

The Earth in 100 Years

“What do you imagine the world will be like in one hundred years?” is a question that has spanned generations and been asked countless times over to thousands, millions, and perhaps even billions of people. As children, this question provokes visions of shining, golden-domed cities and sleek flying cars- images that have been imprinted on our brains from watching generations of people before us interpret their own versions of the distant future. George Orwell’s 1949 novel “1984” brought about the idea of a futuristic society based upon implausible technology and constant surveillance. Television shows like the 1960s’ “The Jetson’s” and movies like the 1985 classic “Back to the Future” imagined a prospective tomorrow filled with fanciful gadgets and gizmos intangible and outrageous but- maybe, just maybe- slightly possible. No doubt, one hundred years ago, people had similar dreams for the future. They may not have conceptualized flying cars yet, in a time when the real car was barely a distant whisper, but they did dream up advanced technology and supremely amplified industry that would make their own lives vastly better. Dreams that, subsequently, they made a reality.

Almost exactly one hundred years ago, the rapid industrialization of the 1920s and the few decades prior left us with a world that would now have the technology to continue to drastically grow, improve, and modernize. In fact, in just twenty years, the world went from a loose collaboration of small, individualized farms to heavily populated cities supported by mass industry. One hundred years later, a vast array of technology and abstract personal conveniences are available that people a hundred years ago would never have even dared to dream of. However, this same rapid modernization that led to a century of wonder has also left us with a sour truth and a bitter future. This essay is not about the typical dreams of a bygone,

wonderstruck world. It is the bleaker, perhaps more realistic, realizations of a disillusioned youth.

Since the beginning of the industrial era, a little over a hundred and seventy years ago, levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere have been raised by 48%, more than what happened naturally over a 20,000-year period. Needless to say, human beings are the primary reasons for this stark and shocking increase. The climate change does not end there. The global temperature has increased 2.1 degrees Fahrenheit since 1880. The sea level increases by 3.3 millimeters per year. But, of course, those are just numbers on paper, and this prompt is not about proving the state of our world now or narrating the changes in the last hundred years. It is about imagining the world in one hundred years. So, let me paint a picture.

It is the year 2121. There is no more ice in the Arctic Ocean and a variety of species native to the region have become extinct, including the polar bear. The mass melting of vast ice sheets and the subsequent expansion of warming seawater has caused the sea level to rise one to eight feet above the levels of the early 21st century. Small islands and entire portions of previously uncovered landmass are completely drowned by the terrible flooding that arises in the wake of these developments. The warming sea water alters ocean currents to create a breeding ground for massive hurricanes and intense rainfall- storms that frequently and forcibly decimate inhabited areas more than ever before. Weather across the world is increasingly unpredictable and severe. Mass wildfires in dry climate areas like California and Australia are fed by the warming temperatures that cause hotter, drier summers and intense, prolonged heat waves. These mass fires are now almost a constant, extremely dangerous occurrence that ravage diverse ecosystems like the Amazon Rain Forest and completely destroy many plants, animals, and natural wonders. The air is thick and unclean almost everywhere on Earth, making the century one of the first in

which it can be a struggle just to breathe. With the carbon budget completely used up, the world is a terrifying, almost uninhabitable place.

This vision is not a pretty picture. In fact, these gruesome images are enough to strike the deepest of fear into anyone's heart. The truth is, at the rate that atmospheric temperature and carbon emissions are rising, in a mere one hundred years, our beautiful world could descend into a state of utter and irreparable damage. However, I believe there is another way, another dream for the future. My dream for the future. Your dream. Our dream. There is a hope; a steadfast, reachable hope. Hope is never truly lost, not to a world in which it is often the only way forward, the only dream to reach for.

The hope is this: It is not too late yet. With the right precautions, humans can fix the problems they created. I believe, I hope, the next one hundred years is full of these changes, enacted by those who truly care for the planet they are so lucky to inhabit. Those who care enough to sacrifice some of their comfort in order to ensure lower carbon emissions and those who work hard enough find more environmentally friendly energy sources in order to use less of the fragile natural resources human beings so often take for granted. The Earth could get better if it is just given a break. In one hundred years, the Earth could still be as beautiful and diverse as it is today. In addition, the technological advancements that we have always dreamed of are still possible- perhaps even flying cars.

It's not too late yet. However, we only have one planet. Our world is a fragile balance of diverse ecosystems and wondrous life forms and, as inhabitants, we need to take on the responsibility of caring for it. Whether or not we want to accept it, this responsibility was entrusted to us, and we only get one shot at upholding it. If it is ignored, there may not be an earth in one hundred years. However, if we embrace this responsibility and make it our dream for

the next one hundred years, the earth could age gracefully and the generations who proceed us will have the ability to invent and create a better, more advanced world. To do that, however, we must remember how fast the earth has changed and deteriorated in the last hundred years from the impact of our human innovations. We must also realize that we have to take action now. If we do, we allow the children a hundred years from now to form their own dreams, their own hopes. We allow them to dream of a world a hundred years older than theirs.

Work Cited

Shaftel, Holly and others. *Global Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet*. Earth Science Communications Team at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, 2007, climate.nasa.gov/effects/. Accessed 19 April 2021.