How accurate is to say that living standards in the USA were transformed for the better in the years 1941-80:

The idea that of living standards changing between the time of 1941-80 has often been debated, some would argue that living standards did change as indicated by the rise in consumerism, economic prowess of America and welfare for minorities during this period. Whilst others may argue that these factors are limited as the oil crises of the 70’s under the Carter administration ultimately limited this transformation of Living Standards as stagflation lead to a decrease in consumerism as well as the economy and government cuts that severely impacted welfare policies. I would argue that there was a change in Living Standards, but this was ultimately limited by the Oil Crisis and was not available to minorities but rather just the white majority.

It could be argued that Living Standards did change as shown by the economic prowess of America following the WW2, by the end of the war, America had become the economic powerhouse of the world with many European countries being in debt to America such as Britain and France, furthermore this was exacerbated by the fact that the arms industry was also largely stationed in America throughout and following the war; as a direct result of the America’s actions in the war, only 1 million remained unemployed following by 1945, a complete contrast to prior to the war with over 9 million unemployed; through these jobs the economy thrived and standards of living dramatically increased as a result of economic prowess. This suggests that during this period that living standards did change significantly as more people were employed as a direct result of economic growth in industries such as defence during the war. This economic prowess continued into the 50’s and 60’s with the “Boom Economy”, throughout this period suburbs grew along (with infrastructure to support them in the Highways Ac of 1956), the role of the economic prowess in the US allowed for the construction of new homes and facilities for citizens to use, this allowed for an increased standard of living as 82,000 residents moved into 17,000 new homes indicating the modern lifestyle that many Americans citizens were able to access; this is further emphasises by the actions of the government to control inflation to enable citizens to be able to access this form of lifestyle, Truman passed the 1946 Employment Act which lead to greater federal knowledge and control of the economy, allowing for inflation to be kept relatively low and for citizens to have an average yearly wage of $4000 dollars allowing for the 50’s lifestyle be attained by many as a direct result fo economic prowess and control by the American government. However, it could be argued that this was ultimately limited to the white Americans, many of minorities during this time were actively prohibited from attaining such a lifestyle, with African Americans often being barred from buying houses in white suburban America, this suggests that standards of living were ultimately not entirely transformed as these changes did not impact or change living for all Americans but rather merely the white majority.

Additionally, it could be argued that the role of economic prowess in America and control by the American government was ultimately limited as a direct result of actions taken by the government. For instance, in the 70’s, the government’s actions greatly affected the economy leading to mass stagflation in American society; this severely decreased the standards of living within America, two fuel crises which the Carter Administration had a limited involvement in preventing lead to mass inflation of oil with prices quadrupling during the shortage, as a direct result of government action )or lack there of), the economy was severely damaged and standards of living massively dropped as cheap oil was increasingly sparse which lead to greater discontent and economic involvement by the public as many began to purchase cars with a lower oil rates from japan and Germany rather than America, as a direct result economically America became weaker and standards of living were not transformed but rather regressed.

It could also be argued that the role of welfare was vital in transforming the standards of living for minorities in America, for instance under the Johnson Administration; the policies involved in the “War on Poverty” in an attempt to form what Johnson referred to as “the Great Society” could be seen as having a positive influence, acts like the Food Stamp Act of 1964 allowed for minority and poor citizens of America to have greater access to food despite mildly inflated prices, this increased their standards of living as many had greater access to food than previously; furthermore the role of Medicaid (a program enacted by Johnson) sought to give those on welfare , a greater access to healthcare which otherwise would be unavailable to the poor and minorities thereby increasing life expectancy of urban and impoverished communities. Furthermore, the Johnson administration also attempted to radically improve the quality of ghetto housing in areas such as Harlem, New York with the Housing Act of 1961 which allowed for an increased 3 billion in funding for the construction of new affordable housing with heating which was missing from the worst housing within the ghettos, this allowed for a transformation of standards of living for those in the worst of conditions in urban ghettos. The idea that Welfare contributed to the transformation of standards of living could also be arguably be seen by the Nixon administration continuing and developing support of the welfare programme despite widely being viewed as a more conservative force who was initially seen to cut them, enlarging the food stamp programmes as well as linking social security payments to inflation, allowing for a greater sum of benefits for those on welfare rather than being reduced as inflation ecreased under his administration.

On the other hand, it could be argued that Welfare did not entirely transform the standards of living within society particularly under the Nixon and Carter administrations due to pressures from the “silent majority” or economy respectively. Nixon, being a conservative force did not favour the “Great Society” policies but rather sought to create a “workfare” policy where those who wished to gain welfare benefits would also have to be employed. This is largely seen as a result of “silent majority” pressure by those in the white, middle class who wished to reduce taxes and expenditure by the federal government, as a result of this pressure, Nixon eventually combined welfare benefits in the Family Assistance Plan of 1970, this reduced the advantages of welfare not being relative to inflation thereby decreasing the standards of living for those on welfare. Furthermore, the Carter Administration was forced to massively cut on welfare due to large federal expenditure as a result of the oil crises; many programmes such as the Stamp Act were reduced to compensate for Stagflation thereby leading to the standards of living not being transformed during this period for minorities and the poor.

It could be argued that consumerism played a major factor in increased living standards particularly in the 50’s with the rise of suburban living, for instance, new technology were able to be bought by the majority of Americans, for instance the Television was within 85% of homes by 1960, this trend can be seen as popularised by the rise of TV dinners in the family, consumerism lead to the direct change in American lifestyle habits and the increased consumption of media (shown through the rise to 354 channels existing by 54, a contrast to 16 in 48). Additionally, the rise of consumerism also allowed for the purchase of labour saving devices such as the Washing Machine and Refrigerator in the “Boom Economy”, this allowed for an increase in Leisure Activities such as Spectator Sports which saw a colossal rise in advertising promotion during this period. As a direct result of consumerism, industries such as spectator sport, aided by the television, saw a rise in attendance to 460 million by the 1970’s.

On the other hand, it could be argued that the Consumerist culture did not in fact transform the Standards of Living but was limited to the white population of America, many minorities did not experience the same levels of consumerism due to the low levels of employment that they experienced during the “boom economy”. This is shown by the quality of life of those during the 50’s where many received limited support by the Truman and Eisenhower administration as much of the government budget was spent on the Korean War and Arms respectively. Furthermore, consumerism could be seen as actively decreasing the standards of living in the 70’s as the demand for cheap oil was so high, that many felt a deep hatred and discontent for the Carter Administration due to the limited supply of low prices fuel, in the age of stagflation, consumerism massively decreased which by this point had become part of the core American economy, when cheaper good were offered in areas such as Japan and Germany, American citizens actively damaged the American economy by purchasing cheaper goods from other nations.

Overall, I would argue that the Standards of Living were transformed to an extent within the period of 1941 – 80 as there was a clear transformation through the rise of consumerism in leisure activities, economic prowess as shown through the rise of employment and wages during the 40’s and 50’s as well as the welfare legislation enacted under the Johnson and Nixon administration to attempt to allieviate pressure form minorities and the poor. However, I would argue that they are ultimately limited as the rise of employment and wages from the economy and consumerism were generally exclusive to the white majority rather than minorities. Furthermore, the rise of stagflation in the Carter administration and the Oil crises lead to a devolution of standards of living which reduced the extent of transformation during this period.