

[Click to Print](#)[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Columns and OpEds

[\[Print\]](#) [\[Email\]](#)

Gene Healy: Not quite the 'decade from hell'

By: [Gene Healy](#)
Examiner Columnist
December 29, 2009

Friday brings an end to a decade most Americans will be glad to see the back of. What's to like about a 10-year span that started with an embarrassingly botched election, moved on to the worst terrorist attack in U.S. history and ended with a harrowing financial crisis?

The "Aughties" were awful. But all the media-driven doom and gloom is getting a little out of hand. Yes, it was a rotten 10 years for America. But cheer up: Things aren't as bad as they seem, and there's a good chance they'll get better.

This was the "decade from hell," Andy Serwer proclaims in a recent Time cover story: a period of economic apocalypse and unrelenting terror, "the most dispiriting and disillusioning decade Americans have lived through in the post-World War II era."

Holy hyperbole, hackman. Has Serwer never heard of the "misery index," the measure of unemployment plus inflation that Ronald Reagan used to pummel Jimmy Carter in the 1980 race? At 11.84, it's at its decade-long peak right now, but it hit 22 in Carter's last months and busted Obama's record in four of the last six decades.

Surely the 1930s -- the decade that saw Hitler's rise to power and a U.S. unemployment that routinely passed 20 percent -- has to count as more "dispiriting" than the 2000s. And how about the '60s -- a decade of assassinations, vicious race riots, rising crime and a pointless war that killed more than 50,000 Americans?

The Aughties were worse, Serwer says, because "the idea that terrorists can attack anytime and anywhere is new and profoundly unsettling."

Well, settle down. The latest "Human Security Brief," tabulating political violence worldwide, reports that over the last decade, "fatalities from terrorism have declined by some 40 percent," while "al-Qaeda has suffered a dramatic collapse in popular support throughout the Muslim world." Every year of this decade -- including 2001 -- many more Americans died from the flu than died from terrorism.

Doomsayers like Serwer could benefit from a little historical perspective. As P.J. O'Rourke once put it, if you think there was some golden age in the past you'd rather live in, "let me say one word: 'dentistry.' "

The fact is, a lot of good things happened in the 2000s, and, typically, the bounties of the era were provided

by private enterprise, not the machinations of government do-gooders. The Internet put the means of production in the hands of the workers, leading to a dynamic do-it-yourself culture in which bloggers compete with established columnists, bands without a record contract can hit it big, and anyone with a digital camera can get his 15 minutes on YouTube.

History comes in cycles. The Aughties resemble a milder version of the '60s, a decade that began with high trust in government (as happened after 9/11) and ended with Americans relearning the old lessons about federal incompetence and the limits to American power.

But whenever pessimism gets its hooks in me -- which is fairly often -- I think back to the introduction my colleague David Boaz wrote a few years ago for "Toward Liberty," a collection marking 25 years of the Cato Institute.


Boaz describes the stagnant America of the late '70s, with a top tax rate of 70 percent, 91 percent of television viewers chained to the big three networks -- a time when people literally couldn't imagine a world without the Soviet Union: "Energy czars. Gas lines. Raging inflation. ABC-NBC-CBS. Mao Tse-Tung. The Soviet Union. Apartheid. It was a different era. What wasn't so obvious at the time was that it was the end of an era."

That era ended because Americans corrected their course after two difficult decades, doing the right thing after exhausting all other possibilities, in Churchill's phrase. And the years to come will give us plenty of incentive to put America on the right path again.

Examiner Columnist Gene Healy is a vice president at the Cato Institute and the author of "The Cult of the Presidency."

Find this article at:

http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/columns/Not-quite-the-_decade-from-hell_-8694125-80226977.html

 [Click to Print](#)

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.