

Economic Prospect

I Was Wrong: The False Dawning of a New Age

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When I was in college, I had lived just long enough to recognize that we lived in a new post-war and post-depression world. This new world was full of prosperity, life changing tech and health advances, and in general we had new levels of human decency and fairness including Civil Rights. We even reached the moon.

At last we would have a nation that was substantially educated and typically reasonable.

Civilization had become the pervasive norm, or so I thought.

I was wrong.

I thought I saw new world-changing realities dawning.

Imagine me growing up in the 1950-60s knowing that the Japanese and the German enemies of WWII were defeated by men like my dad, who served in the Pacific. The evil desire for domination through war and the collateral damage of hatred and torture were not only gone, but, I figured, gone forever.

Imagine me asking my dad what all those rural grain bins were for and him telling me that we grew so much grain that even after selling it abroad we had to store the surplus on every farm. Hunger was not gone, but it would be almost gone soon. And it is.

Imagine me growing up hanging around complex rail sidetracks near my suburban Chicago home to watch the trains shuffle the cement cars and meeting, just once, a hobo. I knew that the Depression was tough, but that kind of depression was gone forever. He was a relic.

Imagine me in the back seat of our '57 Ford Fairlane going through Birmingham on the way to our Florida vacation just before the interstates. As we crossed a rail yard there were endless shanties. I was shocked by the poverty of the African Americans. So, when I watched Little Rock and Selma and saw the victories of President Eisenhower and the Warren Court and ML King and the Voting Rights Act, I knew that the racism and bigotry were finally demolished.

Want more? I watched the African colonies become independent nations knowing that the colonial economic oppression of people was over, and that Africa would soon be prosperous former colonies.

My sister had a life-threatening infection, but excellent new medical care delivered her. Medical advances were here to stay. Polio took my classmate, Jimmy; I saw him at home on Vine St in his iron lung.

I carried a rabbit's foot in fifth grade and was careful of ladders and the 13th, but soon realized that superstitions were ignorant and irrational and would soon be gone too.

All my friends attended Mary Seat of Wisdom school in our suburb. In the 1960s the Latin mass was changed dramatically, and the mysterious authority of the church seemed to be democratized. Gone was dogma (and fish on Friday) seemingly forever.

I met Bobby Kennedy with my dad and then watched the Kennedy tax cut fine tune our economy into a full-employment prosperity machine. We licked the economy! What could be bigger but maybe licking the weather? I saw the UN built in New York City for world peace with Miss America pleading for world peace.

I watched Elvis and the Beach Boys and knew that fun was here and would stay forever.

In short, I believed not only in the goodness of man, but in the fact that we had arrived. No wonder Boomers regard all that happened before our arrival on earth as trivial. Not because it isn't interesting, but because that old world, that bumped along for millennia, was gone. Gone!

We even had fast cars, tv, and transistor radios. I grew up near O'Hare and saw the dawning of commercial jet air travel. Even distance had been conquered.

Imagine me in my 1967 Mustang. I couldn't wait to become an adult and live in this wonderland. The old boring days of squeaking by were over. The maniacs and the bad times were gone.

Violence and abuse and meanness would soon follow into extinction.

But I was wrong. Superstition, incompetence, arrogance, dogma, hatred, and corruption are all part of human nature, and they are here to stay. God help us.