

THE NEXT
40
YEARS

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ANTICIPATION

We salute the basic human urge to remember the future

BY TERENCE MONMANEY

WE'RE HONORED THAT PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA HAS contributed to this 40th anniversary issue about breakthroughs, trends and events likely to shape our world over the next 40 years. In his essay, "Why I'm Optimistic" (p. 58), he praises Americans' "enduring faith, even in the darkest hours, that brighter days lie ahead."

To get a fix on Americans' attitudes about the coming decades, we collaborated with the nonpartisan Pew Research Center on an opinion poll ("Americans Look to 2050," p. 70). Most people surveyed believed in the power of science to improve their lives, yet they expressed concern about the environment, as well as anxiety about population growth and immigration.

That anxiety isn't shared by Joel Kotkin, a journalist specializing in demography, who argues in "Ready, Set, Grow" (p. 60) that an increase of 100 million people in the United States by 2050 will be beneficial. George Friedman, a geopolitical analyst, also defies received wisdom, saying the nation's pre-eminence, far from ending, has only just begun ("The U.S. Stays on Top," p. 69).

When SMITHSONIAN debuted in 1970, the announcement said (please forgive the masculine usage) it would "probe Man's disasters, from oil spills to famine, clarify his predicaments, from overpopulation to pollution, and join battle for his improvement." And so we do. In these pages and on our Web site, Smithsonian.com, you'll learn about threats to oceans and wildlife. But you'll also learn about efforts to ease hunger, disease and poverty. "I am filled with hope," says Melinda French Gates, co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation ("Saving Lives," p. 84).

Scientists say the capacity to imagine the future is one of the most salient human qualities, separating us from other animals and even our fellow primates. The idea behind this special issue is to get a better feel for the consequences of what humanity is up to, and to anticipate whatever's next. SMITHSONIAN set out 40 years ago to "fashion guideposts for today and tomorrow." That pursuit seems more pressing than ever.

TERENCE MONMANEY is the magazine's executive editor.

THE 40 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

3. THE CATCH OF THE DAY? JELLYFISH.
4. NEW CARS WILL BE GIVEN AWAY, FREE.
7. 2,000 NEW MAMMAL SPECIES WILL BE DISCOVERED.
8. IT'S CURTAINS FOR THE WORLD'S RAREST DOLPHIN.
11. THE HEARTLAND WILL RISE AGAIN.
12. THE TOP U.S. SOCIAL PROBLEM? UPWARD MOBILITY.
15. MOST AMERICANS FEAR FOR THE PLANET'S HEALTH.
16. UNLESS WE CONSERVE, MORE PEOPLE WILL GO HUNGRY.
19. GLOWING SQUID WILL LEAD TO NEW ANTIBIOTICS.
20. HEALTH WORKERS WILL ERADICATE MALARIA.
23. HOW WILL WE AVERT THE DINOSAURS' FATE? TELESCOPES.
24. BRAIN SCANS WILL ILLUMINATE THE INFANT MIND.
27. EVERYONE WILL MAKE HIS OWN MUSIC.
28. SECRETS WILL REVEAL IF YOUNG JFK WAS "VACUOUS."
31. NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTHS WILL REVIVE THEIR CULTURE.
32. U.S.-MUSLIM RELATIONS WILL IMPROVE.
35. VIRUSES WILL HELP BUILD MACHINES.
36. GOODBYE, STEREO; HELLO, HYPER-REAL ACOUSTICS.
39. YOUR REFRIGERATOR WILL TALK TO YOU.
40. READING WILL BECOME AN ATHLETIC ACTIVITY.