

Name That Decade (and Try to Smile)

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Body

To the Editor:

Re "Queasy Feeling About a **Decade** With No **Name**," by Clyde Haberman (NYC column, Jan. 4):

Has a nameless dread replaced America's famous optimism? For all the talk about two Americas, to an immigrant (from Ireland) like me, red **and** blue America seems enchanted by a shared vision of impending doom.

For the reds, the catastrophes will be the product of divine providence; different religions offer differing story lines, all of them inevitable, none of them pleasant.

For the blues, the catastrophes will be the product of the policies, foreign **and** domestic, of the reds, whose ascent to power carries the aura of predestination.

In times like these, optimism feels insane!

Optimism has never been "cool" -- there is something silly, naive, goofy, irrational in the persistence of optimism. Hope threatens: disillusion is inevitable. Instead of "Give me your tired," should the inscription on the Statue of Liberty now read "Abandon hope all ye who enter here"?

Calm down, America; the sound you hear is the laughter of your immigrants, whose relentless optimism has kept you going for centuries now. Mindful of the danger of self-fulfilling prophecies, perhaps we might recall that we have nothing to fear but fear itself.

This **decade** will be **named** in retrospect. How it will be **named** is in our hands, today.

Angela M. Hegarty

Central Islip, N.Y., Jan. 4, 2005

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