

ASTONISHING MOMENTS

Distinguished observers select the single most astonishing development of the last twenty years.

Hilton Kramer
Editor, *New Criterion*

Looking back on the last twenty years, the historical event that cast the longest shadow and exerted the most decisive influence on my thinking was the emergence in the late sixties of the counter-culture and the anti-Vietnam war movement. Their combined effect was to elevate anti-American sentiment, anti-middle class morality, and anti-intellectual cultural values to a position of commanding influence in our society, and so entrenched has that influence remained—despite the political changes of the last twenty years—that it even now dominates many of the institutions of government, business, culture, and family life.

Franz M. Oppenheimer
Washington lawyer

There is nothing more astonishing than to have one's expert opinion proved wrong, which happened to me in 1981. There was no greater gulf, I thought, between European and American attitudes than those toward inherited property. While most Europeans consider estate tax rates of 70 percent (77 percent up till 1977) with an exemption of \$60,000 (\$75,000 after 1977) virtually confiscatory, virtually every American I knew either thought such rates the essence of social justice or an essentially unremovable slice of American reality. Yet in 1981 the United States Congress with unprecedented speed and without hearings decided that from 1987 onwards a *pater familias* can go to his heavenly rest with the assurance that \$600,000 of his estate will not be taxed by Uncle Sam; and that if he leaves an additional \$600,000 to his widow, \$1,200,000 will not be taxed. So let us not despair of the future of our social agenda: anything can happen in Congress.

John Chamberlain
Syndicated columnist

Thirty-seven years ago, when you could count professed conservatives and libertarians on two hands, we were hard put to it to round up seven or eight contributors to the first issue of a revived *Freeman* magazine. There were plenty of anti-Stalinists around, but if you scratched them they were all socialists. Our most friendly counselor in our moods of editorial despair was Frank Chodorov, a Grand Street philosopher who told us that it would take twenty years in order to have our way. All that we had to do was to keep butting and kicking. Frank based his prediction on his own study of the history of the Fabian Society, which had taken twenty years to make England socialist.

To me, the most astounding thing of the past twenty years is the accuracy of Frank Chodorov's thinking. We have turned the Fabian inevitability of gradualism to our own ends. The liberals have indeed cracked up. I'm sure that Frank Chodorov would have savored it if he had lived to see it.

Edwin J. Feulner
President, *Heritage Foundation*

The single most encouraging development of the past twenty years was the restoration of market economics as mainstream economic thought. The event which I consider "astonishing" took place on September 1, 1974, when the Nobel Committee announced that the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Science that year would be shared by Friedrich A. von Hayek. In subsequent years, Milton Friedman, George Stigler, and James Buchanan would join Hayek in receiving this award. The Nobel Prize Committee's decision signaled the international establishment's recognition of the importance of the work of these men in support of the market economy, the rule of law, individual freedom, property rights, and the redefinition of the appropriate role for government. Their work laid the foundation for Reagan's tax cuts, Thatcher's privatization, and the spread of the free economy around the world. Once again, we have seen that ideas have consequences.

Elliott Abrams
Assistant Secretary of State

The American defeat in Vietnam and its aftershocks—including the boat people, the fall of Laos and Cambodia, our greatly compromised ability and willingness to act forcefully to defend U.S. national security, which in turn helped produce Iran and Nicaragua—continue to dominate our political culture. If we look back on thirty years of *The American Spectator* in 1997, perhaps Nicaragua will loom as large as Vietnam—one way or another.

Lewis E. Lehrman
Founder, *Lehrman Institute*

That Jack Kemp might be elected President of the United States on a platform based unequivocally on the self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence and upon the idea of a restoration of the authentic American Constitution in every significant respect—this fact is the most significant political event since the candidacy of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

William F. Buckley, Jr.
Editor, *National Review*

There is the temptation, in response to RET's invitation, to be funny, but I'll resist it. For one thing, I am on record. I said at the time to my son: "This is the most astonishing thing that has happened in my lifetime." And the reference was to Jonestown. A mad (anti-Christian) preacher, causing 900 people to drink Kool-Aid with cyanide in it. He had going for him only that Kool-Aid with and without cyanide is indistinguishable. But that episode told me about a reach of hypnotic demagoguery I hadn't in a lifetime's reading thought still possible. It is in its way the most singular human event of our time.



Norman Podhoretz
Editor, Commentary

I guess I would have to say that to me the single most astonishing event of the past twenty years was Watergate. To this day, I find the whole thing impossible to believe or to understand. Does anyone?

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Michael Uhlmann
Washington lawyer

The most astonishing occurrence of the past twenty years has been the speed with which nihilism has infected the philosophical bloodstream of the West. It has already corrupted the way we think about thinking and bids fair to corrupt the way we think about ourselves. Whether this folly of the intellectual class, with its attendant decadence and despair, will also corrupt the common sense of the people will be the central challenge of the next twenty years. There is nothing pre-determined about the outcome of that struggle: as always, everything will turn on what good men and women choose to do. The important point is to understand what is at stake, to find stomach for the battle, and to avoid the sin of despair. In the short run, things may get worse; in the long run—Keynes to the contrary—the laws of nature and of nature's God will endure.

Joshua Muravchik
American Enterprise Institute

The most important event of the last twenty years occurred on January 25, 1987 when the GIANTS won the Superbowl.

Football is manifestly man's highest endeavor and the definitive proof of the superiority of American culture. (Can you believe that Europeans look down on us while they spend their time playing soccer, and even try to cover it up by calling it football?) But football has always had a slight flaw for me, and that is my tragic love affair with the GIANTS. If you ask how I knew that my love was unrequited, you obviously never saw the GIANTS play. They were GIANTS like Bert Lahr was a LION.

The team was run by a man who had inherited ownership of it, a fact which furnished Marxists with an unparalleled opportunity to illustrate to the masses the irrationality of capitalism. When asked why he didn't take certain steps that most observers believed would strengthen the team, he once replied that the GIANTS wanted to win their own way. Apparently this way consisted of something other than scoring more points than the opposing team. The situation eventually made the ruling class so uneasy that the owner was compelled to turn management over to a former high school history teacher who gradually reversed the team's decrepitude, thereby furnishing long-awaited proof of the value of history. The reversal reached its sublimit last January 25. The score was 39 to 20.

Taki
Columnist, London Spectator

As a European, I found the phenomenon of Watergate to be the most astonishing event of the last twenty years. We Europeans believe in powerful presidents and here was a powerful (?) president of the then most powerful nation on earth who had just won a landslide election and who was run out of town by two mendacious hacks, an editor who once flacked for the Kennedys, and some publicity hungry pols.

Watergate proved to us Europeans what disproportionate power and influence the seven deadly sinners—as Paul Johnson calls CBS, NBC, ABC, *Newsweek*, *Time*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*—have in America and how this power can be ill used. The two mendacious hacks invented Deep Throat, and the man who chose to turn a blind eye while the Kennedys used the CIA and the FBI to blackmail their political enemies and intimidate business executives—not to mention what they did to Marilyn Monroe—let them run loose on the pages of the newspaper that gave us Ms. Janet Cooke. The rest of the deadly sinners followed, and we got Communist South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Angola as a result. Oh, yes, and Jimmy Carter.

What was Richard Nixon's crime? Ask many intelligent Europeans and they will be nonplussed. Almost as nonplussed as I am over what Hunt and Liddy were doing in the Watergate in the first place. Nonplussed or not, however, the fact is that, where Richard Nixon was concerned, the seven deadly sinners were to truth and fairness what Teddy Kennedy is to anorexia.

Kenneth Minogue
Author, *The Liberal Mind*

In the wake of the last British General Election, Neil Kinnock uttered some words which ought to become famous: "Self-interest is not necessarily selfish." At a stroke, this proposition removes the basic socialist objection to capitalism as a system. If taken seriously, it would mean that the discussion on public policy could get back to the moral and practical issues from which it was diverted, a century or more ago, by the dream that the right kind of society could solve the human condition: such has been the major category mistake of our time. Other mistakes will no doubt soon turn up to bewitch the mind of man, but it would be some small triumph if our century could record the discarding of at least one grand error.

Ernest van den Haag
Fordham University

The past twenty years have been so filled with astonishing developments that it is hard to single out any one. We have had peace longer than ever, rising prosperity almost everywhere, a considerable spread of democracy, and, not least, in most Western countries people—with the exception of most intellectuals—have come to their senses and voted in governments to pursue more conservative—in short, less featherheaded—policies than before.

I have read some good books—lately Roger Scruton's *Sexual Desire*—among the usual number of bad ones. *The American Spectator* has appeared. It is brilliantly edited as shown by the fact that it solicits my contributions. There are now a number of good magazines in addition to *National Review*. Skirts are getting higher once more and the stock market follows—what more can you want?

Richard A. Viguerie
President, *Viguerie Company*

I remember it like it was yesterday.

Hours after Ronald Reagan's Inauguration, it began: the most astounding 100 days of any presidency. The shutdown of the Departments of Energy and Education. The cutoff of federal funds to liberal advocacy groups, the reforms that crippled the foreign service union and allowed the President to set his own foreign policy. The return of federal lands to the people of Alaska and other states. The appointment of droves of well-qualified conservatives of every type—blacks and women, evangelicals and "ethnics," entrepreneurs and labor leaders—replacing limousine-liberal Democrats and country-club Republicans.

And, soon thereafter, the presentation to Congress of the first balanced budget in over a decade. How proud we were when the President vetoed Congress's unbalanced budget, when he shut down the federal government for two weeks! It was then, of course, that the American people realized they didn't much need a federal government, after all. Except for the Defense Department, which, with the help of the Free Nicaraguans, liberated Grenada and Cuba.

Did it surprise anyone when the Republicans captured both houses of Congress in '82?

Today it all seems like a dream. What? It was a dream?

Oh.

Well, in that case, the most astonishing event of the last twenty years is that it *didn't* happen.

John Von Kannon
Vice President, Heritage Foundation

I find it most astonishing that the party of Franklin Roosevelt is still a major force in American life—even more the majority party. Jim Farley and the other pols helped FDR put together the Democratic coalition of a workable majority. What majority does the Democratic party represent today?

Consider the following groups and pronouncements exempt from criticism by today's Jim Farleys and Franklin Roosevelts:

- Bigotry against white males.
- Bigotry against Jews (depending on the source).
- Bigotry against Christians (if they take their religion too seriously).
- Self-inflicted AIDS carriers.
- The Mafia.
- Certain senile Supreme Court Justices.

So how has the Democratic party remained such a force? Sadly, it's a brief answer:

The Republican party.

Roger Kaplan
Associate editor, Reader's Digest

The most interesting development of the past two decades must surely be that in all this time R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr., hasn't put in an honest day of work. He has demonstrated that it is possible to be a conservative and yet be devoted to the world of ideas. Heretofore, conservatives would have—and I must say not without reason—considered it perverse for a young man to propose to spend his days at a typewriter. Making and selling typewriters, perhaps—but surely making use of them was an activity fit only for ne'er-do-wells.

Oh, of course, let us acknowledge our debts: there was *National Review*, there was the *Freeman* and other smaller journals; we would have gotten nowhere without them and even today we would be nowhere without them. And journalism itself, man by man, was never inhospitable to anyone with strong views; no one was ever told, "You have right-wing views therefore you cannot do this." Nonetheless, it was *The American Spectator*, coming on the scene at a time when America seemed to be disintegrating into mental, moral, and political anarchy, that made it known that, for some of us, at least, who didn't much care to take over the family business anyway (mine was in Chapter Ten), the century might be—might remain—American.

It's nice to know conservatives are

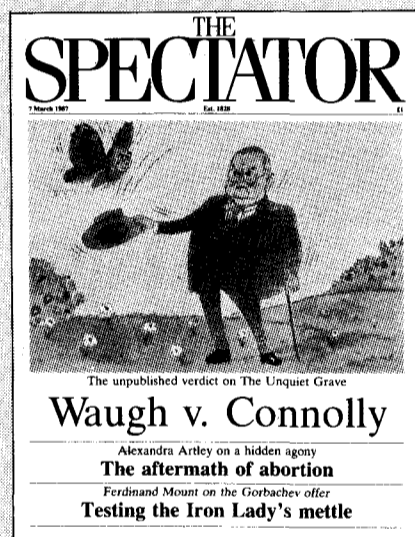
taken seriously. First of all, it's rewarding; and we can tell our mothers, wives, and mistresses that contrary to what they say it is demonstrably untrue that we are mental cripples and slouches. Moreover, since as conservatives we take our ideas seriously, it's good to have the hope that everything we and our mentors have predicted about the fate of our country may not come to pass after all.

However, it is important to understand what accompanies this deep change in conventional wisdom. When ideas become current—when politicians, journalists, or anyone else speak conservative without realizing it, as for many years they spoke liberal without realizing it—their test is no longer how they play in intellectual magazines or for that matter in any magazines, but how closely they correspond to reality.

For us, this means that if the transformation of American ideas was the most important event of the past twenty years, the most important project of the next twenty must be to see our ideas succeed in practice. So let's think big: In twenty years, the success of liberty will be assured, our country will be impregnable.

And we can then take our places in the family firms. →

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William A. Rusher
Publisher, National Review

The most astonishing development of the past twenty years—indeed, as I believe Irving Kristol has contended, of this century—has been the worldwide and near-total collapse of socialism as a viable politico-economic theory. It seems only yesterday that it bestrode the world, while we free-enterprisers cowered in our closets. Now socialism has been officially repudiated in many countries, and quietly jettisoned in virtually all the rest, including (incredibly) Red China and the Soviet Union itself. The reason? It was tried extensively, and has failed spectacularly.

David Horowitz
Former editor, Ramparts

If I were looking at the twenty years ahead, as the intoxicated young radical I was in 1967, what would appear most astonishing to me would be my own passage over to the other side of the political barricades. Looking backward in 1987, as the sober conservative I have become, what is astonishing to me is the sight of my former comrades—those who tried so earnestly and maliciously in the sixties to subvert and destroy the most tolerant, egalitarian, and democratic community on earth—not only still running free, but still pursuing their malicious quest to destroy this magnanimous Republic and replace it with another Marxist gulag.

Edward I. Koch
Mayor, New York City

Of all the upheavals of the last twenty years, the one that strikes me as the most uplifting is the prematurely announced death and subsequent resurrection of the great American heartland—the Northeast.

Maybe it was the glare of the mighty Sunbelt. Perhaps their trumpets deafened us. But a funny thing happened on the way to the cemetery—New York and New England arose in renewed health and vigor. The frost has melted and the rust has been scraped away.

Howard Phillips
Chairman, Conservative Caucus

The most astonishing political fact of the past twenty years is the failure of conservatives during three Republican presidencies (those of Nixon, Ford, and Reagan) fully to comprehend and effectively oppose the control of U.S. foreign policy by a commercial clique which has lined the pockets of its banks, law firms, brokerage houses,

and multinational corporations at the expense of America's moral standing and geostrategic vital interests, even as their anti-patriotic plunder has been subsidized by unwary taxpayers and favor-carrying congressmen of high ambition and low character.

Arch Puddington
Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

The McGovernite takeover of the Democratic party. When else have those regularly featured in the *TAS* Current Wisdom section been able to boast of sitting at the commanding heights of America's largest political party? Runner-up is a tie between the miraculous rise of Solidarity and the Grenada invasion. Regarding the latter event, the very fact that the liberation of a tiny Caribbean nation should strike one as unusual or surprising suggests that while McGovern's followers may no longer control the Democratic party, their baleful influence remains powerful.

Jack Kemp
Congressman, New York

The single most astonishing development of the past twenty years is Bob Tyrrell's move from Bloomington to Babylon-on-the-Potomac. It's as if Mohammed had opened a distillery, or Moses had gone into hog-farming.

Otherwise, the most astonishing development of the last twenty years is the utter abandonment of socialism as an economic ideal, as evidenced by the world-wide consensus to cut steeply progressive tax rates and deploy free-market forces to fight poverty. Democratic capitalism is not only on the side of history; it is on the side of people everywhere.

Leslie Lenkowsky
President, Institute for Educational Affairs

Although I don't think there was any link between the two, the year after *The American Spectator* was founded my wife and I were married. At the time, one would have almost certainly given us the better chance of lasting twenty years (as we have); now, I am not so sure. Even a publication a good deal shakier than Tyrrell's was in the old days (and that is quite shaky indeed) is likely to last longer than the typical love-match made today. And if not the most surprising development of the last twenty years, the weakening of family bonds is perhaps the most far-reaching and most difficult to undo.

James Q. Wilson
Collins professor of management, UCLA

The most astonishing development of the last twenty years has been the transformation—more precisely, the *inversion*—of liberal thought. In the early 1960s, liberals favored nuclear power, believed that blacks should have equal opportunities but not special favors, endorsed Keynesian economics, and wanted the United States to use military and economic power to contain Soviet (and proxy) expansion. Today, liberals oppose nuclear power, support “affirmative action,” claim to believe in the virtues of balanced budgets, and support the use of American military power only when there is clear evidence that a Soviet brigade has actually landed on Long Island for reasons other than attending a cocktail party. No doubt conservatives have changed as well. But the liberal change is more important, because in the long run, liberals run the country.

Midge Decter
Committee for the Free World

The most astonishing event of the past two decades—though not admittedly the most important—was William F. Buckley's advising Robert Bauman, on learning of his old friend's homosexuality, that he should resign from the House of Representatives. How could Mr. Buckley not have known that whereas sleeping with girls is nowadays enough to destroy a man's candidacy, soliciting adolescent boys is positively helpful, and constitutes grounds for the claim to the higher candor, bravery, sensitivity, and compassion?

T. Boone Pickens, Jr.
United Shareholders Association

One of the most startling revelations of my lifetime has been the laziness and arrogance of America's corporate titans. Growing up in Oklahoma, I saw the business establishment as the driving force behind the free enterprise system that built the greatest nation on earth.

Boy, was I naive. My introduction to corporate America as a geologist at Phillips Petroleum over thirty-five years ago was an eye-opening experience. Yet since then, I have seen that a bureaucratic mentality pervades corporate America. Instead of encouraging imagination, creativity, and resourcefulness, the major corporations stifle initiative and reward complacency. It's no wonder that we have relinquished our position as the world's unquestioned industrial leader.

Maurice Cranston
London School of Economics

The most astonishing event of the past twenty years is the Solidarity rising in Poland—a purely trade-unionist protest against a left-wing despotism. The “political general strike” foreseen by Georges Sorel as the workers' only way to introduce Communism has thus come about, ironically, as a workers' movement against Communism. The Soviets could quickly crush the rebellions of dissident satellite bosses such as Nagy in Hungary and Dubček in Czechoslovakia, but against the non-violent moral force of the Polish workers (inspired as those workers were by a deep Christian faith) the Soviets did not dare send in their tanks.

R. Randolph Richardson
President, Smith Richardson Foundation

The accelerating pace of change generates “astonishing developments” almost daily. But nearly all are but symptoms of shifts in widely held perceptions. It's these shifts in the bedrock of opinion that create the future, the era-shaping movements that tomorrow's Paul Johnsons will discern long after 98 percent of today's news is forgotten.

A fishing industry trade paper reports that socialist New Zealand is using the market mechanism to distribute entry rights in certain fisheries, having concluded this will provide better resource preservation than quotas and regulations. The nominally socialist government of France is selling the state's equities in industries as rapidly as it can find buyers. And before Mrs. Thatcher retires there's a possibility that pound notes will be the only product produced by the British government. In the Un-free World, Communists are struggling with the familiar dilemma of an ideology overrun by reality, having at last discovered that incentives and uncontrolled prices do more for production than the knout and the Gulag ever could.

The underlying change in perception is that socialism is a failure everywhere save in the minds of leftwing Democrats. But if one takes socialism to mean Lenin instead of Marx, it's all too alive in the context of Russian military power. Never has a nation performed so poorly economically and gained so much in armaments and strategic advantage over such a protracted period. Joy over the triumph of capitalism must be tempered by recalling that the Mongol hordes of Genghis Khan enslaved nations culturally and economically far ahead of themselves. □

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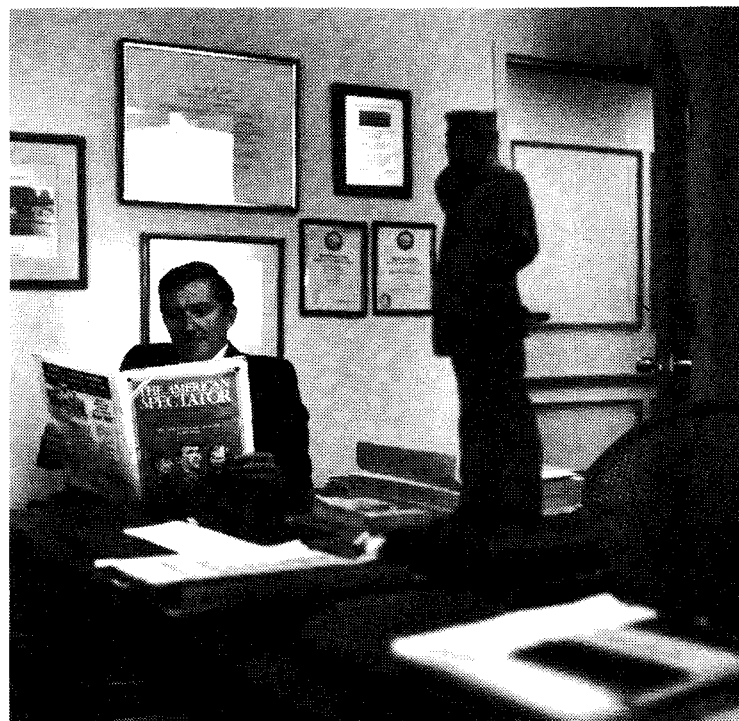
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IN AFGHANISTAN HOSPITAL PATIENTS RECEIVE VERY SPECIAL ATTENTION.

In Afghanistan, nothing is sacred. Not children. Not the elderly. Not even the wounded and dying. According to a *Helsinki Watch* report, Soviet forces systematically destroy hospitals and clinics. And Soviet military units arrest civilian medical personnel working in resistance-held areas.

Last July, a young Afghan paramedic trained by Freedom Medicine, and two wounded patients *on stretchers*, were murdered by Soviet commando forces after their village was attacked.

These assaults on hospitals, clinics and health care workers are part of a larger Soviet strategy to drive the survivors either out of the country or into submission.

Over the past eight years, nearly a million Afghans have been killed and more than five million have become refugees. Hundreds of villages have been bombed into rubble. Livestock slaughtered. Farmlands devastated. Entire regions rendered void of human life.

Since 1980 the Afghanistan Relief Committee has been sending medical aid, food and support for schools and villagers *inside* Afghanistan.

ARC provides aid through a number of internationally recognized organizations such as Freedom Medicine, which trains Afghans as paramedics to work in villages where there are no doctors; Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), whose heroic doctors and nurses set up clinics *within* Afghanistan; and others.

In response to the Soviet attacks on hospitals, this year ARC helped MSF build an underground clinic in Ghazni province. Camouflaged to blend in with the surrounding rocky terrain, it is busy serving wounded Afghans. Your generous contributions made construction possible.

This is just the beginning.

Inside Afghanistan infant mortality rates are soaring. With funding from ARC, a pilot inoculation program in one region is vaccinating 5000 children, and all women of childbearing age, against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis. Vaccines have to be carried by horseback over treacherous mountain passes in "cold boxes" to maintain a proper temperature for some 10 days, all the while dodging hostile forces.

But there's much more to be done.

Those who refuse to flee need your help now more than ever. Won't you open your heart before you turn this page?

The Afghan people still have hope. The hope that the world will not ignore their plight.

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We'll be lots older, paying huge taxes, producing less and less, unless . . .

Over the course of the 1960s, it grew increasingly difficult to talk about the future without apocalyptic visions and rhetorical overkill. First we saw movies about nuclear holocaust, then we read books about the horrors of overpopulation, novels about ecological disaster, and popular studies forecasting the end of all raw materials. A further gush of steam was generated by major works of science fiction in the last gasp of its golden age: the wedding of the Second Coming with blow-me-away psychedelic end-games. In retrospect, it all seems a kaleidoscope of fragmented hysteria. Which came first, *On the Beach* or *Silent Spring*? *Dr. Strangelove* or *Childhood's End*? The Club of Rome or *Stranger in a Strange Land*?

But today the smoke has cleared and things have settled down; looking at the future, we are a lot calmer than we were twenty years ago. One reason for the change, of course, is the aging of the culturo-centric Baby Boom (for whose benefit so many artists and writers, even those much older, have labored). Two decades ago the Boomers needed a vision of the world that blew up at the end of a very late adolescence; today they need a vision that matches check number 360 of a 30-year mortgage. Another reason may be the declining interest, among all age groups, in serious public life or political action. With Reagan's retirement, the World War II generation is packing it in. The upcoming Boomers, who would like to be dutiful but found that politics "didn't work out" after Watergate, are busy pursuing private "lifestyles." The post-Boomers, meanwhile, are trying madly to get rich. Since 1982, voter participation rates are again in steep decline and most Americans view Gramm-Rudman and the approaching

primaries with the same bemusement and detachment with which one watches the Saturday-morning cartoons. It's hard to have a collective vision of the future without a collective vision of the present.

This emptiness at the heart of our future self-image ought to be at least some cause for concern—since it is without many precedents over the last hundred years (the 1960s included). In both good times and bad—from the Victorians through the Yippies, from H. G. Wells and Jules Verne through the Chicago Century of Progress Exhibition of 1933 and then on through Orwell and Huxley, Kubrick and Asimov—America and the West have been obsessed with the future as purposeful direction. We called it "Progress," and it meant the forward transformation of our physical and social environment according to iron laws of civilized development. To be sure (especially in the 1960s), there were sometimes grave worries, even nightmares, about where progress would

lead. Progress might be dehumanizing, a "machine in the garden." Yet like an unquestioned premise, it remained inevitable.

No longer. Progress presupposes that we see ourselves as borrowers from the past and investors in the future. Increasingly, however, we see ourselves as borrowers from both past and future. Thus, instead of progress, we sense somehow that the ultimate direction must be stasis or retrogression. Over the past twenty years, our highbrow interest has switched from renaissance to dark ages; our escapist genre from hi-tech sci fi to swords and sorcery; and our futurist cinema from planetary exploration to escapades by renegades (with names like Max, Road Warrior, Blade Runner, and Snake) amid the slow- or fast-crumbling ruins of civilization. From today's vantage point, the 1960s has a nineteenth-century charm about it. To worry about apocalypse, you at least have to think you're going somewhere. Slogans such as "ZPG," "Gross National Pollution," and "im-

perialist pig" could only be popular in an era when Americans were still reasonably adept at having kids, saving, producing wealth, and projecting a formidable presence in world affairs.

Over the next twenty years, I think it's fair to say, events will force us to reevaluate our attitude toward precisely these activities, especially raising children and investing materially in the future—activities which are, after all, the ingredients of the progress we once took for granted. We will, in the year 2007, be facing much clearer and much harder choices than we are today. In this essay I will discuss those choices, primarily in terms of the demographic and economic trends that we are likely to be experiencing and debating over the next two decades.

One obvious fact must be emphasized at the outset: the year 2007 is only twenty years away. Barring catastrophe, therefore, our world is bound to resemble very much the one we're already living in. Then as now, we'll be driving cars, fixing leaky faucets, filling out W-2 forms, and decorating Christmas trees. By most standards, we will remain an affluent nation. But that doesn't mean that we won't be a different nation. Twenty years from now we may be so burdened by demographic and economic liabilities that visions of a better future will seem practically unattainable without onerous and long-term sacrifices in both our public and private lives. The unthinking progress of the 1960s may seem exotic beyond recapture, and the frightful doomsday we then saw approaching will look strangely like the cultural artifact of an era of innocence.

Aging versus the Youth Illusion

Over the past twenty years, America has been quietly overtaken by two demographic revolutions. Both of these—an unprecedented decline in U.S. fertility rates and an explosion in U.S. longevity—show no signs of abat-



Neil Howe, director of research at Americans for Generational Equity, is co-writing a book on America's thirteen generations.