
Student Commentary

Welcome to 1990

Recently, while browsing through a newsstand, I noticed a magazine cover. The title of the page caught my attention. It read, "Welcome to the 1990's!" and showed panels of two versions of the new decade. The upper panel revealed a futuristic society with clear blue skies, flying vehicles and citizens with jet packs gliding around skyscrapers. Representatives of different nationalities held hands dancing in peace. The caption said, "What we hoped for."

The second panel's caption, "What we've got," showed a society set in a neighborhood which had old torn-down buildings, a store just held up by a robber running with a gun in hand, smokestacks blowing dark fumes into the air, and a man living in a cardboard box on an empty dirty lot.

We have entered a new decade and are nearing the end of the 20th century as well. It is safe to say we have made it at last, the future. A future where traditional dictatorships are collapsing, new governments are being formed and the Soviet Union and the United States are developing a better understanding of each other. This is an era where advances in medicine and science are enhancing our society. Major cities in America are growing. People now live longer and more healthier lives. Yes, this seems to be the future our grandparents, parents and elected officials talk and dream about.

However, we are in a future which has seen a number of troubles grow over the years. We live in a future where the use and profit of drugs is increasing. The same drugs inner city teenage dealer sells also means something to the teenage addict in suburbia.

We live in a future where the children in public schools have low reading and writing test scores and are unable to recall historical dates or events. Gangs are replacing families in the inner cities of this future. Young people living in impoverished areas view their lives not worth living because friends close to them were the victims of drive-by shootings or drug-related deaths.

We live in a future where we hear of professional athletes convicted or dead due to crack or cocaine. We hear of the multi-million dollar contract one player has signed, and the next morning we read the shocking story of a well-known sports figure who can't read or write beyond a certain grade level. Owners of sports franchises threaten to move their teams elsewhere unless money demands are met. Money, of course, that could be used for improving city projects such as building affordable housing and upgrading public transportation.

There are other issues like racial tensions and AIDS to remind us that this isn't quite the future we had hoped for, but what we've got instead. Yes, we can take pride in the achievements in America in the past, but as we come close to the beginning of a new century, there must be solutions to the challenges we face in our society. Perhaps we will never reach a "Jetson's-type" society, but if we don't push for a better way of life now, then this future will be considered a failure.

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