

TURN BACK THE CLOCK (Originally published May 1972)

During the summers spent on a farm in the early 1930s, one of the pleasant pastimes was thumbing through old magazines. Conveniently located on an enclosed, back porch hallway on the way to the commode was a massive, old fashioned, armoire-like bookcase stacked full of twenty-five-year-old copies of *Harpers Sketch* and *The London Illustrated News*. At the time, they all seemed terribly ancient relics of an era and society long past.

In the early thirties, space travel was still something to read about in pulp, science fiction magazines; but with radio, planes, fast cars, sound movies and the promised wonders of the Chicago World's Fair, the times were modern enough to contrast sharply with those pictured in 1900 vintage magazines. In those innocent, turn-of-the-century days, the industrial revolution was just getting into high gear, but life proceeded still at the slower pace of a horse and carriage society; balloonists were the rage, and daring, primitive motorists were pictured in goggles and dusters perched on the high seats of monstrous open touring cars that sported crank handles, acetylene lamps and narrow Michelin tires.

Recently, while clearing out a mass of accumulated junk in one of the den cabinets, we discovered a twenty-five-year-old November issue of *TIME* magazine. It, too, seemed a little dated when compared to recent issues, but not nearly so outmoded as the 1907 magazines did in 1932. There has been change, of course, in the last quarter century, but, by comparison, it has been minimal and mainly one of degree and superfluous abundance of disordered evolution instead of revolution. The 1947 automobiles look bloated and bulkier but not significantly different from the models of today; trucks and planes even less changed; clothing styles, in spite of the freakish fringe, still recognizable; and the news glut of the exploding communications networks was already in evidence.

Just to turn back the clock and remind you of what was going on twenty-five years ago and of the issues that concerned us then, we've culled some of the following information from that magazine.

The cover story featured Chep Morrison, the 35-year-old "reform candidate" mayor of New Orleans who was busy modernizing and transforming a stagnant Crescent City. A dapper, hard-faced President Truman had just reconvened Congress to ask for controls over the U.S. economy in order to combat rising inflation. Walter Reuther had been president of the UAW for more than a year and was angling to bring the CIO under his control. A non-silent Howard Hughes was testifying before a congressional investigating committee about the \$70 million contract for the F-11, and, in Brooklyn, a Howard Hughes for President Club was being organized.

In Indianapolis, its 15% Negro population was worrying officials and a crime wave there was terrorizing the community. California's governor, Earl Warren, announced he was a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination. (You see, it could have been worse.) The Freedom Train was rolling across the country collecting voluntary contributions from individuals and private agencies to the tune of more than \$12 million a month for relief of the hungry and homeless in post-war Europe.

Overseas, the royal wedding of Philip and Elizabeth was about to take place in Britain. German children were pictured scavenging in garbage cans for food. The Russians were obstinately obstructing any peace treaty for Germany and stirring up communist riots in Italy and Greece in an attempt to wreck the Marshall Plan. In China, Generalissimo Chiang Kai Chek was fighting the forces of obscure Communist Chieftain Mao Tse-tung in the General provinces and begging for more U.S. help.

A famous educator here at home griped that permissiveness was making a hash out of education. In medicine, "slugged blood" was the newest discovery and high priced labor was threatening the financial structure of hospitals. (In Columbus, the price of a private hospital room was up to \$12 a day.)

There was a double page spread advertising the revolutionary new Tucker automobile and urging all interested buyers to send for information. Powell Crosley Jr. hoped to effect economies in labor costs so that he could reduce the price of his midget car from \$800 to \$500. Gillette was introducing a new version of its one-piece razor. The cost of TIME magazine had already reached twenty cents a copy.

So, if nostalgia is your bag, the simpler times of the early 1900s seem like an earthly paradise. In retrospect, however, even the troubled days of the late 1940s had some advantages. Missile credibility and generation gaps hadn't been invented. The college campuses were filled with mature, ex-GIs who thought an education was worth working for. Marijuana smoking was still confined to hopheads and musicians. Not even TIME was wringing its hands over population explosions, urban decay, racism, pollution, the disadvantaged poor, or welfare crises. No one had heard of a health consumer. The day of the sociologist, anthropologist and environ-mentalist had not yet dawned, and ecology was a word known only to crossword puzzle enthusiasts. Women thought they had already been liberated and you could be as gay as you pleased without being queer. Angela Davis, Jane Fonda and Ralph Nader were still in the diaper and potty-training phase, and Kennedy was the name of a film comedian.