

THE NEW MILLENIUM

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The new Millenium. Measuring time is a creation of man to be able to account for time. With ten fingers, numbers divisible by ten made sense. It is doubtful that the stars, moons, planets and other creatures on earth have any interest in our time frame as they have their own schedule to meet. What does the future hold in store for us ? Can we really have any idea of what to expect in the future ? Are we any better in seeing ahead today than people were 100 years ago ? Were the great events of the 20th century, good and bad, really predictable ? It is very difficult to look back in time and understand how events and the future appeared then when we know with hind sight what did happen. But first let us review what was happening one hundred years ago.

At the beginning of the twentieth century there were about 76 million people, two thirds of them still on the farm, in the USA and the population was growing at over 20% a year. There were slightly over a billion people in the world at that time compared to over 6 billion now. McKinley was president and there were 45 states in the Union and Hawaii became a territory of the USA that year. The economy was stronger than expected in 1900 and the stock market had pretty much recovered from the crash of 1893 and was trading over 600,000 shares a day. Interest rates on US government debt were about 2% and the government was refunding past higher cost debt. The gold standard was established in 1900

putting US money on a parity with gold. There was general optimism about the future. One million immigrants came to the USA in 1900 looking for a better life, but one third of these returned to their home lands in time. The magnet was New York City where close to 3 million people were living at the beginning of the century. The lower East side of Manhattan was where most of the immigrants started. They were poor and most tried to maintain their ethnicity. As they moved west and south to the coal mines, steel mills and stock yards this ethnicity limited their ability to be organized into forceful labor unions. An advantage for the employer.

The major news events of the period were the Boer War In Africa and the suppression of the revolt in the Philippines as a follow up of the Spanish American War of 1898. It was felt in the USA that the Philippinos were unfit to govern themselves and that we had to do it for them. The Anglo Saxon feeling of superiority over other races was evident in the United States too. The British in their first year of the Boer War were badly out fought and suffered a large number of casualties. The British blockade to prevent supplies from reaching the Boers raised tensions with many nations including the USA who protested having ships stopped and searched for contraband. A Lieutenant Churchill, although supposedly a correspondent, was captured in the fighting, but later escaped and wrote articles predicting a long and bloody war, which it was.

In Europe the German Kaiser spent several weeks in the Fall of 1899 in Great Britain visitng his relatives and showing off some of his new toys – battleships.

He wanted a navy as big as that of his relatives. Joseph Chamberlain father of Neville, then British Colonial Secretary says that an Anglo-German alliance was the only way for a peaceful Europe. France was bickering with Germany and Great Britain over many issues including colonies in Africa. In Asia Japan's relations with Russia were deteriorating and it was expected that a war was possible. In the Spring of 1900 the Boxer Revolution began in China in a revolt against foreign domination. For its part in putting down the revolt the USA received \$24 million which later was decided to be too much and \$13 million was returned to the government which the Chinese put into a scholarship fund to send students to the USA. The world was as usual a restless place but with hopeful signs for the future.

As the United States entered the new century prospects were bright for increased business activity and a new period of prosperity. One of the biggest events at the end of 1899 was a celebration with an elaborate parade in New York City of the Hundredth Anniversary of the death of George Washington on December 14. But it was cold in New York on New Years Day with a great snow storm that engulfed most of the USA. President McKinley had the usual reception for thousands in the White House on New Years Day although his wife was quiet sick. Sing alongs at the White House were regular occurrences and Washington was an informal place to visit.

In June McKinley was nominated as the Republican choice for re-election and surprisingly Teddy Roosevelt after declaring earlier that under no circumstances

would he accept the post accepts the vice presidency little expecting an assassination would make him president in little more than a year.

But change was in the air and faster than ever before. (Sounds familiar) There were about 8000 automobiles in the USA, with about 4000 in New York City where traffic was already a major problem. Congestion on Fifth Avenue was impossible and daily people were killed in traffic accidents. However, these were not automobiles killing people, but wagons and carriages where horses had gone wild or a driver had been careless running over children or old people not able to get out of the way. However, the automobile was on its way to replace the horse drawn vehicle. President McKinley was the first President to ride in this new form of transportation. There were over 500 companies at this time producing some sort of horseless carriage driven by electricity, gasoline or steam engines. That number of manufacturers would be reduced by one half with in ten years and much more in the next 30. Sounds like the Internet today. Photography, particularly in news papers, was allowing people to see sights never imagined before of all parts of the world. Recorded sound was in its infancy but already changing music tastes. Electricity was changing the way people lived, streets were lighted and night time activities were increasing. Bath tubs were changing how people smelled. The steam locomotive dominated long distance transportation and it now took only six days to cross the country. The New York Times cost one cent for the daily issue and three cents for the Sunday edition. It would appear to be an auspicious beginning for the new century.

Although there were many signs of major new and exciting changes to come there was also the dark side of things that had not changed. Early in 1900 a Negro was burned at the stake for killing a white woman in Kentucky. Lynching was a common occurrence through out the South. There were nine million blacks in the USA, but George White who was the last black representative in Congress after gains made in government representation after the Civil War but was not re-elected in the Spring of 1900. Government representation and other gains from the Civil War for blacks were lost to terrorism and bigotry. Unpunished killing of blacks was common. It was still a world wide assumption that colored people were inferior mentally. But discrimination was not just against the blacks. In San Francisco the Chinese population were still under pressure in China Town and considered sub-humans particularly since the depression of the early 1890s. Immigration was greatly limited and living conditions were desperate for those in the city. For all the employed work standards and conditions were poor and an eleven hour day, six day week was common. Work environments were often dangerous and unhealthy. No age limit on workers, so children were much employed. In May 1900 a blast at a coal mine killed several hundred people. There were no Federal rules or regulations for worker's safety and it was felt that they were not necessary or the company's responsibility. Although the Labor Movement started by Samuel Gompers in the last part of the previous century was underway, the difficulty of organizing people with many distinct ethnic backgrounds limited its success for the common laborer. Late in 1899 McKinley in his annual talk to Congress first called for reform of corporate trusts and anti-

trust legislation. Despite the passage of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act in 1890 the steel industry was rapidly consolidating in defiance of the Anti-Trust laws. This was followed by Rockefeller's consolidation of the oil industry. The question was raised on how to control the power of concentrated wealth in a democracy.

By 1900 one half of the forests in the USA had been cut without any thought of replacement. John Muir was advocating conservation of our timber resources. There were five National Parks at this time, but thanks to Muir's efforts support was growing in Congress that something had to be done to protect the remaining timber lands. There were 400 buffalos remaining of the countless herds of one hundred years before. But awareness was growing that this neglect had to change and conservation of natural resources a national priority.

Other important happenings at this time important to Kevin Starr, was the Supreme Courts' decision that Harvard College president's home and other non-student buildings were exempt from taxation. Harvard beat Dartmouth 11-0 at football as the year 1899 closed. The Alaska Gold Rush that started in 1898 continued with new discoveries near Nome. Women were beginning to play golf and the wait for tee off begins. John Philips Sousa and band music was popular and Sunday Concerts in the Park the big event of the week. Scott Joplin and his Maple Leaf Rag was the hot new non-traditional music of the times. A terrible hurricane hit Galvanston, Texas in September killing over 5000 people and property damage over \$20 million. Two responsible and successful business men in Mississippi were killed in a duel over an affair of honor. Casey Jones dies at

the throttle crashing his Cannonball Express and saving his passengers lives. Prohibition was coming as Currie Nation was leading her anti- liquor campaign. Doctor Walter Reed discovered the source of yellow fever to be the misquitos and with in a year the disease was virtually eradicated. There were many new and exciting things happening.

Was it possible in 1900 to see the major events that would shape the new century? Not really. Who would have predicted a major World Wars resulting in the killing of millions of people ? Is it any more likely that today we can even imagine what the major events, good and bad, of this new century will be ? I do not believe it is so. In fact, the bad events seem even less predictable because we are all optimists. I have been in a business that has big rewards for those that can see into the future. My experience has been that a very few if any can do it. We would like to believe that with all the new scientific and technical achievements we should also be able to know the future. The factor that makes forecasting impossible is trying to understand human nature and its reactions to events. Many events can be predicted with some success, but not people's reaction. Many of the major developments in the twentieth century that were so beneficial over time were used as weapons of war first. The airplane and tank and truck were first developed and mass produced to kill people in World War I before really used for peaceful purposes. In World War Two atomic power, microwave transmission and many more technical developments were first developed for wartime uses. Major medical advances were also a fall out but not without a new fear of

bacterial warfare. Space travel was first a development of the Cold War but not without its fear of intercontinental missiles .

The Internet which is probably the first major revolution of the 21st Century will be one of developments started without major government military involvement although it was initially developed as part of a Defense Department communication system. When we look back at the Internet we will be amazed how much greater was its impact than imagined today.

Will we need another military threat to create the other wonder things of the future or will they come any way ? Through more open societies, maybe democracies and capitalism have created conditions that will foster these new developments faster and better than in the previous century . It is possible to predict some of the new developments of the future , but is it possible to know how they will be used, for good or evil ? It appears that man's basic nature does not change and we will always be faced with problems arising from rogue persons who are greedy, murderous, power mad evil and great leaders. They can cause great disruption of societies that is completely irrational with either hindsight or foresight, but at the time many people and nations are easily led into disastrous situations. It can happen again. It will be an exciting time, Change for better or worst has been on an exponential curve this past century and most likely will continue for the future.