

**FUTURE** *takes*

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### *Discussion Threads*

This issue starts three discussion threads, one on demography and destiny, one on evolving concepts and uses of time, and one on cultural diversity. *Future Takes* welcomes supporting, opposing, and other relevant commentary.

#### **Discussion Thread on Demographic Issues: Demography as Destiny, and Demography in a Global Village**

by Juanita Tamayo Lott, [jtlott@capaccess.org](mailto:jtlott@capaccess.org)

Much of futurist dialogue centers around advances in science and technology. A less visible but basic, underlying factor in understanding the past, present, and future of the human race is demography, the statistical study of human populations. Thomas Malthus, regarded as the father of demography, focused on demographic transition and the sustainability of various populations and selected countries. Basic components of demographic analysis include births, deaths, immigration and emigration. To understand and to balance supply and demand, basic demographic variables such as sex ratios, age distributions, and life expectancy of cohorts are measured and tracked. In the 21st century, demographic transition and sustainability must now be viewed within the global village.

If we could shrink the earth's population to a village of precisely 100 people, with all the existing human ratios remaining the same, it would look something like the following.<sup>1</sup> There would be:

- 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 Americans (North, Central, and South), 8 Africans
- 52 would be female, 48 would be male
- 70 would be non-white, 30 would be white
- 70 would be non-Christian, 30 would be Christian
- 89 would be heterosexual, 11 would be homosexual
- 6 people would possess 59% of the entire world's wealth and all 6 would be from the United States
- 80 would live in substandard housing,
- 70 would be unable to read, 50 would suffer from malnutrition
- would be near death, 1 would be near birth
- (yes, only 1) would have a college education
- 1 would own a computer

Future discussion threads on demographic issues will focus on the (1) aging of the post industrial countries, highlighting the United States experience and forecasts, (2) changing household and family composition, (3) assumptions and realities of worker/dependent ratios, and (4) religion, race and citizenship as demographic variables.

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<sup>1</sup> Contributed by James G. Smirniotopoulos, M.D., USUHS

**Discussion Thread on Evolving Concepts and Uses of Time**

*by Tommy T. Osborne, COL, USA (Ret), 703-425-7402*

We have progressed from Hunter/Gatherer, where time was a rudimentary concept, based on immediate events to satisfy immediate needs through multiple technological groupings or civilizations, in terms of time: from Pastoral (where time is a driver of phased actions planting, harvesting, fixing tools/clothes in a seasonal context), through City-States and Kings that needed calendars and saw seasons in years, months, days and subdivision of days; to Industrial Nation States that actually used short (hours) and long (multiple years) as work periods. We moved from work as an a-periodic necessity to seasons of work, then finer sub divisions of work. As the sub-divisions became finer, the concept and fact of parsing days into work and non-work periods grew. By the mid Twentieth Century, the most industrialized nations worked less than half of a 24 hour day and had total non-work periods ranging from half of a month to two months, excluding Holy Days and other celebration. Work and non-work were sequential.

An odd thing happened as people tried to raise productivity, or output/input ratios. Technology raised the productivity of industrial, entertainment and farm workers. However, with the growth in Knowledge Workers vis a vis the other three groups, the challenge of productivity grew. How do you improve ratios where both components are ill defined? Office administrative staff was dramatically reduced by the use of office automation, but they were the least expensive inputs. Now the non-admin staff is doing its own administration in addition to its own functions, courtesy of advanced computing suites. With information distributed in less time via e-mail/voice mail and available 24 x 7, and portable/home voice and information processing approaching 100%, work time can be all the time. Most "key" knowledge workers are always on for calls and on over half the day for work related information processing. Despite this increase in automation and in time dedicated to work, the work/information queue exceeds the work level. We're exhausted and time challenged, trading personal time for work and losing focus on being whole-or so the legend goes.

What of the next 50, 100, 500 years? Our information gurus have long predicted automated assistants which can take routine decisions, separate out useless information and segregate information we need by time and type of urgency. I have thought of giving the rapidly aging, mostly general information media, like the newspapers that pile up on my desk, a time to live (TTL), just like undelivered TCP/IP packets. 30 day old papers and newsmagazines would disintegrate, having exceeded their TTL; opinion and professional magazines would have a longer life or consist only of a contents page. The rest would be available on line. Would this automated help, current-ness related life span and pull versus push result in a return to less harried times? Can it be done in a just in time economy where almost all the slack and friction have been removed from the most successful business processes? What do you think?

**Discussion Thread on Cultural Diversity**

*by Dave Stein, editorinchief@futuretakes.org*

Cultural diversity enriches the human experience, and we are indeed fortunate to know about lifestyles and values of other societies and cultures, both those of the present-day and those of the past. There is much that we can learn from other parts of the world. For example, where we value our traditional work ethic, Western Europe places more primacy on family and leisure time, as evidenced by their longer annual vacations and (in some parts of "Old Europe") shorter workdays. Where we value near-term results including the quarterly earnings statement, Oriental countries have traditionally been characterized by patience and a longer time horizon. In fact, the viability of their long time horizon was demonstrated quite convincingly by the outcome of the Vietnam War. Speaking of time, some Native

tribes do not distinguish among past, present, and future in their respective languages! Even the traditional Islamic societies, although repressive and austere by our standards, have historically valued learning, as evidenced by their contributions to science, mathematics, and medicine while much of Europe was in the Dark Ages. (Interestingly, these societies were generally more tolerant of other Western religions than were their Christian contemporaries.) These are but a few of the many examples that history can offer us.

However, as a result of a cultural "trade deficit," cultural diversity is giving way to cultural hegemony. This is illustrated by the migration of some TV game shows and other forms of entertainment to Western Europe and elsewhere. Ditto for fast food establishments. In fact, when I visited Brussels in mid-1999, I was told to remember that blue "M's" indicated metro stations whereas yellow "M's" referred to a well-known fast food chain! Nothing against TV game shows and fast food chains – but why are the entertainment, authentic restaurants, and the other ways of various cultures and countries abroad not migrating here (the notable exceptions being Eastern religion, philosophy, and medicine)? Similarly, Japan has had baseball for many years, but more recently, American baseball stadium food has been making inroads there. Now, Japanese baseball fans no longer need be concerned about dying from stomach cancer as their ancestors often did. They now have the opportunity to die of colon cancer, just as we do in North America!

What are the implications of the present drift toward cultural hegemony? There are several points for contemplation:

1. Since time immemorial, cultures have conquered or displaced other cultures, either militarily or otherwise. Is the situation fundamentally different today, given globalization and the information age, or are we observing a difference in degree rather than in kind?
2. Is the trend toward cultural hegemony really a problem?
3. Are we in danger of losing the lessons that other cultures can teach us? In the years to come, will we be looking at life through only one lens?
4. How will the worldwide losses of alternative "operating systems" impact those whose interests, skills, and personality types are incompatible with contemporary "mainstream" culture as we know it? Will those who are "out of step" in one culture not find a home anywhere?
5. Using metrics such as celebrity status and salary, will the same types of people who are MVPs here (primarily entertainers such as athletes and movie stars) be the MVPs worldwide?
6. While we uplift mankind by "exporting" prosperity (in our terms), human rights, and democracy, are we also exporting a workaholic society, together with the costs that it exacts – costs to balanced and fulfilling lifestyles, to health and wellness, to adequate rest (with implications to driver alertness on the highway), to family stability, and to responsible parenting of children so that they don't yield to harmful peer pressures?

As we so often hear in various outdoor games, "It's your serve." What say ye?