

The following is a speech written by Mary Wanser for a history class November 15, 2008. The assignment was to answer these questions:

Judging from developments since 1989, which problems do you think will prove the most serious in the years to come? Why? Do you think there is good reason for optimism? Why?

After learning this semester about the shaping of nations from the 17th century until the present, the adage about history repeating itself rings true to my ears. We have made strides to unite as a people; yet sadly, I see that we are still segregated nations filled with as much greed as led us to WWI. I notice patterns and habits that might cause one to give up on all hope for a bright tomorrow. It would seem that destruction is our destiny.

Since the collapse of Communism after 1989, some chaos still abounds in former Communist nations. This is similar to the post-WWII troubles faced by newly independent de-colonized nations. The current U.S. auto industry crisis reminds me of the cultural lag experienced by the Soviets when their planned market and collectivization strategies were not able to keep up with the consumer demands of the technological age of the late 70s and 80s. From trench warfare to atomic bombs and now, we've graduated to nuclear armaments.

The lining of pockets of wealthy Americans and big corporations by tax incentives established under Reaganomics in the 1980s and reinstated in the 21st century under another U.S. Republican administration is not much different from the bestowing of privileges upon the French nobility of the 1700s. Our oil addiction prompted President Bush to use as justification for invading Iraq in 2003 an erroneous report about "weapons of mass destruction" in the hands of terrorists. This is an echo of the British colonists' extermination of Amerindians out of their homeland in order to gain access to raw materials in 1700s North America.

I read the local paper, and home invasions in downtown Bradenton mark the ever-present struggle between the haves and the have-nots. It has been an issue for hundreds of years. Civil infighting still reigns, and I'm not only thinking of Shiites and Sunnis in foreign Iraq. I tune to domestic news, and I see gays versus straights on the streets of California.

Technological globalization of the 1990s made it clear that we are all more interconnected than ever before. By 2000, it was well known that all nations of the globe, together, face environmental issues. In these past several months, it has become apparent that when the economy of one nation falters, particularly that of a so-called superpower, it creates a global ripple effect. Just as no man is an island, so too, no country stands independent of the rest of the world. We need each other.

Which problems do I see as most serious? It's not the economic ones, nor political, cultural, religious, or even ideological. No, it's the problems that begin with the selfishness of each individual person that I fear are, and will be, the most serious in the years to come. The globe is made up of nations, and nations of individuals. Until each one of us is willing to share what's been given him and to work for the common good beyond individual desires, poverty will continue. Until we set down weapons to lift another's hand, live and let live, and embrace that which unites us rather than focus on that which divides, war will not cease. Until we learn to love

our neighbors, discuss differences, and are open to new ideas, walls will remain erected. Until we teach our children civility, claim responsibility for ourselves and for our own actions while restraining the finger of blame, and learn respect for our brother regardless of race or creed or demographics, not until then do I see history not repeating the same destructive cycle.

Is there good reason for optimism? Where there's life, there's hope. Without that, what else do we have?

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