my kids
175. spend more time in nature and less in front of computer; volunteer more.
180. live within my means; work closer to home
185. leave work at 4:00; say no more or less
190. bike more- drive less
195. get rid of things that create clutter and aggravation for me, things that require taking care of.
200. learn to sew. Stop owning a car.
205. it's pretty simple now - but I'm willing to listen.
216. get rid of computer and television
220. prioritize my time
225. declutter, reduce.
230. stop spending money on "stuff"; reducing what I put out as waste.
240. reduce hours @ work; spending more time w/ spiritual pursuits.
245. quit my current job; use my bicycle for transportation and work at home
250. share, borrow, cut back intentionally, on stuff & search for my purpose
255. eliminate consumer debt; reduce commute time (get a job closer to home).

BOX IIC-30. Summary statistics from Voluntary Simplicity survey, with comparisons  
 [See notes and sources in Box IIC-31]

survey item	Respondents	LA County	California	USA
sex: % women	68	50	50	51
% men	32	50	50	49
% married	44	52		61
% homeowners	61			
age: mean years	46			
age: median (years)	45			
age by decade (percent):				
less than 20	1	-	-	-
20-29	8	27	25	20
30-39	21	26	25	24
40-49	31	17	18	20
50-59	27	11	12	13
60-69	10	10	10	11
70-79	2	6	7	8
80 or over	0	3	3	4
mean # people/household	2.2	3	2.9	2.7
# children <18 in household:				
0	74	65		65
1	12			
2	12			
3 or more	2			
mean hrs TV/week/respondent	6.9			31
mean # cars/household	1.8	1.7	1.3	1.4
household income				
median	\$50,000	\$37,507	\$39,072	\$37,005
mean	\$61,410			\$49,692
household savings				
median	\$5,000			
mean	\$10,490			- \$ 2,500
education (%'s)				
no high school diploma	0.4	30	23.8	19.1
high school diploma	1.6	20.7	22.2	34.4
some college	21.7	27	30.5	24.4
BA degree	31.9	14.5	15.3	14.7
graduate/professional degree	44.4	7.8	8.1	7.5
voter registration status:				
Democrat	55.7	46.2	37.8	
Republican	12.1	26.0	29.2	
Green	8.9	0.3	0.5	
Libertarian	1.2	0.3	0.4	
Peace & Freedom	0.8	0.5	0.4	
other	2.0	2.8	2.8	
decline-to-affiliate	-	9.3	9.1	
unaffiliated	14.1	-	-	-
not registered to vote	5.2	14.6	19.8	

**BOX IIC-31. SUMMARY STATISTICS: NOTES AND SOURCES**

All values listed in the “Respondents” column in Box IIC-31 were obtained from the survey response forms. Values shown in other three columns—Los Angeles County (LA), California (CA), and USA (USA) are as described below. Values are shown for 1997 unless noted otherwise.

**sex:** LA: 1990 US Census, data base C90STF3A. [venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup](http://venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup).

CA: 1990 US Census; [venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/909174476](http://venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/909174476).

USA: Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1996, table #12, p. 14. Figures for 1995.

**% married:** LA: 1990 US Census Data, Database C90STF3A, [venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/909171896](http://venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/909171896).

**age:** The mean age of heads of households in the US in 1997 was 48.6 [U.S. Census Bureau, The Official Statistics, 9/2/98, table 2 p. 5.] The median age for the whole US population in 1995 was 34 [Statistical Abstract of the US, 1995, table 13, p. 14.]

**age by decade:** LA: 1990 US Census, Database C90STF3A

[venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/909163337](http://venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/909163337). CA: [venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/909174476](http://venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/909174476).

USA: Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1996, table #16, p. 16. Figures for 1995. The breakdown of age by decade gives percents for all persons 20 or older, for LA, CA and USA. The percents shown for Respondents are for all respondents; only 1% were less than age 20, so the other values don't change when they are adjusted to show percents of all respondents 20 or older.

**mean # people/household:** LA: State & Metro Area Data Book, 1997-98, pp. 75, 130.

CA, USA: California Statistical Abstract 1997, p 182. Figures for 1996.

**# children < 18 in household:** LA: US Census Database: [venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/909170682](http://venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/909170682).

US: Statistical Abstract of the US, 1995. Table 66, p. 58. Figures for 1994.

**mean hrs TV/week/respondent:** USA: Statistical Abstract of the US, 1997, table 887, p. 565.

**mean # cars/household:** LA, USA: 1997 California Statistical Abstract, p. 182, 187.

**household income:** USA: US Census Bureau, The Official Statistics, Sep. 2, 1998. Table 2, p. 5. (median and mean). CA & LA: US Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, P60-197, Table C, p. xiii. Money income in the US. For CA, 1995-1996 moving average = \$38,457. To adjust 95-96 figures to be comparable to the respondent's 1997 figures I multiplied each value by an estimated consumer price index of 1.5. by an estimated cpi of 1.016, to get \$39,034. For LA, 1995-96 moving average = \$36,917, x 1.015 = \$37,470. The respondents' figures are directly comparable with those for LA County, but comparison of these figures with those of the US, and to a lesser extent of CA, requires cost-of-living adjustments. The American Chamber of Commerce Research Associates (ACCRA) COL for the metropolitan LA region for 1996 was 1.197. This means that the US figures, for example, should be increased by 19.6% to be comparable with the LA and respondents' figures: \$37,005 x 1.197 = \$44,294. However, the ACCRA index is based on consumption patterns of fifth quintile, “middle management” households, so it may be a bit high.

**HH savings:** USA: figures for 1996: savings/HH = \$246.6 bill (Statistical Abstract of the US, 1997, table 704, p. 455) / 98.751 HH in US (California Statistical Abstract 1997, section P p. 182) ~ \$2500.

**education:** LA: [venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/909162909](http://venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/909162909).

CA: [venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/909174476](http://venus.census.gov/cdrom/lookup/909174476). USA: Statistical Abstract of the USA, 1995. p. 158, table 240.

**party affiliation:** LA and CA: California Statistical Abstract, Nov. 1997, Section O. Percents shown are for the total population eligible to vote. On the survey form I used the term “unaffiliated” rather than the correct term “decline-to-affiliate.” This may have been misleading, and compromises the value of these figures.

Fully 44% of respondents had graduate or professional degrees, compared with 8% for the general population.

Seventy-four percent of respondents had no children under age 18 as part of their household. Either they have not been parents, or their children are living elsewhere. The comparable figure for LA county is 65%. The average household size--2.2 persons per household--is also notably smaller than elsewhere.

About 56 % of respondents were Democrats, compared with 46% for LA County. About 9% of respondents were members of the Green Party, well in excess of their representation among voters in general but still limited. Only about 12% of respondents were Republicans, less than half their LA County proportion.

Respondents spend only 7 hrs/week watching TV, far less than the mean of 31 hrs/week for all Americans. On the other hand, the number of cars per household owned by respondents is slightly *higher* than the American average.<sup>6</sup>

Median household income of the respondents in 1997 was \$50,000. This is higher than that of the general population, which in LA County was about \$37,000. Is this result consistent with participation in a movement that stresses lower consumption, simpler life styles, and more attention to spiritual than material pursuits? It depends. **IIC-32** shows a breakdown of income by education and age, for the respondents and for the United States as a whole. We see in Table 1 that the mean and median household incomes of the respondents are quite a bit *lower* than the household incomes of other Americans of equivalent education. Thus one interpretation might be that the respondents have chosen to live at levels of income lower than those they would otherwise be able to command, albeit at levels still higher than average. Of course, it is possible that the lower levels of income reflect real differences in abilities, or at least marketable skills, despite the formal equivalence of educational background.

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<sup>6</sup> All but a very few respondents live in Los Angeles County, where automobiles are a practical necessity.

BOX IIC-32. HOUSEHOLD INCOME BY EDUCATION AND AGE

Table 1. Income by education (dollars)

	Respondents		United States - 1997	
	median	mean	median	mean
BA	43,000	54,112	59,048	71,521
MA		69,000	68,115	82,955
Prof. degree			92,228	126,778

Table 2. Income by age (dollars)

Age	Respondents		United States - 1997	
	median	mean	median	mean
15-24	12,000	14,000	22,583	29,026
25-34	35,000	42,900	38,174	45,099
35-44	60,000	64,400	46,359	57,036
45-54	50,000	61,900	51,875	65,286
55-64	55,000	59,000	41,356	57,396

[Figures for the United States: U.S. Census Bureau, The Official Statistics, 9/2/98, table 2, p. 5.]

Note: The figures shown are not adjusted to account for cost-of-living differences between the LA metropolitan region and the average for the US. As noted in Box IIC-31, the ACCRA cost-of-living index for LA is 1.197. Adjusting figures for the US upward by this amount (19.7%) to allow for comparability would reinforce the pattern described in the text in which respondents have lower household incomes than do persons of comparable educational level. However, the caveats noted in Box IIC-31 remain.

Table 2 in Box IIC-32 shows that some of the difference in incomes between respondents and Americans at large could be due to the fact that the mean age of the respondents is higher than the mean for the country as a whole. For both groups persons under 35 have lower incomes than those over 35.

The results in Table 1 show that respondents appear to be putting a larger share of their earnings into savings than are Americans overall. However, this result could also be an artifact of differences in the age distribution of the two groups.

**Box IIC-33** displays the occupations given by a random sample of 102 (40%) of the 255 respondents. Note the high proportion of respondents involved in education (~27% of the sample) and medical services (~13%), and services in general. Few respondents hold high-tech jobs and almost none hold blue-collar jobs.

**Box IIC-34** suggests that the financial aspirations of respondents might be characterized as moderate to moderately high in comparison with typical American household incomes. At the peak of their earning powers the respondents aspire to mean household incomes of somewhat more than \$70,000/year. In 1997 about 30% of all U.S. households with heads of age 45-54 had incomes of \$75,000 or more. It appears that a majority of survey respondents aspire to place within the top 30% of households of their own age cohort, at least for some period.<sup>7</sup>

As for retirement, respondents hope to be able to have secured enough savings, or be the beneficiary of sufficient other incomes, to have household incomes of about \$40,000/year. Given that their current median incomes are about \$50,000 a year, their retirement goals might be thought of as roughly equivalent to their current level of consumption, minus expenditures on kids, commuting, and mortgages. A retirement income of \$40,000 per year is equivalent to ownership or entitlement assets of about \$600,000, assuming a 6.5% return on investment.

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<sup>7</sup> Are these figures consistent with an ethic of voluntary simplicity? It's difficult to say without data on life-cycle income patterns. It's possible that some respondents, now in their late fifties, are aspiring towards household incomes of \$70,000 for only the final few years of a worklife that otherwise generated far lower incomes. Further, cost-of-living adjustments using the ACCRA index of 1.196 would reduce the share of respondents aspiring to place within the top 30% from a majority to about 36%.

**BOX IIC-33. RESPONDENT OCCUPATIONS**

Shown are 101 verbatim responses (40% of all responses), selected at random.

1. library assistant
3. student
5. accountant-artist
7. clinical social worker
10. RN-retired
12. scholar assistant
15. college teacher
17. registered nurse
20. special education assistant
22. teacher
25. full-time college student
27. organizer
30. retired teacher
32. public relations
35. self-employed: cleaning business
37. trainer
40. paralegal/songwriter
42. college student
45. health educator
47. systems analyst
50. high school teacher
52. journalist
55. computer programmer
57. retired aerospace engineer
60. high school teacher
62. physician
65. teacher
67. urban planner
70. chemist
72. register nurse - mental health
75. planner for LA county
77. medical assistant
80. quality assurance coordinator
82. marketing communications manager
85. film editor
87. retired - toxins at work (defense)
90. homemaker
92. manager
95. retired teacher
97. actuary
100. retired professor of plastic surgery
102. finance computer systems analyst
105. writer
107. speaker/entertainer
110. operations manager
112. housewife
115. social work: mentoring juvenile offenders
117. college geography teacher
120. mail carrier

122. mother
125. writer
127. environmental nonprofit administrator
130. elementary school teacher
131. teacher
135. former health program administrator
137. elementary school teacher
140. agent
142. engineer
145. office worker
147. psychotherapist
150. grad student: art history
152. body/mind therapist
155. at home mom
157. administrative assistant
160. high school science teacher
162. home school teacher
165. retired homemaker
167. retired elementary school teacher
173. R.N.
172. senior financial manager
175. writer/entrepreneur
177. coach
180. teacher
182. environmental activist
185. school counselor
187. administrative assistant
190. investor
192. actor, writer
195. asst. food service director: school district
197. designer/teacher/artist
200. unemployed; trying to become a teacher
202. student
205. retired engineer
207. high school student
210. mother at home; social worker
212. social worker
216. teacher (substitute)
217. environmental planning & design assistant
220. paralegal
222. paralegal
225. stay home mom/childbirth educator
227. bank teller
230. Americorp-mentor to teens
232. counselor/teacher
235. writer
237. real estate entrepreneur
240. sociologist
242. retired
245. research audiologist
247. counselor for disabled
250. stay at home mom
252. occupational therapist
255. computer security

**BOX IIC-34. Survey Responses Concerning Income and Savings**  
 [dollars; see Box IIC-27 for the wording of the questions]

	median	adjusted mean	mean
Table 1.			
household income	50,000	54,520	61,410
household savings	5,000	6,036	10,490
max. household income anticipated	70,000	72,840	89,210
anticipated retirement income	40,000	37,630	56,490

Table 2. How much to			
just get by	33,500	33,330	37,190
live in reasonable comfort	50,000	54,990	60,470
too much	100,000	119,200	169,800

Table 3. How much for			
bottom 20%	30,000	29,120	30,560
middle 20%	55,000	51,350	54,190
top 20%	90,000	91,340	98,620

percentage difference:	-10.4%	-12.6%	-17.8%
(Panel 3 - Panel 2) / Panel 2	10.0%	-6.6%	-10.4%
	-10.0%	-23.4%	-41.9%

The adjusted mean is determined by computing the interquartile range, multiplying this value by 1.5, adding this product to the upper quartile to get an upper boundary and subtracting it from the lower quartile to get a lower boundary, and deleting as outliers all sample values that lie above or below these new boundaries.

The current and anticipated incomes of the respondents show wide variances, as displayed in **IIC-35**. Although median household income is \$50,000, fully 25% of respondents have incomes above \$78,000.

### ***3. Opinions about income, consumption, growth and equity***

#### ***a. How much is enough?***

The question “how much is enough?” is perhaps the central question of the entire debate over economic growth, ecological integrity and social equity. Question IV-I follows Roper-Starch (1995) and divides the question into three parts, as shown on the survey form in Box IIC-27.<sup>8</sup> The responses, shown in Box IIC-35, table 2, suggest that a majority of respondents believe that \$33,500 is enough, or more than enough, for a family of four to “just get by” on; that \$50,000 is enough, or more than enough, for them to “live in reasonable comfort and security;” and that \$100,000 or more is “much more than enough,” or “too much.”

The distribution of responses is shown in **IIC-36**. We see that variance is least for “get by,” more for “comfort” and greatest for “too much.”<sup>9</sup>

A quarter of respondents said that \$40,000 or more is necessary to “just get by,” that \$70,000 or more is needed to live in “reasonable comfort and security,” and that household income would have to reach \$170,000 before qualifying as “much more than enough”.

The median level of \$50,000 felt to be needed for “reasonable comfort and security” is precisely the median level of the respondents’ own current household incomes, as shown in Box IIC-30. Fourteen percent of respondents currently have incomes of \$100,000 or more, the median

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<sup>8</sup> *Roper Reports*, 1995. The data displayed was taken from Andrew Hacker, 1995, *Money: Who has how much and why*, pp 39-40

<sup>9</sup> The standard deviations for the three categories “get by,” “comfort” and “too much” are \$14K, \$27K and \$110K, respectively. The interquartile ranges for these categories are \$15K, 30K and \$96K. These values exclude outliers of \$100K or more for “get by,” \$200K or more for “comfort” and \$1 million or more for “too much”.

**BOX IIC-35. Current income, maximum anticipated income, and anticipated retirement income**

The three charts below show responses to questions IV.2, IV.4 and IV.6 of the survey, as displayed in Box IIC-27. Values on the horizontal axes are in thousands of dollars. The vertical axes show the percent of respondents who gave answers in the ranges shown on the horizontal axes.

Figure 1. Income of respondents, 1997

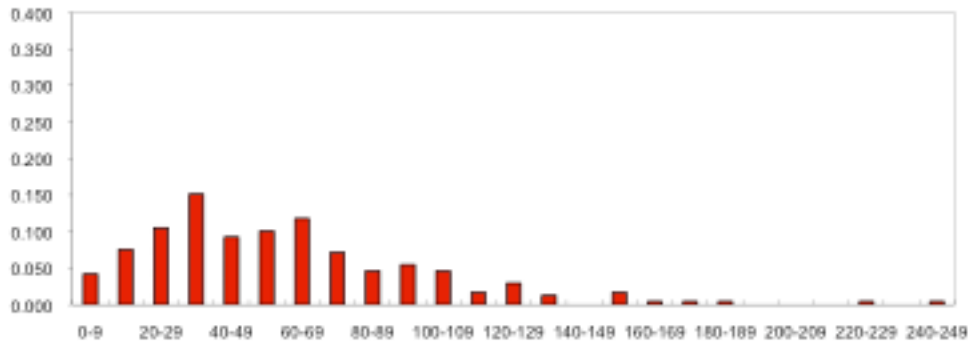


Figure 2. Maximum household income anticipated

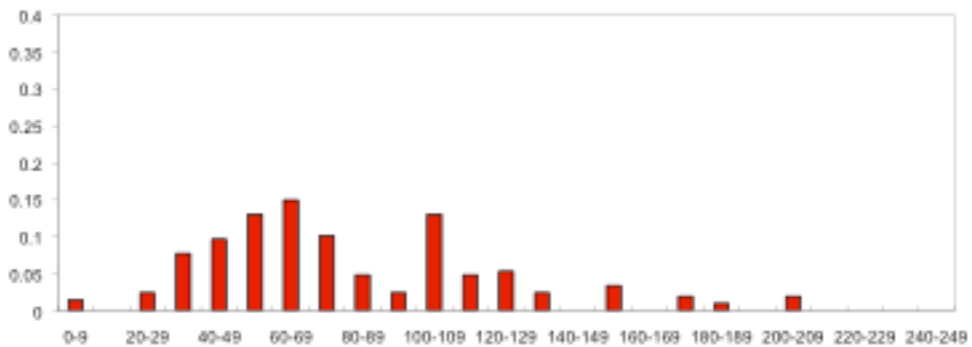
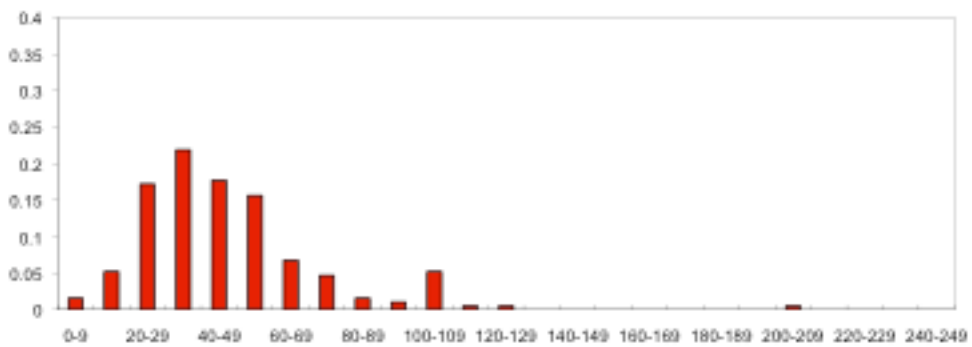


Figure 3. Anticipated retirement income



**BOX IIC-36. INCOMES NEEDED TO SUPPORT DIFFERENT LIFE-STYLES**

The three charts below show responses to Question IV.1 of the survey, as displayed in Box IIC-27. Values on the horizontal axes are in thousands of dollars. The vertical axes show the percent of respondents who gave answers in the ranges shown on the horizontal axes.

Figure 1. "JUST ENOUGH TO GET BY"

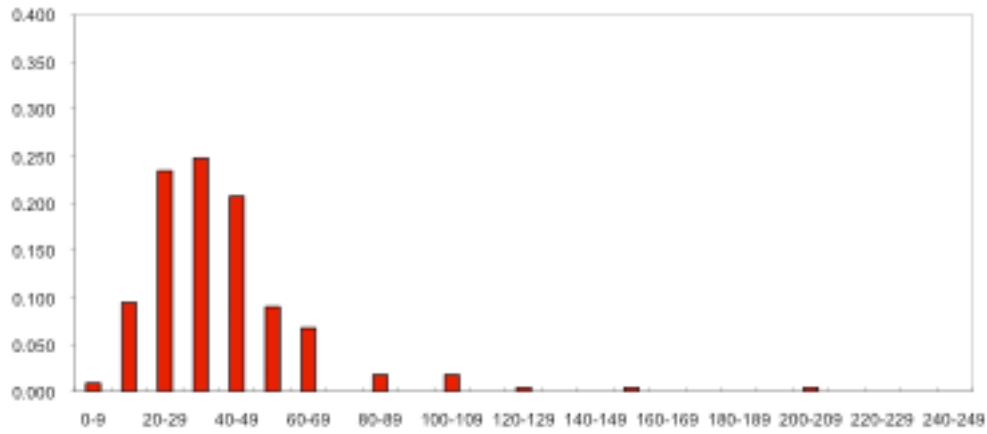


Figure 2. "ENOUGH TO LIVE IN REASONABLE COMFORT AND SECURITY"

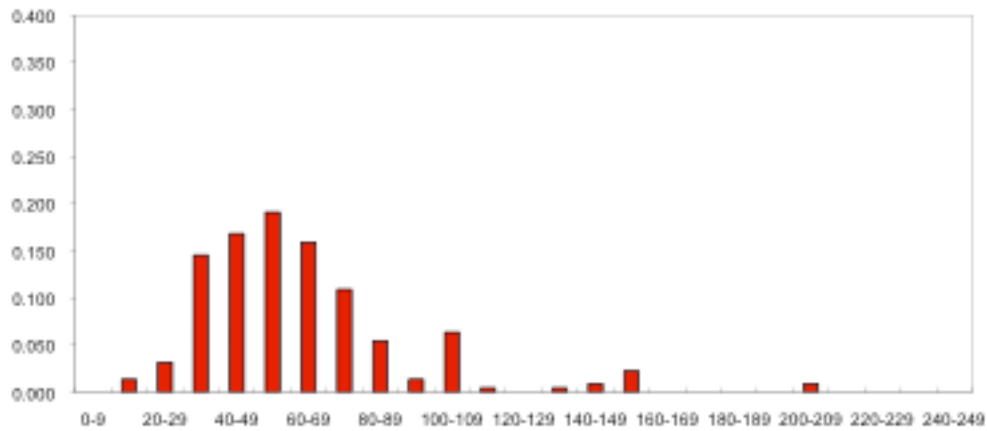
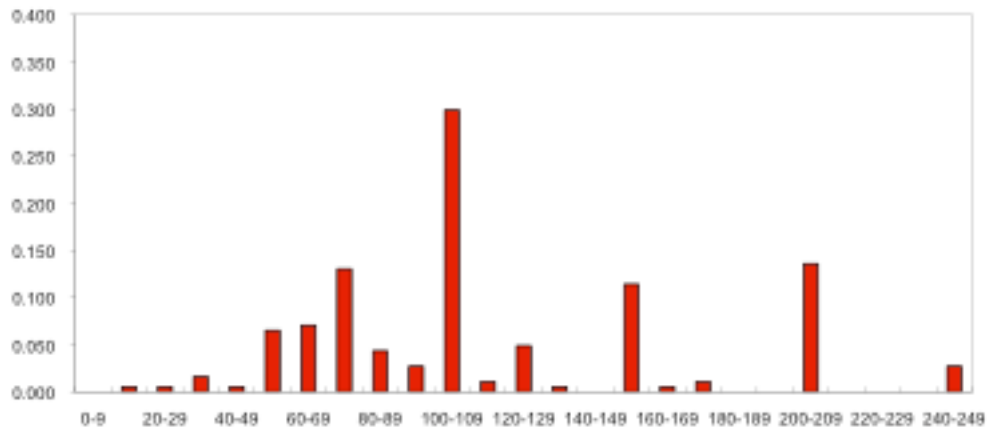


Figure 3. "MUCH MORE THAN ENOUGH"



level judged to be “too much.” Fully 33% of respondents aspire to have incomes of \$100,000 or more at some time in the future.<sup>10</sup>

It might be expected that attendees at a major conference on “Building the Voluntary Simplicity Movement” would differ from the general public in that the levels of income they believe are “enough” would be lower, perhaps significantly lower, than the levels that the general public believes are enough. **IIC-37** compares the Survey results with results from a 1995 Roper Starch poll of the general public. We see that the Survey respondents and the general public do not appear to differ much in their assessment of the incomes needed to “just get by,” and to “live in reasonable comfort and security.”<sup>11</sup> However, the Survey question asked for the income needed to support “a family of four, including two children of high school age,” while the Roper Starch poll asked about “you and your family.” Since a majority of American households include fewer than four people, it is reasonable to suspect that had the question as worded in the Simplicity Survey been asked of the Roper sample, the responses regarding needed levels of income might have been higher.

In its third question the Roper Starch poll asked for the level of income needed “to fulfill all your Dreams” whereas the Simplicity Survey asked for the level of income that respondents considered to be “much more than enough” or “too much.” Median responses were both just about \$100,000. With the adjustments noted in IIC-37, and the caveat about household size noted above, it’s clear that the median response given by the Survey respondents is lower than that given by the Roper Starch sample, although perhaps not greatly so. In comparison with responses

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<sup>10</sup> The distribution of maximum anticipated incomes shown in Box IIC-35 is bimodal. One mode centers on incomes of about \$60,000 and the other—actually more of a spike—is found at \$100,000. This pattern might reflect the hold that the cultural image of the “\$100,000 life” has on many Americans, apparently including a large minority of participants at the Voluntary Simplicity conference. Alternatively, it might be an artifact of habitation patterns: persons who expect to be living alone might aspire to incomes near \$60,000, while those who expect to be living as a couple could aspire to twice that amount, with little significant difference in personal earning status.

<sup>11</sup> If the ACCRA index overstates the cost-of-living then it could be that Survey respondents actually believe that *higher* incomes are necessary to “just get by” and to “live in comfort,” than do Americans in general.

**BOX IIC-37. LIFE-STYLE INCOME COMPARISONS**

Roper Starch, 1995	Survey Respondents, 1998
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How much would you and your family need to...

Just Get By

percents:

<=\$20,000	26	19
\$20,001 - \$35,000	45	33
\$35,001-\$50,000	15	36
over \$50,000	14	12
Get-by median:	\$25,500	\$33,500

Adjusted comparison:\*

Roper	Respondents
\$31,600	\$33,500

Live in Reasonable Comfort?

<=\$35,000	37	12
\$35,001-\$50,000	21	41
\$50,001-\$70,000	25	22
over \$70,000	17	25
Comfort median:	\$41,100	\$50,000

\$51,000	\$50,000
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Fulfill all your Dreams? / Much more than enough?

under \$50,000	12	8.5
\$50,001-\$100,000	28	60
\$100,001-\$200,000	28	19
\$200,001-\$1 million	14	12
over \$1 million	18	0.5
Dreams median	\$102,000	\$100,000

\$126,500	\$100,000
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Sources: Data from the Roper Starch poll are taken from Hacker (1997).  
See Box 2 for the wording of the questions used in the Simplicity survey.

\*I adjusted the 1995 Roper figures upwards to make them more comparable with the respondents' 1998 figures, by two values. One was a consumer price index of  $(1.012)^3 = 1.036$ . The other was the ACCRA cost-of-living index of 1.197 noted in Box IIC-31. Together these gave an index of  $1.036 \times 1.197 = 1.240$ . However, the ACCRA index may overstate the differential, especially for the middle and lower quintiles. On the other hand, the different wording ("you and your family" vs. "household of four...") could have elicited higher income responses from the Survey participants, as noted in the text.

to the Survey, which were strongly centered near the modal value of \$100,000, responses to the Roper poll were skewed to the upper end. Thus in the Roper poll 32% of the general public said that incomes of \$200,000 or more would be necessary to fulfill all their dreams, whereas only 12% of respondents to the Survey said that an income in excess of \$200,000 was *not* “too much.”

The question “how much is enough?” was addressed a second time, with heavier contextual loading, in Question V of the Simplicity Survey. This question first provided current income figures for bottom, middle and top quintile United States households, and then asked for the income levels that respondents believed were “consistent with sustainability and fairness, and might be aspired to, over the coming century, as goals for our country.” Median and mean responses are shown in IIC-34 and the distributions of responses are displayed in **IIC-38**.<sup>12</sup>

The responses are close to the income thresholds that persons offered in response to Question IV.1. The median level believed to be fair, sustainable and practicable for the “bottom 20%” of households (\$30,000) is 10% less than the level given in Question IV needed to “just get by” (\$33,500). The median level given for the “middle 20%” of households (\$55,000) is 10% greater than the level given for “reasonable comfort and security” (\$50,000). And the level given for the “top 20%” (\$90,000) is 10% less than the level that is considered “more than enough” (\$100,000).

While the median household income levels among parallel income categories given in response to Questions V.1 and V are similar, an important difference shows when we consider *mean* levels. In Table 3 of IIC-34, we see that the mean level given as fair, sustainable and practicable for the “top 20%” of households (\$98,600) is 42% less than the mean of the incomes considered to be “too much” (\$169,800). However, the differences between the means for the “bottom 20%” and the level needed to “just get by,” and between the means for the “middle 20%”

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<sup>12</sup> The current distributions of income by age of householder were calculated using tables F1, F2 and F3, “Money income received by families”, in *Money Income in the United States*, U.S. Bureau of the Census, for 1996. See web site [http://ferret.bis.census.gov/cgi-bin/ferret.\[c\]](http://ferret.bis.census.gov/cgi-bin/ferret.[c])

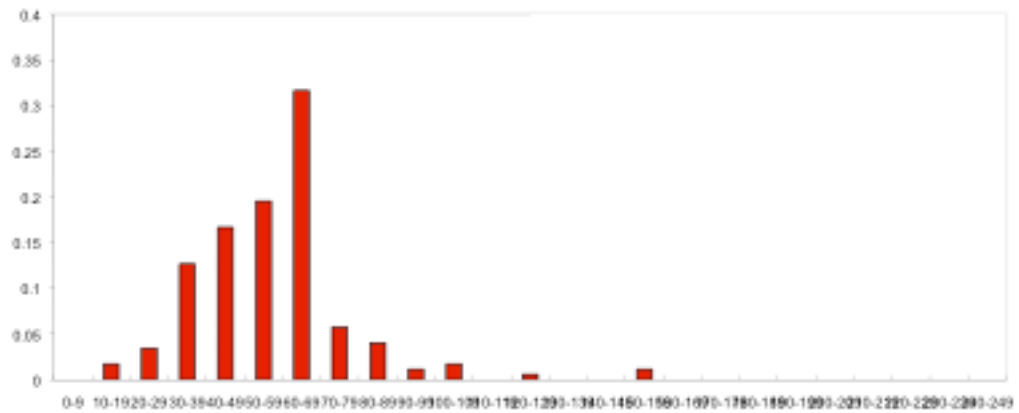
**BOX II-C-38. Sustainable and Fair Annual Average Incomes**

The three charts below show responses to Question V of the Survey, as displayed in Box II-C-27. Values on the horizontal axes are in thousands of dollars. The vertical axes show the percent of respondents who gave answers in the ranges shown on the horizontal axes.

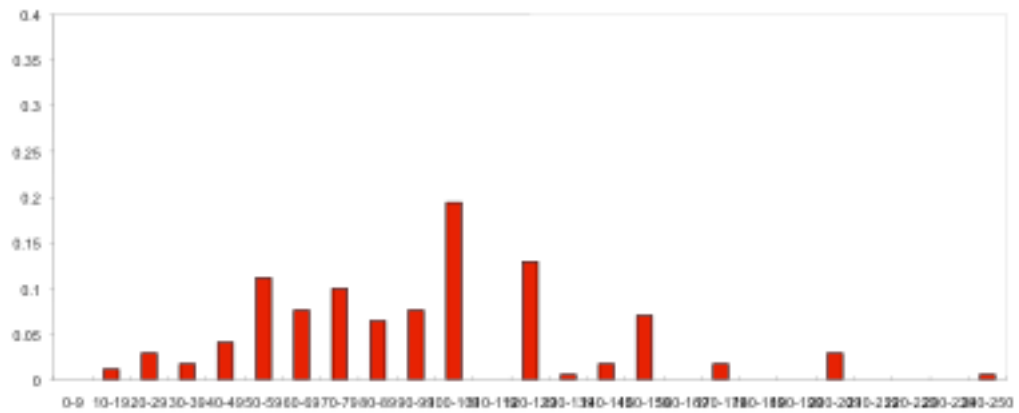
**Figure 1. Bottom 20% of Households**



**Figure 2. Middle 20% of households**



**Figure 3. Top 20% of Households**



and the level needed for “comfort and security,” are proportionately much less. These results suggest that when constraints of equity, sustainability and practicability are taken into account, respondents will adjust their earlier, unconstrained answers by reducing the highest incomes received by the households in the highest income sector.

In order to achieve the levels that respondents believe are fair, sustainable and practicable, the average incomes of the lowest 20% of families would need to increase by 66% (\$18,100 to \$30,000), while those of the highest 20% of families would decrease by 39% (\$147,000 to \$90,000). Average incomes of the middle 20% would stabilize at somewhat less than their present levels (\$58,000 to \$50,000).

The ratio between the highest and lowest quintiles, the “80/20” ratio, is a standard measure of income inequality. Survey respondents believe that an 80/20 ratio of \$90,000/\$30,000, or 3, is fair, sustainable and practicable for the United States. A comparison with the values shown in Box IIB-1 of these notes shows that at the present time an 80/20 near 3 exists in only one country in the world, the Slovak Republic (80/20 = 2.9), and that only three countries in the world (out of 108 for which statistics exist) have 80/20 ratios below 4<sup>13</sup>. The mean 80/20 ratio for the industrial democracies is today about 6.5. The United States has an 80/20 ratio of 8, the highest of the industrial democracies. **IIC-39** shows the range of 80/20 ratios imputed by survey respondents. We see that the survey responses of fully 95% of respondents generate 80/20 ratios of less than 6.5.

*b. Economic growth*

Question VI of the Survey attempted to assess attitudes about long term economic growth. The question displayed a diagram showing per capita GDP growth in the United States for the 45-year period 1950-1995, and asked respondents to sketch the growth trajectory they

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<sup>13</sup> These are Ukraine (3.7), Latvia (3.8), and Hungary (3.9)

**BOX II-C-39. 80/20 RATIOS**

The table and chart show the ratios of the values given by respondents for the fifth quintile (top 20%) of families and the first quintile (bottom 20%) in response to Question V of the survey. That question asked respondents to give the level of income that they believed would be "consistent with sustainability and fairness, and might be aspired to, over the coming century, as goals for our country."

Table 1

80/20 ratio	count	percent
1-1.4	14	8.3
1.5-1.9	13	7.7
2-2.4	26	15.4
2.5-2.9	24	14.2
3-3.4	37	21.9
3.5-3.9	9	5.3
4-4.4	20	11.8
4.5-4.9	5	3.0
5-5.4	7	4.1
5.5-5.9	1	0.6
6-6.4	4	2.4
6.5-6.9	2	1.2
7-7.4	1	0.6
7.5-7.9	2	1.2
8-8.4	2	1.2
8.5-8.9	1	0.6
9-9.4	0	0.0
9.5-9.9	0	0.0
10-10.4	1	0.6
total	169	100.0

Figure 1



believe is “desirable and sustainable” for the coming 55-year period, 1995-2050. The results are shown in **IIC-40**. Forty-six percent of respondents sketched a trajectory of positive growth, with a mean growth rate of 0.8%. Twenty-four percent drew a flat line from 1995 to 2050. Twenty-nine percent showed declining per capita GDP, with a mean growth rate of -1.0%.

These average values don’t capture some of the variations in the growth trajectories sketched by respondents, in particular those that combine periods of initial growth or decline with subsequent stability. A sample of growth trajectories is shown in **IIC-41**. In Table 3 of IIC-40 we see that 63% of respondents believe that it is desirable to attain zero economic growth by 2050. Of these, 35% would do so after an initial period of positive growth, 27% would do so after an initial period of negative growth, and 38% would move to zero growth more or less immediately.

It is difficult to know how the respondents interpreted their own responses. A recession is two successive quarters of negative economic growth, and a depression is a prolonged recession. Thus one interpretation of the survey results shown in Table 1 of IIC-40 would be that nearly 30% of respondents believe that a 55-year national depression, over which time personal incomes shrink by an average of 42%, is desirable, presumably because at the end of that period economic output will have at last attained a sustainable level.

The 24% of respondents who advocated zero economic growth from 1995 on have the experience of the period 1984-1996, during which most household incomes did not grow, as a reference case for short-term practicability. Of course, zero economic growth as a permanent condition, beginning soon, would present far greater challenges, particularly regarding distributional equity.

The trajectory of slow positive growth advocated by 47% of respondents appears less socially and politically challenging. However, the mean growth rate of 0.8% would still be considered unacceptably low by most Americans at the present time.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The Clinton administration set a goal for average annual per capita GDP growth of 2.2%.

**BOX IIC-40. Opinions about future economic growth**

The values shown were given in response to Question VI of the survey, shown in Box IIC-27.

**Table 1.**

	number	percent	mean per capita GDP in 2050	mean annual growth rate, '95 to '50 (%)
participants who sketched:				
positive growth	62	46	\$46,000	0.77
no growth	33	25	\$28,000	0
negative growth	39	29	\$16,000	-1.01

**Table 2.**

	number	percent	example in Box IIC-41 [form #]
participants who sketched:			
constantly positive growth	29	26	137
initially positive growth, slowing to zero growth by 2050	25	22	201
constantly zero growth	27	24	29
initially negative growth, "slowing" to zero growth by 2050	19	17	169
constantly negative growth	12	11	82

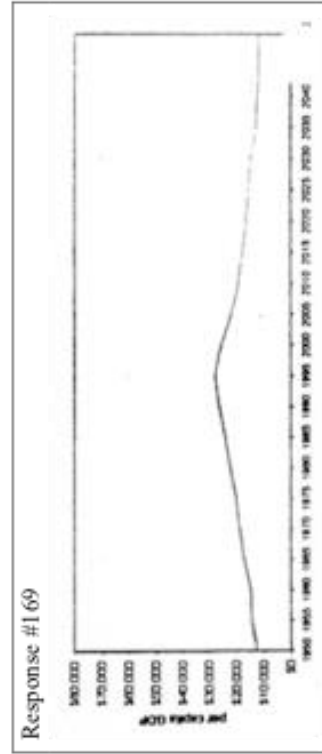
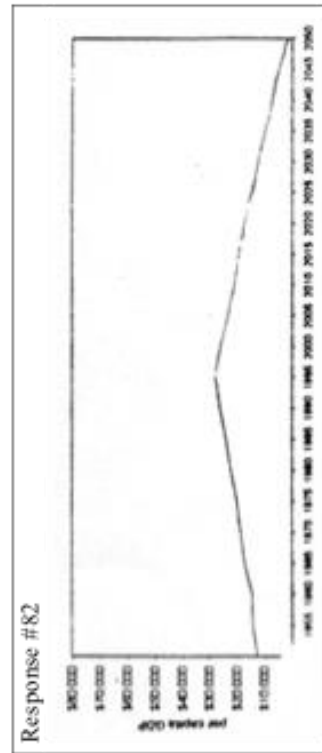
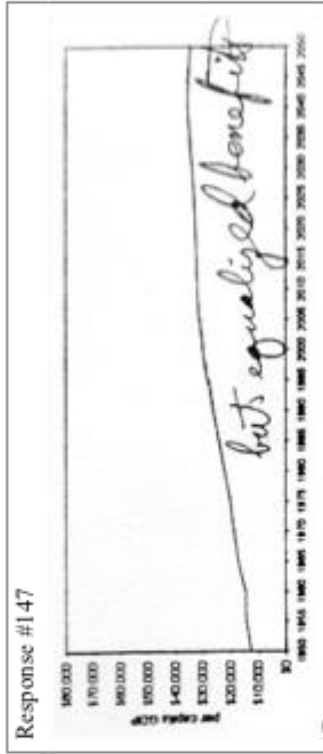
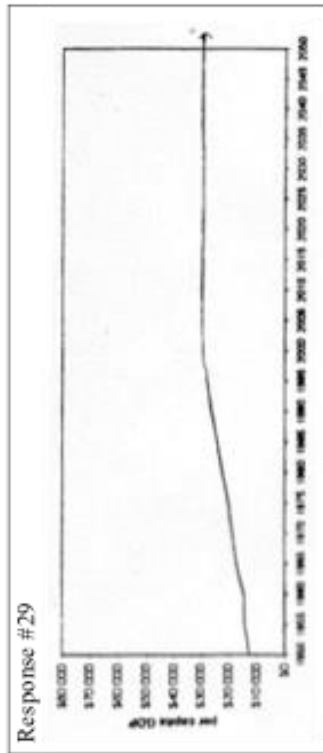
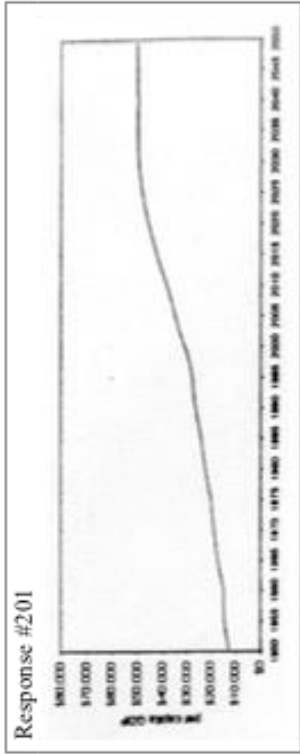
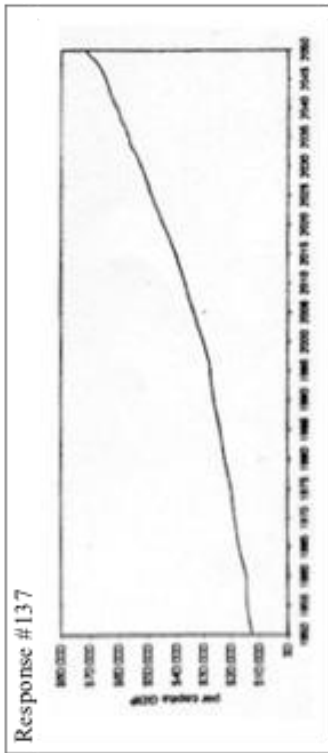
**Table 3.**

	number	percent
participants who sketched zero growth by 2050 [ = the sum of the middle three categories shown in 14b.]	71	63

[note: some trajectories which showed net positive or negative growth over the 55-year period of interest are not described even by the finer categories used in Table 2, and so are not included here. This accounts for the discrepancies between Table 1 and Table 2.]

**BOX IIC-41 Growth Trajectories, 1950-2050**

These are examples of responses to Question VI, asking participants to sketch their vision of "desirable and achievable" economic growth.



The growth trajectory that is quantitatively most consistent with the “fair, sustainable and practicable” levels of household income specified in response to Question V, and displayed in IIC-34, table a, is one of zero, or perhaps slightly negative, economic growth. If we use the three quintile values given in Question V and its responses to estimate plausible values for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quintiles, we can estimate relative total GDP under present and proposed conditions. We can then calculate the rate of growth that would be necessary to arrive at the proposed total GDP level over the 55-year period shown in Question VI. This rate of growth is about  $-.0032/\text{year}$ , which is one-third of the way between the growth rate of zero given by 25% of respondents and the mean negative growth rate of  $-.01/\text{yr}$  given by 29% of respondents.<sup>15</sup> If we use the 100-year time frame suggested in Question V, the preferred rate of economic growth is essentially zero.

### ***II.C.3.d. Multivariate Analysis of Survey Results***

#### 1. DESIGN OF THE ANALYSIS

The results reported above take the 255 respondents as a single sample. However, significant differences of opinion might exist among respondents according to their age, sex, level of education and other demographic factors, and according to other values, attitudes and opinions they hold concerning the topics at hand.

I conducted a series of multiple regression analyses in order to explore possible influences of such factors on the answers given to questions asked in the survey. Multiple regression is necessary because it enables the influence of one factor to be measured while controlling for the influence of other factors.

The key survey results that I wanted to analyze further, here called the outcome variables, are:

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<sup>15</sup> Using values given for the 1st, 3rd and 5th quintile given in the prefatory statement in Question V, we estimate plausible current household income levels for each quintile (in thousands of dollars) of 18, 24, 50, 89 and 147. Using similar proportions applied to the responses to Question V, we estimate plausible desired levels of 30, 40, 50, 70 and 90. These values give relative total GDP values of 345 (present) and 280 (desired). Using  $280 = 345 (1+r)^{55}$ , we calculate  $r = -.0032$ .

1. The levels of income that respondents felt were currently needed to support the three life-style categories: “just get by,” “reasonable comfort and security” and “too much.”
2. The levels of income that would be appropriate for the bottom, middle and top household income quintiles in a world where fairness and sustainability were taken into account.
3. The rate of economic growth over the period 1995-2050 that respondents thought was desirable and achievable.

To shed further light on attitudes towards income and consumption I also analyzed:

4. The maximum annual household income that respondents expect to receive, at any time.
5. The level of income that respondents expect to be living on after they retire.

To explore further the correlates of attitudes concerning economic inequality, I analyzed two constructed outcome variables:

6. The ratio of the income levels given as “too much” and as “just enough to get by.”
7. The ratio of the incomes given for the top 20% and bottom 20% of households, in a world in which fairness and sustainability were taken into account.

Finally, I wanted to explore the way real-life behavior concerning income and consumption might correlate with attitudes about these, and about economic inequality. For this analysis the outcome variables were:

8. Current household income.
9. Amount saved last year.

For the nine outcome variables just listed I tested the influence exerted by nine explanatory variables. Five of these were demographic variables:

1. Age of respondent.
2. Sex of respondent.
3. Level of formal education of the respondent.
4. Current household income of the respondent.
5. Political party affiliation of the respondent.

Four explanatory variables were attitudinal variables:

6. The levels of income that respondents felt were needed to support the three

life-style categories: “just get by,” “reasonable comfort and security” and “too much.”

7. The ratio of the income levels given as “toomuch” and as “just enough to get by.”
8. The ratio of the incomes given for the top 20% and bottom 20% of households, in a world in which fairness and sustainability were taken into account.
9. The rate of economic growth over the next 55 years that respondents thought was desirable and achievable.

In total the exercise consisted of 36 regression equations using 9 outcome variables and 9 explanatory variables. Details of the construction and coding of the outcome and explanatory variables are described in **IIC-42**. The regression equations are shown in **IIC-43**. Six complete sets of regression results are shown in **IIC-44**, as examples.

The exercise generated 428 correlation coefficients. Of these, 151 were judged to be invalid or otherwise unuseful.<sup>16</sup> Of the remaining 277, 37 were found to be statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. These are listed in **IIC-45**.

## 2. RESULTS

The most striking finding of the multiple regression analysis was the paucity of significant results. Of those results that were significant, few appear to be of much consequence.

In this section we review the significant results, such as there were. These are shown in IIC-45 and displayed schematically in **IIC-46** and **IIC-47**.

### *i. Levels of income needed to support the three life-style categories*

The level of income that respondents felt was necessary for a family of four to “just get by” correlated negatively with the age of the respondent. The needed level of income declined by about \$350 for every year older the respondent was. For example, if the mean value given by

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<sup>16</sup> Most of these discarded coefficients were those associated with the political party variables. As noted, the wording of the survey questions concerning political parties was confusing; further, the sample size of parties other than Democrats and Republicans was small, and respondents identifying with the small parties accounted for a large number of outlier values. For these reasons I don’t consider the regression results for the parties in these notes.

**BOX IIC-42. Names, definitions, units and codes of variables used in the regression analysis**

variable	name	definition	units / codes	survey question #
1	Married	the respondent is married	[married = 1; not = 0]	II-1
2	Homeowner	the respondent is a homeowner	[owner = 1; not = 0]	II-2
3	People	# of people in HH	number	II-3
4	Children	# of children < 18 in HH	number	II-4
5	Cars	# of cars in HH	number	II-5
6	TV	# of hours of TV watched	number	II-6
7	Age	age of respondent	years	III-1
8	Sex	sex of respondent	[male = 1, female = 0]	III-1
9	HS2	highest level = HS diploma	[HS2 = 1; other = 0]	III-3
10	somecoll	highest level = some college	[somecoll = 1; other = 0]	“
11	BA	highest level = BA degree	[BA = 1; other = 0]	“
12	[Reference variable: highest level = professional degree]			“
13	Rep	Republican	[Rep = 1; other = 0]	III-4
14	Party2	Green + Peace & Freedom	[Party2 = 1; other = 0]	“
15	Libert	Libertarian	[Libert = 1; other = 0]	“
16	Party3	Other + unaffiliated + not reg'd	[Party3 = 1; other = 0]	“
17	[Reference variable: Democrat]			“
18	Getby	HH income need to just get by	thousand dollars	IV-1a
19	Comfort	HH income need to live in reasonable comfort	“	IV-1b
20	Toomuch	HH income that is much more than enough	“	IV-1c
21	Income	annual HH income	“	IV-2
22	Savings	annual HH savings	“	IV-3
23	Max	maximum HH income expected	“	IV-4
24	Retire	expected HH income at retirement	“	IV-5
25	Q1	“fair & sustainable” income for lowest 20%	“	V
26	Q3	“fair & sustainable” income for middle 20%	“	V
27	Q5	“fair & sustainable income for top 20%	“	V
28	2050	per capita US GDP projected by 2050	“	VI
29	inequality	Q5/Q1	ratio	--
30	rich/poor	Toomuch/Getby	ratio	--

**BOX IIC-43. REGRESSION EQUATIONS**

Here are the outcome and explanatory variables used in the 36 multiple regression equations of this study. The definitions and coding of the variables are shown in IIC-42.

<b>Regression Equation Number</b>	<b>Outcome Variable</b>	<b>Explanatory Variables</b>
1.	Getby	Age, Sex, Education, Income, Party, Rich/Poor
2.	“	“ 80/20
3.	Comfort	“ Rich/Poor
4.	“	“ 80/20
5.	Toomuch	“ Rich/Poor
6.	“	“ 80/20
7.	“	“ 80/20*
8.	Rich/Poor	“ comfort
9.	“	“ toomuch
10.	Max	“ rich/poor
11.	“	“ 80/20
12.	“	“ comfort
13.	“	“ toomuch
14.	Retire	“ rich/poor
15.	“	“ 80/20
16.	“	“ comfort
17.	“	“ toomuch
18.	Q1	“ rich/poor
19.	“	“ 80/20
20.	Q3	“ rich/poor
21.	“	“ 80/20
22.	Q5	“ rich/poor
23.	80/20	“ comfort
24.	“	“ toomuch
25.	2050	“ rich/poor
26.	“	“ 80/20
27.	“	“ comfort
28.	“	“ toomuch
29.	savings	“ rich/poor
30.	“	“ 80/20
31.	“	“ comfort
32.	“	“ toomuch
33.	income	Age, Sex, Education, [ n/a ], Party, rich/poor
34.	“	“ 80/20
35.	“	“ comfort
36.	“	“ toomuch

**BOX IIC-44. SAMPLE REGRESSION RESULTS**

Regression #3. Outcome variable:  
income needed "to live in reasonable  
comfort and and security"

Explanatory variables	Coefficients	
	value	Pr(>/t/)
age	-0.5384	0.0136
sex	-9.4037	0.0528
HS2	-26.2518	0.1736
somecol	-3.3322	0.6052
BA	0.0802	0.988
income	0.0247	0.5324
Rep	2.7001	0.7058
Libert	-15.8608	0.4011
Party2	-4.8196	0.4308
Party3	8.3066	0.2902
inequality	0.3916	0.3243

R<sup>2</sup> = .0843; df = 188

Regression #4. Outcome variable:  
income needed "to live in reasonable  
comfort and and security"

Explanatory variables	Coefficients	
	value	Pr(>/t/)
age	-0.4305	0.8932
sex	-8.3619	0.6026
HS2	-24.9345	0.518
somecol	-7.231	0.7745
BA	2.9543	0.5033
income	0.0688	0.9261
Rep	-8.1212	0.3822
Libert	-14.7051	0.5563
Party2	-11.7	0.5369
Party3	10.0419	0.1993
80/20	1.6913	0.2212

R<sup>2</sup> = .1465; df = 149

Regression #6. Outcome variable:  
income level beyond which  
is "much more than enough."

Explanatory variables	Coefficients	
	value	Pr(>/t/)
age	-1.8042	0.5299
sex	-95.5335	0.103
HS2	-214.7217	0.3233
somecol	-2.8532	0.9746
BA	78.1549	0.2431
income	0.1574	0.7936
Rep	-24.9611	0.7997
Libert	258.9932	0.2102
Party2	-21.1255	0.7835
Party3	223.6514	0.0187
inequality	16.4439	0.3281

R<sup>2</sup> = .08622; df = 141

Regression #22. Outcome variable:  
incomes of top 20% of families in a world  
valuing "fairness and sustainability."

Explanatory variables	Coefficients	
	value	Pr(>/t/)
age	0.4248	0.2159
sex	2.0001	0.7691
HS2	32.3114	0.1989
somecol	-20.1122	0.053
BA	-7.0301	0.3657
income	0.0983	0.1627
Rep	0.9236	0.9348
Libert	26.868	0.2644
Party2	-8.1528	0.3622
Party3	-21.2284	0.0571
rich/poor	1.051	0.0488

R<sup>2</sup> = .1472; df = 138

Regression #24. Outcome variable:  
income inequality; top 20% of  
households/bottom 20% of households

Explanatory variables	Coefficients	
	value	Pr(>/t/)
age	0.0141	0.3264
sex	0.2144	0.4667
HS2	1.5026	0.1668
somecol	-0.9739	0.0286
BA	-0.387	0.2485
income	-0.0012	0.6797
Rep	0.8708	0.0756
Libert	0.9695	0.3497
Party2	0.8381	0.0282
Party3	-0.3646	0.448
toomuch	0.0004	0.3281

R<sup>2</sup> = .1148; df = 141

Regression #27. Outcome variable:  
Per Capita GDP Growth, 1995-2050.

Explanatory variables	Coefficients	
	value	Pr(>/t/)
age	0.0927	0.577
sex	3.6055	0.3078
HS2	22.4559	0.238
somecol	0.6439	0.893
BA	-1.1775	0.756
income	-0.0132	0.683
Rep	7.6154	0.1765
Libert	18.0643	0.1749
Party2	-3.0321	0.4945
Party3	-5.33	0.3418
comfort	0.074	0.2416

R<sup>2</sup> = 0.09256; df = 108

**BOX IIC-45. SIGNIFICANT REGRESSION RESULTS**

<b>Regression number</b>	<b>Outcome variable</b>	<b>Explanatory variable</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Beta</b>
1	Get by	age	.0024	-.4066
2	Get by	age	.0332	-.2707
3	Comfort	age	.0136	-.5384
3	“	sex	.0528	-9.4037
4	Comfort	age	.0461	-.4305
8	rich/poor	income	.0452	.0145
9	“	income	.0132	.0131
10	max	income	.0000	0.7892
10	max	rich/poor	.0000	5.8023
11	“	income	.0000	0.7720
12	max	income	.0000	0.6762
12	“	comfort	.0000	1.0308
13	max	toomuch	.0000	0.1974
14	Retire	income	.0006	0.1087
17	Retire	income	.0001	0.1151
18	Qfirst	income	.0150	0.0598
19	Qfirst	income	.0275	0.0494
20	Qthird	income	.0308	0.0685
20	“	rich/poor	.0113	0.6095
21	Qthird	80/20	.0001	2.7181
22	Qfifth	somecol	.0530	-20.1122
22	“	rich/poor	.0488	1.0510
24	80/20	somecol	.0286	-0.9739
29	income	somecol	.0066	-31.8876
29	“	rich/poor	.0393	1.4960
30	income	somecol	.0053	-33.0026
31	income	somecol	.0089	-29.8997
32	income	somecol	.0076	-31.0936
33	savings	sex	.0178	7.0528
33	“	income	.0000	.3405
34	savings	sex	.0122	7.5980
34	“	income	.0000	.4610
35	savings	sex	.0194	6.6946
35	“	income	.0000	.3270
36	savings	sex	.0162	7.1232
36	“	income	.0000	.3340

BOX IC-46. SIGNIFICANT CORRELATIONS (1)

Comments in the boxes show the direction and magnitude of significant correlations between variables. A blank box means that no significant correlations were found.

	Age	Sex	Income	Education	80/20	toomuch/ getby
<i>income measures:</i>						
Getby	negative (moderate)					
Comfort	negative (moderate)	males < females (moderate)				
Toomuch						
Q1			positive (small)			
Q3			positive (small)		positive (small)	positive (v. small)
Q5				somecol < professional (moderate+)		positive (v. small)
<i>equity measures</i>						
Q5/Q1				somecol < professional (large)		
Toomuch/ Getby			positive (small+)			
<i>growth projection 2050</i>						

**BOX IIC-47. SIGNIFICANT CORRELATIONS (2)**

These results are mostly of secondary interest to the central questions that this exercise sought to address, but are noted here for completeness.

explanatory variables

outcome variables	Sex	Income	“comfort”	“toomuch”	“toomuch/getby”	education
<b>current income</b>		n/a			positive (v. small)	somecol < prof. (large)
<b>maximum anticipated income</b>		positive (large)	positive (moderate)	positive (v. small)	positive (small)	
<b>anticipated retirement income</b>		positive (v. small)				
<b>current savings</b>	men > women (large)	positive (moderate)				

Notes:

1. Savings is positively correlated with income. For every \$1000 more in income, about \$300-400 more was saved last year. This result includes the distorting effect of several large outliers.
2. Savings is positively correlated with male sex. Male respondents saved on the average about \$7000 more than did female respondents, all else controlled for.
3. Having “some college” shows a significant influence on income, but other levels of education do not. Household income of a person with only some college is \$30,000 less than that of a professional, all else controlled for. Having only a high school diploma did not produce a significant correlation with income, but this may be due to the small sample size. The sign and magnitude of the coefficient (-\$44,000) was consistent with the result for “some college.”
4. For every increase of 1 point in the “rich/poor” ratio given by a respondent, their household income showed an increase of about \$1,500. This value is very small and of little consequence.
5. Retirement income expectations correlated positively with current income. For every \$1,000 more in current income, retirement income expectations increased by about \$100. This is not large.
- 6a. For every additional \$1,000 in current income, maximum income expectations increased by about \$780.
- 6b. For every point that the rich/poor ratio increased, maximum income expectations increased by \$5800. A 2-point difference in two persons’ rich/poor ratios (e.g., from 3 to 5, equivalent to, say, 90K/30K to 150K/30K) would generate an \$11,600 > in income expectations.
- 6c. Maximum income expectations increased by about \$1,000 for every \$1,000 more that a person believed was necessary for a household to lie in “reasonable comfort and security.”

25-year-olds was \$55,000, the mean given by 60-year-olds would be about \$42,750, all other factors controlled for.<sup>17</sup>

Age also correlated negatively with the value given for the amount needed “to live in reasonable comfort and security.” The value given declined by about \$500 for every year of age.

Age did not correlate significantly with the levels of household income that were believed to be “more than enough.”

The only other instance of a significant correlation for any of the outcome variables treated in this section was that between the level of income believed necessary to live in “reasonable comfort and security,” and sex.<sup>18</sup> All else controlled for, men gave values that were about \$9,400 lower than the values given by women.

In no instances did current or projected household incomes, education or other attitudes and opinions about income, equity, or economic growth correlate significantly with the levels of income that a respondent felt was “just enough to get by,” “enough to live in reasonable comfort,” or “too much.”

***ii. Levels of household income consistent with fairness and sustainability***

The levels of income consistent with fairness and sustainability that respondents gave for the bottom 20% of households correlated positively with the respondents’ current household income. For every \$1000 more that a respondent’s household received, the amount that respondents believed the bottom 20% of households should receive increased by about \$50-\$60. This is a very small amount. If the mean value given by persons living in households with annual incomes of \$25,000 was, say, \$28,000, then the value given by a person living in a household with an annual income of \$85,000 would be about \$3,300 more, or \$31,300.

The values respondents gave for the preferred income of the middle 20% of households also correlated positively with respondents’ household incomes, and by the same small amount.

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<sup>17</sup>  $55,000 - (35 \times 350) = 42,750$ .

<sup>18</sup> Actually this correlation is of only borderline significance, with  $p(.95) = .0528$ .

For every \$1,000 increase in a respondents' household income, their opinion concerning the ideal income for the middle 20% of households increased by about \$68.

A respondent's household income did not correlate significantly with the values given by respondents for the preferred income of the top 20% of households.

A negative correlation with the borderline p-value of .0530 was found between the income level that respondents give for the top quintile and whether or not they have some college, but not a BA. For example, if a person with a professional degree felt that a mean top quintile household income of \$100,000 was consistent with equity and sustainability, a person with only some college, but identical in other regards, would suggest the lower value of \$80,000.

Significant correlations were found between the preferred levels of income that respondents gave for the middle quintile and the constructed measure of equity preference, the 80/20 ratio, and for the preferred income levels that respondents gave for the middle and top quintiles and the weaker measure of equity preference, the "toomuch/getby" ratio. The correlations were positive; that is, as one's "preference" or "tolerance" for income disparities increases, so does the level of income that they believe is just and sustainable, or "needed" for the middle and top income groups. In all three instances the change in the outcome variable per unit change in the explanatory variable was small. Given the somewhat abstract nature of the relations between the variables, the possibility of definitional correlation, and the seeming small consequentiality of the findings, further analysis of these results doesn't seem warranted.

***iii. Imputed equity measures as outcome variables***

**iii-1. The 80/20 ratio.**

The ratio of the income levels given by respondents for the top and bottom household quintiles in a world of fairness and sustainability is taken in this study as an imputed measure of equity preference. Neither age, sex, or current income, nor the income believed necessary to support a household at levels that are "comfortable" or "more than enough," showed any

correlation with the 80/20 ratio. However, the variable “some college” was significantly correlated. Respondents with some college, but not a BA, believed that in a world of fairness and sustainability the 80/20 ratio should be about 1 point *lower* than people with professional degrees believed. For example, if a person with a professional degree suggested incomes in the ratio of 110K/31K (3.5), a person with only some college might suggest 78K/31K (2.5), all other variables controlled for.<sup>19</sup> The fact that the 80/20 measure correlates with education, but not income, suggests that education might be a more significant determinant of class identity than income per se. But the results of this exercise are too thin to be anything but suggestive.

### **iii-2. The ratio “toomuch”/ “getby”**

This ratio measures the ratio between the level of income that a respondent would consider “much more than enough” and the level the respondent believes is needed to “just get by. It is a weak measure of a respondent’s sensitivity to conditions of economic inequality. The only explanatory variable that correlated significantly with this ratio was household income. The correlation was positive but moderate. If a person with a household income of \$20,000 gave “toomuch” and “getby” values of, say, \$100K/\$30K, a matching person with a household income of \$80,000 might give values of \$126K/\$30K.<sup>20</sup>

### **iv. Measures of desirable and achievable rates of economic growth, 1995-2050.**

As discussed above, respondents clearly differed about whether the desirable and achievable rate of economic growth for the coming 55 years was positive, negative or zero, although the range encompassed by the means of their responses was rather small (-1% to +0.8% = 1.8% range). I did not find even a single explanatory variable that was significantly correlated with a respondent’s opinion in this regard. Neither age, sex, education, current income or

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<sup>19</sup> A value of 110/44 would also give an 80/20 ratio of 2.5, but we saw in section b-ii above that having some college, but no BA, correlates with suggested lower incomes for households in the fifth quintile.

<sup>20</sup>  $(\$80K - \$20K) = \$60K \times .0145 = .87$ ; thus the ratio  $\$100K/\$30K = 3.3$  will increase to  $3.3 + .87 = 4.2$ , or  $\$126K/\$30K$ .

attitudes concerning appropriate levels of income appeared to have a discernible influence on the opinions that respondents have about the preferred rates of future economic growth.<sup>21</sup>

*v. Current and expected income, and current savings, as outcome variables*

I used this final set of regression equations to see if attitudes and opinions about income, consumption, equity and growth appeared to make any difference in respondents' behavior or expectations concerning these important economic aspects of one's life. Three significant sets of correlations of any consequence were found. Men report that they saved about \$7,000 more last year than women reported, all else controlled for. Another significant correlation was found between the levels of income that a respondent believed were needed for "comfort," or were "too much," and the respondent's maximum anticipated income. Specifically, the higher the level of income a respondent believed was needed to "live in comfort and security," the higher the maximum income they aspired to. The third was a positive correlation between the rich/poor ratio that a respondent's opinions generated and both the current and maximum anticipated income of that respondent. Other significant results are described in more detail in IIC-47.

3. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF REGRESSION RESULTS

The regression exercise suggests that the following conclusions are statistically valid and may be of at least moderate consequence:

1. Older people state that, in their opinion, less income is needed for a family of four to "just get by" or to "live in reasonable comfort and security," than do younger people.
2. Men state that, in their opinion, less income is needed to "live in reasonable comfort and security, than do women. Men report higher levels of savings than do women.

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<sup>21</sup> Fifty percent of the 255 persons who turned in survey response forms did not complete the question concerning long-term growth rates. This lower response rate may have contributed to the low number of significant correlations.

3. Persons with professional degrees believe that in a world of “fairness and sustainability” households in the highest income quintile can have higher average annual incomes than do people who have not graduated from college.

There is some support, albeit weakly and inconsistently, for the conclusion that as one’s household income increases so to does ones’ estimate of the levels of income that are fair and sustainable for bottom and middle sector households. This conclusion is somewhat of the same sort as the third conclusion above.

The first conclusion prompts the question of whether the observed pattern is a cohort effect or a life-cycle effect. A cohort explanation would look for unique experiences in the formative years of different age groups that would explain the pattern seen. A life-cycle explanation would look for common experiences in all persons as they age that would explain the pattern. Respondents in their late 40’s through late 50’s were in their teens and twenties during the countercultural period of the mid-1960’s through early 70’s. Respondents in their 20’s and 30’s spent their formative years during the less idealistic 80’s and 90’s. So the willingness of older respondents to accept lower levels of household income might be rooted in that cohort difference. I can’t think of a life-cycle explanation that is intuitively convincing.<sup>22</sup> In any event the only conclusive way to decide between cohort and life-cycle explanations is to examine time series data, which is difficult to obtain.

The two results that suggest differences between men and women concerning income thresholds for “comfort” and reported savings are intriguing, but the fact that sex does not correlate in a similar way with comparable outcome variables suggests that these results may not be robust. This same weakness applies to the results suggesting that people who earn more, or

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<sup>22</sup> We can speculate that perhaps as people get older they become more conscious of the vagaries of life and thus lower the income levels they believe are needed to get by, and to live comfortably. But this is unconvincing; as people age and become aware of life’s vagaries they could just as well *raise* their income thresholds. It’s probably wrong to simply state that younger people tend to be more “optimistic” about the economic future. In the late 60’s and early 70’s it was young people who responded most decisively to forecasts of coming economic decline.

have the potential to earn more, will tend to believe that higher levels of income are fair, sustainable and practicable.

The most consistent result of the regression exercise is the lack of significant correlations. As noted, in no instances did current or projected household incomes, education or opinions about equity or economic growth correlate significantly with the levels of income that a respondent felt were “just enough to get by,” “enough to live in reasonable comfort,” or “too much.” In no instances did age, sex, income or opinions about income or economic growth correlate significantly with imputed patterns of income distribution that respondents thought were fair, sustainable and practicable. And in no instances did age, sex, current or projected household income, education, or any opinions about income or equity correlate significantly with a person’s beliefs about desirable and achievable patterns of future economic growth.

There are at least two ways that these negative results might be explained. One is that many of the opinions offered in response to the survey were “pseudo-opinions.” Pseudo-opinions are replies to survey questions about which respondents have simply not thought about very much before, perhaps ever. Indeed, the questions asked—how much is enough? What is a fair distribution of income? What rate of economic growth is sustainable? -- are actively avoided by most Americans. Thus any opinions given on the survey form may not be related in a functional sense to any characteristics of the respondent that otherwise have a bearing on important life choices. Of course, this survey was conceived partly on the expectation that the questions asked were ones that conference participants *had* thought about. Still, the requests for quantitative responses may have been novel even for these participants.

A second possibility is that the respondents have certainly thought about the questions at hand, even in some depth, and that their opinions reflect this intentional, conscious process. On this account their answers incorporate a multitude of understandings, beliefs, values, hopes and

fears that in effect trump the more conventional characteristics—age, sex, education, etc.—tested for as explanatory variables. This possibility does not necessarily mean that respondents had earlier formulated *explicit* opinions about preferred rates of growth, equity, etc., which they simply reported when queried. It means rather that there existed a developed set of attitudes that, if made explicit, would correlate with the answers provided on the response form, and that these are not correlated with age, sex, education, etc. In short, the observed results of the regression analysis are consistent with the existence of what might be called a “philosophy of voluntary simplicity.”

I believe it might be possible to learn more about which of these is more likely by having a random sample of Americans answer the survey questions, and determining if the pattern of responses shown in the current survey formed a statistically significant cluster. If they did, it would support the suggestion that a “philosophy of voluntary simplicity” exists as an independent variable.

### ***II.C.3.e. The Voluntary Simplicity Survey: Discussion and Conclusion***

Respondents to the Simplicity survey were largely white, middle-class and middle-aged. They were highly educated but worked in human services occupations rather than in more highly paid professional sectors. Their household incomes appeared to be comparable with those of Americans of similar age, but were lower than those of households headed by persons of similar educational level.

The characterization most frequently mentioned by respondents when asked about the meaning of voluntary simplicity was that it involved reducing consumption, spending or income. Fully 54% believe that the desirable rate of economic growth over the coming 50 years is zero or negative.<sup>23</sup> At the same time a large minority, and perhaps a majority, of respondents aspire to earnings that would place them within the top 30% of American households with heads of

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<sup>23</sup> An additional ~22% of respondents believe that economic growth should be positive but decline to zero by 2050. Only ~25% believe that positive economic growth should continue beyond 2050 (see IIC-40).

comparable age. Over a third of respondents aspire to household incomes of \$100,000 or more. A majority of respondents wish to see a significant increase in the annual incomes of the bottom 20% of households, from about \$18,000 to about \$30,000.

Are these responses consistent? They appear not to be, but in truth the survey questions were not finely grained enough to allow inconsistency to be firmly established in all particulars. Using the speculative values suggested in Footnote 104, it would appear that the fair and sustainable income quintile levels affirmed by the respondents could be consistent with zero economic growth, although not with more than minimally negative growth. If a top quintile family were to transfer \$12,000/year to a bottom quintile family and \$16,000/year to a 2<sup>nd</sup> quintile family, the income levels of the bottom three quintiles would be in rough alignment with the levels that the respondents felt were fair and sustainable, and would leave the top two income quintiles with money left over. The mean income of the top quintile would need to decline by another \$29,000/year in order for the entire economy to be operating at the median values given for fair, sustainable levels.

It's notable that in those cases where responses could be used to construct or approximate an 80/20 ratio, the income levels that were suggested as being reasonable, or as consistent with "fairness and sustainability," generated ratios of about 3 to 1. The actual 80/20 ratio in the United States is about 9.8 to 1.

An obvious problem concerns practicability. The Simplicity survey did not ask for opinions concerning the means by which the various outcomes preferred by the respondents might be achieved. It is possible that additional questions focused on the means of achieving desired outcomes could lead to a re-evaluation of the outcome levels themselves.

By emphasizing different aspects of the responses, different interpretations can be had. If we look at the respondents' actual and anticipated levels of income, we see what appears to be a group of well-educated urban professionals living, and expecting to live, modestly comfortable lives. If we look at the narrative responses concerning the meaning of voluntary simplicity, we

see insightful, challenging questions being raised about the entire modern industrial/consumer society. If we look at the quantitative values given for fair and sustainable levels of income and economic growth, we see patterns consistent only with the most radically ecological and egalitarian ideologies.

#### **II.C.4. ASSESSMENT**

Is the scenario of Green sustainability, as understood in Section II.C.1, likely to be desirable, credible and compelling enough, to enough people, to enable it to serve as a practicable advocated scenario? The material presented to this point raises doubts. The fact that biogeophysical constraints on continued economic growth do not appear to be strong, at least over the coming century or longer, reduces the credibility of the argument that global economic growth must in short order be brought to zero if a catastrophic overshoot is to be avoided. The number of persons who would welcome a steady-state world in the absence of necessity appears likely to be small. Americans appear willing to pay several percent of annual income to support environment protection, but they don't appear willing to endorse the end of economic growth. Even those sympathetic to a philosophy of voluntary simplicity are of different minds about the desirability of a steady-state world. Fully 48% appear supportive of continued positive economic growth over the coming half century. Although few desire dramatically higher levels of income, neither do they appear eager to reduce their current household incomes, which appear to be slightly higher than comparable mean values for Americans and about 20 times higher than the mean incomes of households in the developing countries. Finally, people seem far more supportive of policies that would keep income inequality from increasing than they are of those that would reduce income inequality by any significant amount.

Of course, all this could change if new information suggests that limits to growth of the sort discussed in Sections II.A and II.B are closer at hand. In addition, economic growth could be curtailed if it becomes impossible to manage a globalized world economy in a way that ensures stability, equity and ecological integrity. Further, we may decide to forgo continued economic growth if it forces us to become dependent on technologies that have unacceptable social consequences. We consider these last two possibilities in the final sections of this dissertation.

For the moment, however, the material we've reviewed suggests that the our ideal scenario, comprised of quantitative Scenario 5 and the narrative scenario of Green sustainability, is unlikely to be desirable, credible and compelling enough, to enough people, to serve as a practicable advocated scenario.

But what is the alternative? Our review suggests that we might consider a scenario in which economic growth in a mature industrial world proceeds slowly, rather than not at all, and in which we commit to preventing inequality from increasing, rather than hoping to reduce it.

As an example, let's revisit quantitative Scenario 3 presented in Section I.A.3 of this exercise. A comparison of key features of Scenarios 1, 3 and 5 is shown in **IIC-48**. In Scenario 3 we envision per capita GDP in the high income countries slowing from its 2000 rate of about 1.7% per year to a rate in 2050 of 0.5%, and remaining at that level for the next 100 years, and perhaps indefinitely. The low and middle income countries, and China, grow at much higher rates for most of the next century, but by 2100 they too begin slowing and by 2150 have also stabilized at 0.5% per year. As shown in Box IA-18 in section I.A.3, this trajectory allows per capita income of all countries to attain parity by 2150. Note that even with the high income countries growing at unprecedented low rates, *global* per capita GDP is growing through the coming century at historically very *high* rates, generally well in excess of 2% per year. And the low-income countries are positively booming, sustaining annual growth rates of 4 and 5 percent for many decades.

Scenario 3 calls for a commitment to ensure that inequality in the developing countries, which today have 80/20 ratios averaging about 8 to 1, declines to the level of inequality in today's developed countries, which have 80/20 ratios averaging 6.5 to 1. In Scenario 3 a further commitment is made to prevent inequality in the developed countries from increasing beyond this current level.

Some readers may object, saying that it is unrealistic to expect the industrial countries to deliberately slow their economic growth to 0.5% within the next half century. But if this does not

**BOX IIC-48. COMPARISON OF SCENARIOS 1, 3 and 5**

See Section I.A.3 for full scenarios. Scenario 1 is the business-as-usual scenario. All values are as of 2150, and given in 1990 US dollars.

<u>feature</u>	<u>Scenario 1</u>	<u>Scenario 3</u>	<u>Scenario 5</u>
population (billion)	11.3	9	9
per capita GDP			
world	31,120	81,991	44,797
low income countries	11,539	82,747	44,513
high income countries	136,217	80,984	44,892
ratio, high/low			
per capita GDP	11.8	1	1
economic growth rates			
(%/yr in 2150)			
world	1.1	0.5	0.0
low income	1.3	0.5	0.0
high income	0.8	0.5	0.0
energy use (terawatts)	165	60.9	33.2
watts/\$ GDP	.469	.083	.083
income distribution			
within low income countries			
bottom 20%	3,906	26,083	27,147
top 20%	25,525	170,822	67,681
ratio	6.5	6.5	2.5
within high income countries			
bottom 20%	41,978	25,063	27,987
top 20%	274,058	163,626	69,818
ratio	6.5	6.5	2.5
ratio, top 20% high income/bottom 20% low income	70.0	6.5	2.5

Very roughly:

    Scenario 1 is associated with techno-global neoliberalism.

    Scenario 3 is associated with social democratic internationalism

    Scenario 5 is associated with Green sustainability

happen, the gap between the rich countries and poor countries does not close. And so long as that gap is expected to remain, there is no possibility of negotiating a transition to a world in which *aggregate* economic growth can proceed at a pace and in a manner that is ecologically sustainable and avoids dependence on possibly unacceptable technologies, over the very long haul.

Other readers may object for just the opposite reason, saying that global per capita GDP growth rates of 2% and greater throughout most of the 21st century, resulting in a level of per capita economic output in 2150 *seventeen times higher* than the level of 2000, is ecologically unrealizable. If such rates of growth were to continue indefinitely, that would be so. But the whole point of wanting high growth rates in the short term is to reach a condition of economic parity that would allow negotiation of sustainable growth rates for the long term. Our review of biogeophysical and technological limits in Section II.A suggests that such a trajectory of economic growth—the trajectory displayed in Scenario 3--would be ecologically realizable and, with caveats, sustainable.<sup>24</sup>

Scenario 3 presents further challenges, however. A world in which per capita GDP in the great majority of countries not only grows but *accelerates* for the next half century, and does so in a way that maintains global ecological integrity and social equity, is a highly managed, technologically dense world. Success of such a venture would seem to require, at a minimum, the creation and maintenance of global institutions of governance and accountability, and of a supportive global political culture.

In short, I'm suggesting that our ideal scenario, comprised of quantitative Scenario 5 and the narrative scenario of Green sustainability, be put on the shelf, at least for the moment. In its place we consider an alternative comprised of quantitative Scenario 3 and the narrative scenario identified in Section I.B. as "social democratic internationalism."

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<sup>24</sup> The caveat is that technological innovation allows an ecologically acceptable level of resource flow to generate 0.5% greater output each year. For a period of many decades or a short number of centuries this seems reasonable (e.g.,  $e^{.005(200)} = 2.7$ ). In Section III we comment on the prospects for continued growth, even at the low rate of 0.5%, annually, over many centuries and millennia.

Is such a scenario likely to be desirable, credible and compelling enough, to enough people, to enable it to serve as a practicable advocated scenario? We begin to address this question in the next section. If it appears unlikely that a globally integrated economy can be governed in a way that ensures stability, ecological integrity and social equity, then quantitative Scenario 3 will not be achievable. In that case the trajectory of the world system would appear to be one of great precarity, in which event constraints such as those imposed by Scenario 5 and Green sustainability might be welcome rather than resisted.