

Where we've been, where we're headed, what's likely to happen soon

No, we can't predict the future — but we can make some educated guesses about what life in the 1990s will hold. Here are this author's best guesses and forecasts about your daily life in the decade to come:

Architecture: retro/schmetro

In the 1970s, architects could design anything they liked as long as it was slablike, with floor-to-ceiling windows and flat roofs. In the 1980s, they designed anything but and strained to incorporate witty-campy historical ornament in the name of "post-modernism." In the 1990s, every American city with over 100,000 people will have at least one pyramid-topped office building and "postmodernism" as a design phase will come to seem self-indulgent if not downright decadent. Architects will start inching back toward the form-follows-function of the Bauhaus slab but will be careful to avoid provoking the populace and the critics by stressing "contextualism" — the integration of the building's ground level into the overall life of the street. Above the fifth floor, though, efficiency will prevail.

Economic life: the vanishing middle class

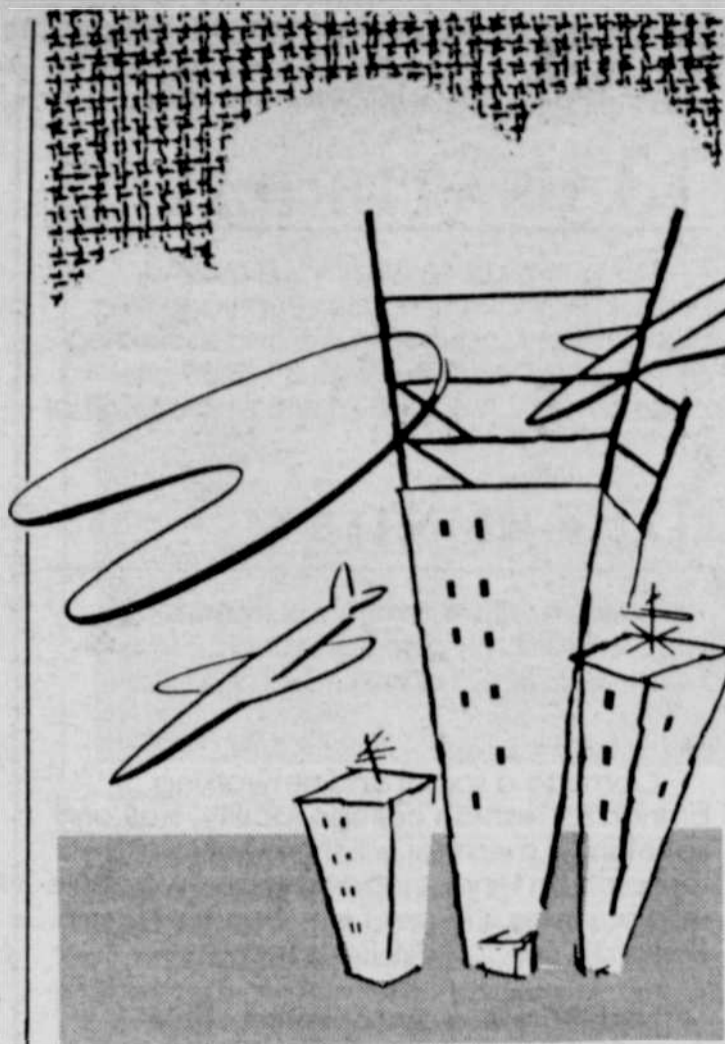
Backing for this one comes both from economic forecasting and from the left. The World Future Society notes a "bimodal" trend toward luxury and economy while the middle gets squeezed out. Increasingly, it's Hyatt or Red Roof, Bloomie's or K-Mart, with the middle in decline. Barbara Ehrenreich's provocative new book, *Fear of Falling* (Pantheon, \$18.95), offers a grim view of self-deluding "yuppies," who fancy themselves an elite but who, in reality, have more in common with the classes below them than the classes above. We note as well the trend away from classic up-the-line middle management corporate jobs, as computerization renders obsolete the information-gathering functions of the dutiful white-collar yeomanry. Pessimists extrapolate a future social structure that resembles a lopsided figure-eight, with a few truly wealthy and powerful astride a huge *nouvelle* proletariat.

Environment: permanent pollution

In the 1990s, the EPA or local versions thereof will be forced to intervene in our daily lives to protect us from ourselves. In the largest cities — particularly New York, Los Angeles and Chicago — pollution monitoring will become the norm, even of gasoline stations, dry cleaners and home furnaces. On days when ozone and hydrocarbon levels are way up, expect periodic bans on backyard barbecuing and lawnmowing. Cleaning up the environment will gradually cease to be the goal; holding the line will be about all we can hope for.

Gay press/gay literature: best of times/worst of times

Much of the gay press will fall on hard times in the 1990s as the "976-phone sex" numbers cease to be a novelty and the



amount of advertising placed with gay papers falls way off. Best positioned to withstand the hard times will be those papers with strong local advertising and broad-based circulation. Subscriptions will become more common as gay people move away from core "ghetto" areas (see "Lifestyle," following).

Gay literature will show a familiar boom-and-bust pattern as the larger, mainstream publishing houses shy away from publishing gay- or lesbian-themed novels. However, smaller presses and a few sympathetic academic presses will make the new literature of the 1990s available to gay and lesbian readers. Eventually, by the mid-to-late 1990s, gay- and lesbian-themed literature will start to infiltrate the big publishers again.

Generations: the young and the not-so-young

The true "gay gray" revolution won't come until after the turn of the century, when gay Baby Boomers retire in droves. However, the strains of middle age will be much more apparent as the older Boomers reach their 50s in the 1990s and the youngest turn 30. "Younger people" — who by 1995 will be anyone under 30 — will continue to hold themselves somewhat aloof from the Boomer majority, in part due to differences in style (the "Boy" phenomenon observable in large cities), and of course health (pre- and post-AIDS gay men). What will happen to gay male role playing in an era of grandfatherly "daddies" and balding "sons" will be anyone's guess. Intergenerational conflict among lesbians will not be quite so pronounced, but still there will be a clash between those who came out in the 1970s and their younger, (perhaps) more career-oriented counterparts.

Lifestyle: urban-suburban convergence

In the 1990s the cities will start to resemble suburbia a little more, as discos and revival movie houses are torn down to be replaced with strip shopping centers and video stores. And suburbia — at least the older postwar areas — will resemble cities more and more, as they add office complexes and day-long traffic jams. Most important, this is where the new jobs will be.

In cities like Chicago and San Francisco, it will be practically impossible to maintain a visible gay "ghetto" as skyrocketing rents brought about by gentrification make it hard for the young to get a toehold in the Castro or New Town. Increasingly, gays will choose to live all over the place, even in the new built-

up citified suburbs close to work. There will be the usual jokes about polyester and breeders, but smart gay and lesbian business persons will follow their clientele or make their services available to them (newspaper subscriptions, for example.)

Living quarters: small is beautiful

Rents will skyrocket in inner-city areas as yuppies bump into unreedemable slums and housing projects. Smaller lofts and condos and Japanese-style miniaturized living will become increasingly the norm in such districts, at least for those of us who don't have a lot of money and live alone. The older, 1950s suburbs like Oak Brook, Illinois and Tyson's Corner, Virginia, will continue to add new apartments and condos and many of us will find it more practical to live there (see "Lifestyle," above). By the late 1990s, the "Beaver Cleaver" belt of single-detached homes for families will have shifted to exurban areas like Ventura County, California and Kane County, Illinois. Such areas will be within driving range of the older suburbs but far, far removed from the original cities. If the Democrats ever regain the White House, look for something like a "housing IRA" to enable younger people to amass the (considerable) amount of money necessary for a down payment.

Great (and not-so-great) moments in future forecasting

1939 — Designer Norman Bel Geddes' enormous "Futurama" exhibit debuts at the New York World's Fair. Centerpiece of the exhibit is a scale model of the city of the future — 1960 — with 16-lane freeways surrounded by identical-looking 80-story skyscrapers. Corporate sponsor General Motors' input is evident in predictions of \$200 cars-of-the-future (cheap even by Depression standards) that are "probably refinements of the diesel engine." Exhibit routinely drew two-hour-long lines. Visitors who made it through received a button saying, "I have seen the future."

1960 — Clark Kerr, then Chancellor of the University of California system (including, among other campuses, Berkeley) goes on record regarding 1960s youth, saying "employers are going to love" them, and "there won't be any riots."

1971 — Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* is published and a new phrase enters the American vocabulary. Toffler's thesis — that the pace of technical and social change in contemporary America alienated citizens from their own society — is still being debated. He was undoubtedly right, though, in using California as a predictor of nationwide change, and in viewing the rise of special interest groups. In the chapter "A Surfeit of Subcults" he mentions, among other groups, gay motorcycle gangs.

1974 — Publication of *The Front Runner* by Patricia Nell Warren, a heartfelt but sociologically naive novel set among gays in the near future. Warren viewed gay rights as the logical culmination of civil rights and detailed the sweeping changes brought on by the U.S. Supreme Court's striking down of all antisodomy statutes in the mid-1970s (an event that has, regretfully, never come to pass). Drag queens feature prominently in Warren's coalition of gaydom, even receiving special seating at track-and-field events.

1982 — Movie *Blade Runner* establishes a gritty new look in science-fiction movies. Set in the early 21st century in an impoverished, abysmally polluted Los Angeles, *Blade Runner* is the pessimistic flip side of "Futurama" optimism.

Three who care — lesbian and gay experts forecast the 1990s

Robin Tyler, events producer/activist

"We can go one of two ways in the '90s — we can struggle around the scarcity of resources in our community in terms of a position of weakness, or we can work together from a viewpoint of strength. It's not just a question of leadership but of linking leadership among us all — lesbians, gay men, minorities — crossing class and color lines.

"Among the so-called free nations, only the USA and South Africa lack a national health-care policy. Working toward such a policy is a good idea toward focusing our energy on a common goal and not fighting each other. That issue is the common thread linking us all together...the feminization of poverty for women with AIDS for men."

Barbara Smith, black feminist writer/activist

"To me, the political situation is more important than anything cultural by itself. I think we will see increased leadership of lesbians and gay men of color, who in many ways are politically positioned to be leaders now but who have not been recognized as such. There will be more acknowledgement that our movement will benefit from that kind of politics.

"It has been really hard up until now for "out," politicized lesbians of color to get the funding, through grants and so on, to get us started writing novels. [In the '90s] there will be more novels by lesbians of color, as some of us get the financial resources that would give us space and time to work. It think that AIDS will continue to bring various communities together such as gay men, lesbians and the third world. For instance, third world communities are beginning to confront issues of sexual identity and lesbians and gay men of color are learning to deal with issues of race. I pretty well expect — and certainly hope for — a Democratic presidential administration at some point in the 1990s. I don't know how much more of this we can take."

Jeff Zurlinden, syndicated AIDS columnist

"Infection rates for AIDS have probably reached their peak in New York, San Francisco and possibly Los Angeles. The 'second tier' of large American cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia and Houston will probably top out in the early 1990s. People who live in these cities who have been spared the plague up until now may come to regret their 1980s optimism.

"Much of the health care establishment will continue to view AIDS as someone else's problem: in smaller cities and affluent areas, a gay men's problem; in larger cities and poorer areas, an I.V. drug users' problem. Those at greatest risk will continue to be the young, the ill-educated and the poorly informed, and their infants.

"There probably won't be a single dramatic solution for AIDS like the Salk polio vaccine, but many new drugs and new courses of therapy will emerge in the 1990s. By the late 1990s, AIDS will be viewed not as an always-fatal disease but as a treatable affliction, controllable like leukemia or even diabetes."