

AMERICA *the* VINCIBLE

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY
FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Earl H. Fry
Stan A. Taylor ♦ Robert S. Wood

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Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

FRY, EARL H.

America the Vincible : U.S. foreign policy for the twenty-first century / EARL H. FRY, STAN A. TAYLOR, ROBERT S. WOOD.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-13-028457-2

1. United States—Foreign relations—1989- 2. Twenty-first century. I. Taylor, Stan A., [date]. II. Wood, Robert S., [date].

III. Title.

E840.F78 1994 93-24566

327.73'009'049—dc20

Editorial/production supervision and interior design: *Edie Riker*

Cover design: *Design Source*

Production coordinator: *Mary Ann Gloriande*

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A Paramount Communications Company
Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632

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Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 0-13-028457-2

Prentice-Hall International (UK) Limited, *London*
Prentice-Hall of Australia Pty. Limited, *Sydney*
Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., *Toronto*
Prentice-Hall Hispanoamericana, S.A., *Mexico*
Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, *New Delhi*
Prentice-Hall of Japan, Inc., *Tokyo*
Simon & Schuster Asia Pte. Ltd., *Singapore*
Editora Prentice-Hall do Brasil, Ltda., *Rio de Janeiro*

PREFACE

As the title of this book emphasizes, America is a “vincible” nation as it prepares to enter the highly complex and interdependent world of the twenty-first century.

Vincibility does not mean that the United States, home to more than a quarter billion people, will soon relinquish its position as the planet’s most powerful nation-state, possessing an awesome strategic and conventional military capability bolstered by a huge and resilient national economy. Indeed, one might argue with some justification that the end of the Cold War and the dismantlement of the Soviet Union have resulted in the United States being the world’s only superpower.

Even a superpower, however, cannot guarantee stability, peace, and democracy in a global community fragmented into more than 180 nation-states. Perhaps the threat of an imminent nuclear confrontation with another military superpower is now behind us, but many more nations are expected to possess nuclear weapons and delivery systems over the next few decades. With the proliferation of such deadly weapons, the chances that they will be used in combat somewhere around the globe have increased dramatically.

Moreover, decision-makers in Washington, D.C., are just beginning to grapple with the intricacies of peacekeeping and peacemaking operations in areas as diverse as Africa, Eastern Europe, and Central America. Just during the early period of the 1990s, American troops have been deployed in an effort to combat aggression in the Persian Gulf, end starvation and anarchy in East

Africa, quell civil strife in the Adriatic, and restore democratic government in the Caribbean. As tensions flare around the world, will the United States be expected to assume the role of global cop and take responsibility for maintaining international and regional law and order?

At home, the average American citizen is beginning to comprehend both the opportunities and vulnerabilities present in an increasingly interdependent community of nations. It is now easier than ever before to travel around the world or to procure goods and services produced in distant lands. More U.S.-based companies than ever before are now exporting their products, and foreign-owned enterprises in the United States provide 5 million jobs for American workers.

On the other hand, the United States has the world's largest government debt and is very dependent on foreign investors to buy U.S. Treasury bills and bonds which help finance this debt. Washington, D.C. can no longer determine the value of the dollar or the level of domestic interest rates without first taking into account how these decisions would impact upon America's global competitiveness. Moreover, the U.S. government could outlaw the use of CFCs, a substance which damages the earth's ozone layer, but this would do little to solve the problem unless other nations were also willing to curtail the production of this chemical compound.

In other words, many vital issues linked to the military, the economy, the environment, and natural resources and energy are beyond the capacity of the U.S. government to solve unilaterally. As a consequence, the well-being of the American people may be more vulnerable than ever before to decisions rendered and actions taken outside the borders of the United States. This, when combined with the overlapping of "domestic" and "international" issues in an era of interdependency and interconnectedness, renders the making of U.S. foreign policy in the twenty-first century a very difficult task indeed.

The end of World War II and the rise of the Soviet Union were watershed events which indelibly differentiated the world of the first half of the twentieth century from the world of the second half. The end of the Cold War, the demise of the Soviet Union as a nation and communism as an ideology, and the growing thrust of global interdependence, may prove to be equally monumental events which differentiate the latter half of the twentieth century from the first few decades of the twenty-first century. *America the Vincible* highlights the major challenges facing U.S. policy-makers in a vastly transformed international system and illustrates why bold new thinking will be needed in both America's domestic and foreign policy arenas.

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AMERICA THE VINCIBLE

THE SHIP OF STATE IN HAZARDOUS WATERS

MILLENARIAN REFLECTIONS

Time is a human invention. It is true that day flows into night and that the seasons pass from warm to cold and from dry to wet, but the punctuations of life are inserted by man. The continuum is broken by human decision, and in those mental ruptures human beings find meaning. The notions of ages and of eras, of schedules and of history, of daily work and of sabbaths—all of these constitute the grammar that gives coherence to the statements of life.

In Western civilization, we are now approaching two of these punctuation marks: the end of a century and, in more visionary perspective, the onset of a new millennium. One can reasonably expect that learned commentary will be published, sermons will be preached, popular imagination will be titillated, and proverbial mountains will be climbed—all signaling the end of the twentieth century as well as the end of the second common millennium.¹

If the end of a human-defined fragment of time inspires reflections on who we individually and collectively are and where we are going, we can be excused for beginning a study on U.S. foreign policy by examining the nature of the era in which we now find ourselves and into which we are moving. Moreover, as the title of this book indicates, we are concerned not only with the movement into another century and millennium, but the unprecedented

vincibility and vulnerability of the United States of America as it prepares for the challenges which lie ahead.

There are moments in human history when people from many walks of life, and subject to widely diverse conditions, sense that the answers which they had learned to the problems of life no longer quite fit. Not that they were irrelevant but that they were incomplete. New circumstances shaped the old problems and new problems for which the wisdom of the ages had not yet devised answers pressed upon the consciousness. Such periods are later seen to have been great transitions in civilization itself. The end of the Roman empire and the beginning of the Middle Ages was such an era. The conditions of security and public order, the requirements of economic life, the definition of ethics, the relationship with the "gods"—these were all at best ambiguous and at worst collapsing. So it was with the end of the Middle Ages and the onset of the modern state system. The feudal structure of obedience and order, the rigid connection between the land and one's economic role, the highly stratified social structure, the limits on commerce and lending, the dominant role of the Church and the restrictions on private conscience—all of the pillars of meaning were at first eroded and then crumbled. Some now suggest that the latter part of the twentieth century may also be such a period of transition. If so, the turn of the century and a new millennium now almost upon us may yet be seen as marking a decisive turning point in history.

DECIPHERING THE NEW ERA OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Thomas Kuhn, noted commentator on the history of science, argued that science is characterized by a shared understanding of what constitutes the correct questions to ask, the ways to go about answering them, and the parameters of acceptable responses. Many social scientists have observed that this characterization goes quite beyond science. Political and social culture itself is bound together in much the same way. Kuhn argued that when observed phenomena could no longer quite fit within the accepted questions and answers and could not be studied using the standard techniques, complicated theoretical elaborations were often constructed both to accommodate these "anomalies" and to secure the accepted approaches.² And so it is in the broader society. We go to extraordinary lengths to preserve the traditional understanding and develop marvelous rationalizations. Demographic patterns change, the conditions of work and of wealth are transformed, the means of communication vary, new ideas (or old ideas rediscovered) emerge, social patterns and individual expectations are remolded—but we try desperately to maintain older patterns of behavior and of rule. Indeed, as Kuhn demonstrated in the history of science, it is not that the older approaches were utterly wrong

but that they were substantially inadequate. Revolutions seldom annihilate completely the ancient ways of thought and behavior, but rather they develop coexistent ways or rework the old.

Many students of international relations and foreign policy contend that we do indeed live in a period where ancient understandings and new conditions uneasily coexist. The understanding of international politics that emerged from the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern state system is seen as at best incomplete and at worst utterly irrelevant. The "classical" conception stemmed from a period in which new and relatively self-contained units of political authority arose which were territorially defined and effectively sovereign. The resultant "system" was a collection of states claiming total secular independence and actively seeking the military, economic, and ideological conditions necessary to make good on that claim. Integration within each state, and anarchy among the states, represented the basic presumptions upon which policy was to be grounded. Even if concepts of political liberty and economic wealth would prompt states to permit a free flow of peoples, goods, and money, they always insisted on the right to define the terms of the flow and to limit or end such interdependence should security requirements, economic advantage, or political control dictate such restrictions.

It is true that this model of international relations was never the whole of social reality nor was it particularly applicable to many smaller or weaker states. Indeed, on the latter point, Raymond Aron noted that the system was always tilted toward the great states; in other words, the system was oligopolistic and hegemonic in its basic power relations.³

Nonetheless, the paradigm, if simplified, sufficiently explicated for the statesman the world that he saw and, more importantly, provided a guide to action that seemed to promise reasonable control of his domestic and international environment.

Even today this abstract model of reality serves statesmen in the formulation and execution of their policies, and quite frequently with acceptable results. Particularly when we examine the politics of national defense, it is clear how dominant this approach is. Balance of power, alliance management, containment, deterrence, power projection—all of these words and phrases are the very staples of strategic discussion and analysis. Moreover, they are ideas with which a Frederick the Great or a Bismarck would feel comfortable. Even in economic areas, commentaries on foreign investment in the United States or on measures of protection for domestic industry are well within the parameters of the classical model. And yet, if the interdependence of societies is not a new phenomenon, the nature, range, depth, and impact of such interdependence may create a qualitatively different condition. The intertwining of capital markets, the truly multinational corporation, the global environmental linkages, the intrusiveness of modern communications, the range and speed of movement of peoples and goods, the apocalyptic destructiveness of

modern weapons, the potential empowerment of countless millions through the information revolution—all signal a transformation of the human condition that is at times utterly bewildering. In a real sense statesmen find themselves “between two worlds,” struggling to apply tested concepts in untested terrain and to develop new approaches to a world whose dimensions are still uncertain.

AMERICA THE VINCIBLE

It is the world thus portrayed that the United States confronts as it moves through the last decade of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. It is a decade, some prominent commentators argue, for which the United States is terribly unprepared and in which it finds itself vulnerable to forces that are perhaps beyond its control. For example, Paul Kennedy insists that the United States has already seen its best days as a global economic and military power.⁴ He offers the following admonition concerning the linkage between economic and strategic prowess:

For it has been a common dilemma facing previous “number-one” countries that even as their relative economic strength is ebbing, the growing foreign challenges to their position have compelled them to allocate more and more of their resources into the military sector, which in turn squeezes out productive investment and over time, leads to the downward spiral of slower growth, heavier taxes, deepening domestic splits over spending priorities, and a weakening capacity to bear the burdens of defense.⁵

The popular British magazine, *The Economist*, observes that the major task facing America’s political leadership “is to help the country come to terms with its diminishing preeminence in the world, both as a military and, above all, as an economic power.”⁶ David Calleo dishearteningly adds that the “United States has become a hegemon in decay, set on a course that points to an ignominious end.”⁷ Tokyo’s leading business newspaper writes of the Japanese belief in the “American decay,” referring to the United States as “a sick and ill-humored uncle who is suffering from financial and family problems, paying no attention to chastity or discipline.”⁸ Tokyo-based Nikko Research stresses that “there are many unfavorable factors rooted deeply in American society, such as the declining work ethic, increases in crime, deterioration of education, as well as social discipline and order.”⁹

The American people also harbor some ambivalent feelings about their nation’s future. In 1989, about half optimistically believed that the Cold War was about to end and that the Kremlin was sincere in seeking much better relations with the West, and two-thirds no longer viewed the USSR as an

immediate military threat.¹⁰ On the other hand, almost 60 percent perceived that Japan had now become the world's leading economic power, giving some credence to Richard Rosecrance's parallel observation that if "things continue as they are now, it won't be much beyond 2010 before Japan becomes the leading power in world politics."¹¹

There is little doubt that some of this criticism directed at the United States is justified, especially in the economic arena. For example, the U.S. share of the world export market has declined 30 percent since 1950. Between 1970 and 1987, the U.S. manufacturers' share of America's own domestic telephone market decreased from 99 percent to 25 percent, the machine tool market from 100 percent to 35 percent, and the color television market from 90 percent to 10 percent.¹² At the end of 1987, of the 100 largest industrial companies in the world (based on stock market value), 53 were Japanese, 34 were American, and 5 were British. Of the 100 largest banks (based on assets), 28 were Japanese, 11 French, 11 West German, and 11 American. Citizens of the United States have long taken pride in their high-technology sector, but U.S. trade in these products moved into the red in 1986 for the first time in the post-World War II era. Moreover, foreign corporations and individuals now receive almost 50 percent of all the patents issued by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, nearly twice as many as in 1980.

Do these statistics indicate that America is destined to be a much weaker economic power in the twenty-first century, and how will America's strategic and diplomatic choices be impacted by the nation's overall performance in an increasingly interdependent global economy? Has Henry Luce's 1941 vision of the "American Century" actually ended after only three or four decades?¹³ Does an "America the Vincible" stand at the portal of an age of great uncertainty?

We do not share the perspective of these prophets of decline. As one does a comparative trend analysis of the world's powers, one cannot help but be impressed at the resilience of the American people and their institutions. Indeed, by 1993 many of the economic ills which some seemed to attribute to the United States were visible elsewhere, including Japan, and American social stability and political adaptability were even more impressive. We use the concept of *vincibility* in its precise meaning in this book. We do not mean that America will play a less significant role in world affairs nor that America is destined to be characterized by weakness. To be *vincible* is to be vulnerable, to be capable of being overcome. Such a condition is the normal fate of men, individually or collectively. The founders of the American republic were keenly aware how fragile social arrangements and political institutions are and how much attention, therefore, needs to be given to the foundations of our polity and to the direction of our policies.

To acknowledge vulnerability is to understand that security is not automatic, that national preservation comes only through prudent, thoughtful, and

wise policies. A sense of vincibility implies not an end of Great Power status, but a sober assessment of the conditions and responsibilities of great power. A sense of invincibility is often associated with arrogance and is marked by bravado and a reckless disregard of one's permanent interests. The history of this century is littered with the political wreckage of regimes so animated. A truly strong and powerful country is one which recognizes national limitations and comfortably accepts social interdependence. America is the largest, continuous constitutional democracy in the world, but, as Abraham Lincoln observed, our form of government is always an experiment to which even today the cause of mankind is linked.

How will the United States validate its founding principles and aspirations in a changing and increasingly interdependent international environment? In a simplified sense, there is a continuum of possible responses. At one extreme of the continuum is the option to withdraw into a state of isolation so that the United States has very limited international dealings. Various states have tried permutations of this policy at different times with little success. The United States moved towards this kind of policy after World War I in response to public desires to avoid the kind of policies that had drawn America into that war. In today's interdependent world, however, few see isolationism as a viable option although its proponents occasionally appear on the domestic political stage, most frequently during national presidential campaigns. It is not a viable option today because of the extensive intertwining of peoples and economies which exists in the contemporary world and about which more will be said later in this book.

At the other extreme of the continuum is the option of acquiring such overwhelming power, and the reputation for using it, that, rather than dealing with the complexities of the world, America merely has to let its wishes be known and be prepared to enforce policies to achieve those interests regardless of the implications for other actors. This archetype has never existed to the degree that some would suggest, but the phrases *pax romana* and *pax britannica* have been used to describe earlier international systems which were dominated so thoroughly, either by the Romans in ancient times or by the British in more recent times, that most other states complied with the wishes of the empire.

Some have suggested that the period of time from World War II down to the end of the Vietnamese War was a period of *pax americana*, a global system heavily dominated by the preponderance of American power. Some have even talked of an "American Century." While these generalizations are much too broad, it is fair to say that the United States has been the predominant actor at least through much of the twentieth century. A commitment of American military could turn the balance of power in a conflict (or potential conflict) situation, the American dollar was (and continues to be) the international currency, and the sheer size of the American economy made all

other economies, especially those of war-torn Europe, pale into insignificance. American assistance was needed not only to win World War II but it was also needed to reweave the political and economic fabric of Western Europe.

One of the most fundamental changes in the post-World War II international political system, however, has been not only the end of the age of empire, but the disappearance of the type of international system in which empires can develop and exist. People who talk of a *pax japonica* or *pax americana* or any other kind of single power dominant system fail to recognize these changes. The great powers of today have difficulty governing their domestic affairs and they are unable to manage their own allies, let alone other hostile states within the international system. The United States cannot control events in Nicaragua, Panama, the Philippines, or other states where U.S. intervention traditionally has altered political developments. Even more dramatically, Russia, having lost both its internal and external empire, may only with great difficulty, if at all, establish its imperium over its erstwhile provinces and dependent allies.

Surely, some nations will continue to be more influential than others and today's influential nations may be less influential tomorrow, but today's decision-makers must pursue national security in a vastly different international environment—one that has never existed quite this way in history.

This era is unique in a number of ways. In the contemporary international political system neither isolationism nor single power hegemony is possible. The U.S. must deal with other nations, large or small, as if those relations mattered. It must recognize the many facets of interdependence and understand that other peoples and nations cannot be ignored or bullied. Never before in the history of mankind have the interests of all nations been so intertwined. Scores of books have been written describing in various details the complex web of interdependence that exists. Some of the most fundamental notions of traditional international politics have been challenged. To some degree, this also is what we mean in this book by the phrase "vincibility." Today's world is no longer controlled by the actions of powerful states; nonstate actors play significant roles, in some cases more significant than those played by some state actors, and some relatively weak states also have considerable influence. The very idea of political sovereignty has been challenged by historical forces. The notion that a state has supreme authority within its own borders has been challenged by many developments, at least two of which have little to do with economics and trade.

First, many states have treaty obligations which make it extremely difficult for them to exercise unilateral control over matters traditionally considered solely within their domestic jurisdiction. To be sure, states may still take unilateral actions; but, in an increasing number of situations, political and economic costs make it unwise to do so. Members of the European Community (EC), for example, effectively share powers over some political and economic matters for which states in the past have fought for the right to

control unilaterally. It is true that members can always withdraw from the EC if they are dissatisfied, but after forty years of integration, it is increasingly difficult to do so.

Second, a panoply of cross-national social, commercial, financial, and personal contacts have intertwined societies so completely that even legal, unilateral action by a state within its own borders can be undertaken only with considerable concern for the international implications. For every segment of American society which wants higher duties on imported goods, there will be another segment who will worry that such action will spark retaliation by foreign nations and subsequently hurt American exports. The legal concept of sovereignty has thus lost much of the factual political and economic base that historically undergirds it.

The era is unique in another way. At a time when the global system is becoming *more* homogeneous, nations themselves are becoming *less* homogeneous. This reverses an historic process that has been going on at least since the modern nation-state system came into existence in the mid-seventeenth century. Generally speaking, from the 1648 Peace of Westphalia which ended the Thirty Years War up to World War II, nations grew more *homogeneous* while the international system grew more *heterogeneous*. That is, domestic societies were being created through linguistic, economic, social, cultural, and political unification while, at the same time differences between nations were becoming greater as peoples began to define themselves ever more distinctly as Germans, Italians, Englishmen, etc. This is often referred to as the classical period for the development of nationalism. Nationalism was an integrative force within nations while at the same time it was a disintegrative force between nations.

But today the opposite is occurring. There is an increasing fragmentation within nations (more and larger communities of immigrants and refugees, greater language diversity, an explosion of separatist sentiment, demographic cleavages, etc.) while, at the same time, the states which make up the international system, particularly the western industrial nations and other states whose development has been influenced by the Enlightenment, are becoming more like one another.

Today, the forces of interdependence create common dilemmas as well as common enemies for all nations.¹⁴ Small states have as much at stake in a nuclear war between major powers as the major powers themselves have. All nations are equally vulnerable to economic disruption, to environmental and ecological degradation, and to terrorism. The major powers have as much interest in developments in smaller states as those states themselves have. Diplomats from all states are potential hostages and the resource policies of even the smallest states can create serious consequences for larger states. Again, it is developments like these that contribute to the vincibility of all nations.

Another manifestation of this phenomenon is that certain segments of national populations are becoming more like related segments in other nations and less like disparate segments in their own nations. An almost guild-like relationship has developed between people in similar occupations across national boundaries. For example, computer programmers in Japan, Russia, Italy, and the United States share common languages, communicate frequently through scholarly publications and personal correspondence, meet together often in international and regional conferences, have loyalty to certain common principles (a commitment to certain kinds of technological developments, etc.), have been trained at the same universities, and have been socialized by many similar ideas and values. In fact, they have more in common with similar groups in other nations than they have with their own countrymen in different professions. This principle may be more noticeable within high technology professions than others, but it is also present in other professions (for example, musicians, artists, academics, homemakers). This decreasing homogeneity within nation-states makes it more difficult for governments to define their national interests with pristine clarity. Increasingly, the critical question for foreign policy analysts is which particular group's interests are being furthered by the external policies of the government.

Beyond that, once national interests are defined, pursuing them in a fragile and interdependent world is equally more difficult. All nations have lost some of their abilities to control global economic and political forces. Fluctuating exchange rates, the tenuousness of energy sources, the vulnerability of the global environment to adverse ecological developments, the uneven distribution of commodities, small wars that can turn into large ones, subnational groups who can carry out severely damaging acts of terrorism, capital flows—all of these forces and many more are beyond the control of any single nation-state. In fact, in the contemporary world there are a decreasing number of national problems which can be solved solely by national policies.

The contemporary period thus fascinates and challenges by the way that the traditional concept of state sovereignty is being challenged from both above and below at the same time. In many regions of the world, traditional state sovereignty is qualified by supranational authority, such as the European Community or the North American Free Trade Area or even the United Nations, while being challenged at the same time by ethnic, tribal, religious, and political groups within.

In the face of this diversity and interdependence, America will continue to play an extremely significant, perhaps the dominant, role in the drama of international politics. But it can ill afford to do so except from a sense of the limits as well as reach of its power. Above all, American power in the twenty-first century, as in the past, will depend on the totality of America itself—on its economic, political, military, and moral qualities.

Interdependence and vincibility, like political independence and invulnerability, are always relative. But, as indicated above and as shall be further illustrated in the following chapters, the United States has occupied a virtually unique position among great world powers in its self-containment—geographically, politically, materially, intellectually. Not only the fact of growing interdependence, but the vast dimensions of it, are thus particularly disorienting to the American public and its leaders. The vincibility associated with this interdependence covers the whole spectrum from the cosmic to the pedestrian. Although it will be argued in Chapter 6 that the United States is still largely immune to invasion and occupation, it is clear that it is not immune to genocidal destruction. Not only the United States but the planet now lives under multiple swords of Damocles—nuclear, chemical, and biological in character—not to mention the potential for environmental destruction arising from our daily work and play.

On a personal note, if you look around the room in which you are sitting, you will see more mundane evidences of vulnerability. The chair upon which you sit, the clothes you wear, the hand-held calculator in your briefcase, the car outside for which the keys are in your pocket—all in some degree probably come from a foreign market or from a U.S.-based company under foreign ownership. The very notion of “foreign” may be undergoing substantial alterations. The social web that ties us to others also defines who we are. Even the music to which you listen and the ideas which move you may originate in places far removed from your home and your country. Your vacation to a faraway nation may be threatened by quarrels to which you are seemingly not a party and which you may not even comprehend. Vulnerability is not simply a condition of the abstraction called the “United States of America,” but of your daily life.

Returning to the earlier theme of this introduction, the transition through which we are now going, whether it be civilizational or more modest in proportion, is not simply an intellectual curiosity but rather the very warp and woof of our lives. *America the Vincible* is not a counsel of despair but a call for a new enlightenment from which new heights can be climbed. All Americans must understand that the quality and substance of their lives are potentially at risk, but that an informed citizenry and prudent policies are the preconditions to forestall dire consequences and to grasp the splendid opportunities which will also be found in the era of 2001 and beyond.

ENDNOTES

1. At the end of the first common millenium, legend suggests that millenarian fervor was so great that on January 1, 1000, the entire population of Iceland was converted en masse to Christianity. One does not anticipate that the fervor will be as strong at the completion of the second millennium. Even here, of course, not everyone subscribes to the calcula-