

Back to the Future . . .



In addition to looking to the past to understand our society, we also look to the future. In 1900, newspapers and magazines printed predictions for the turn of the 21st century. Decide, true or false, whether each of the following was predicted in 1900.

[The American] will live 50 years instead of 35 as at present—for he will reside in the suburbs. The city house will practically be no more. Building in blocks will be illegal. The trip from suburban home to office will require a few minutes only. A penny will pay the fare.

- True
- False

2. Fleets of air-ships, hiding themselves with dense, smoky mists, thrown off by themselves as they move, will float over cities, fortifications, camps, or fleets. They will surprise foes below by hurling upon them deadly thunderbolts. These aerial war-ships will necessitate bomb-proof forts, protected by great steel plates over their tops as well as at their sides.

- True
- False

3. Persons and things of all kinds will be brought within focus of cameras connected electrically with screens at opposite ends of circuits, thousands of miles at a span. American audiences in their theatres will view upon huge curtains before them the coronations of kings in Europe or the progress of battles in the Orient although they will not hear the crowds cheer or the guns of a distant battle as they boom.

- True
- False

4. The owner of a [flying] machine, or even the man who did not own one, by patronizing the express lines, could live 50 miles away and yet do business in the city day by day, going by air line to his home each night.

- True
- False



5. Coal will not be used for heating or cooking. It will be scarce, but not entirely exhausted. The earth's hard coal will last until the year 2050 or 2100; its soft-coal mines until 2200 or 2300. Meanwhile both kinds of coal will have become more and more expensive. Man will have found electricity manufactured by waterpower to be much cheaper.

- True
- False

6. Ready-cooked meals will be bought from establishments similar to our bakeries of today. They will purchase materials in tremendous wholesale quantities and sell the cooked foods at a price much lower than the cost of individual cooking. Food will be served hot or cold to private houses in pneumatic tubes or automobile wagons. The meal being over, the dishes used will be packed and returned to the cooking establishments where they will be washed.

- True
- False

7. The living body will to all medical purposes be transparent. Not only will it be possible for a physician to actually see a living, throbbing heart inside the chest, but he will be able to magnify and photograph any part of it.

- True
- False

Sources:

Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

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John Elfreth Watkins, Jr., Predictions of the Year 2000, *Ladies' Home Journal* (December 1900), reprinted by the Yorktown Historical Society (accessed August 31, 2009).

<http://teachinghistory.org/history-content/quiz>