

editorial opinion

Meaning of the new year outshines bicentennial exploitation bunk

Hold on folks, here comes bicentennial year. After much bally-hoo, we've reached the 200-year mark. It seems that a greater part of 1975 was taken up with talking about this historical occasion. A lot of persons already are sick and tired of hearing about it.

Like most things in America today, the event has fallen prey to the guys who want to make a buck. Trinkets, banners and bumper stickers abound across the fruited plain.

Even Michigan license plates look like some weirdo rendition of Old Glory. Cities around the country are smacking bicentennial markers on buildings and acreage that have the remotest connection to history.

A major airline commissioned an artist to paint one of their craft to resemble the flag in abstract. Making it even worse, playing cards, ashtrays and toilet seats are being manufactured to commemorate the occasion.

Those of us who have been entrenched with the belief that somehow history should be treated in an intellectual vein may find ourselves using those toilet seats often.

But if you can overcome the crass commercialism made of the year, it would be a good

time to learn a little about this country. After the recent struggles we all have endured, this should be a year of reflection and reassessment of our goals.

Many persons are unaware of just what a great event transpired 200 years ago. The passage of time has dulled our senses to the fact that this country was founded on the then-revolutionary idea that all men were created equal.

It has been a constant battle to enforce and reaffirm this belief. There is much work yet to be done.

To begin the new year we should resolve to dig in and bone up on the principles on which this country was founded to make sure those beliefs last for another 200 years. Two things can be done to achieve this goal.

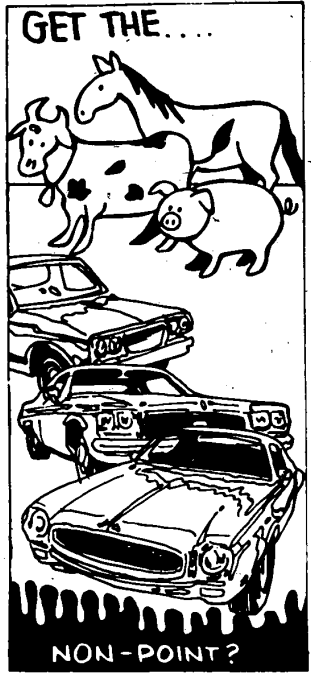
First of all, find out about these guys who had the courage to sign their names to the Declaration and Constitution. Unfortunately, they have been carved out to look like a bunch of stuffed shirts. Don't let that placid look on George Washington's face kid you.

Our founding fathers were very real and exciting persons. Wander over to the library or your local bookstore and find out about them.



Secondly, now is the time to find out how your local government works. It would be a good idea to become more active in the community's political scene. Forget about your neighbor's carping that nothing can be done. It just isn't the truth. Things get done by those who are willing to apply themselves.

Most importantly, remember the words of Martin Luther King Jr., "No man is free until all men are free."



'76 may hold bright spots for suburbs

Although it won't be all bed of roses, the New Year will almost certainly be a better one than 1975 was for the suburbs.

Most basic, the economy of the metropolitan area—which means in practice the automobile industry—will be substantially better than it was last year. Industry leaders are predicting a 10 million car sales figure for this model year, up substantially from last year's disaster.

This means increased employment in the area, just as improved profit projections for the auto companies and their suppliers mean that year-end bonuses will contribute joy to the forthcoming Christmas season. All this means that local businesses and retailers should enjoy a good year in 1976, especially with the momentum of the very good 1975 year end.

The major gloomy spot on the economic horizon is that economists estimate that even with the assembly lines humming at a renewed clip, approximately 100,000 jobs in Michigan have been permanently lost as a result of the auto industry's drive to increase efficiency and eliminate unproductive overhead.

OVERALL, the State of Michigan will enter 1976 with a budget at least \$130 million out of whack, despite drastic cuts made last year.

The wise men in Lansing are beginning to realize that there simply is not enough room to make cuts of this size without very substantially altering the kinds of services citizens have come to expect from the state. My guess is that after a period of agonizing reappraisal, the governor and the legislative leadership will agree that a tax increase is the only solution. Face-saving devices will be found so Democrats and Republicans can



equally duck voter disapproval, and income taxes will start going up some time during the first half of the year.

What will hit by not do is help out local schools, which were hit by two substantial cuts in state aid last year and which may well be clubbed for another slash this year. School officials are already highly anxious about their ability to operate for the remainder of this school year without running about of the law which forbids deficit operations, not to mention their enormous concern that educational quality may be irreparably eroded.

Complicating this problem for some local districts will be the effect of the new state single business tax which replaces a set of taxes which includes one on business inventories. For districts with a substantial business tax base, the loss of local revenue could be considerable. Birmingham schools, for example, will lose an estimated \$300,000 for the fiscal year 1976-77.

POLITICALLY, 1976 is an election year, so the air should be a bit hotter than usual.

Although it's unlikely that anything concrete

will be done about it during the year, the bill to create a form of regional government introduced by Rep. William A. Ryan (D-Detroit) will generate intense debate. The specific purpose of the bill would be to create a new regional governmental body which would coordinate planning and allocate federal funds coming into this area. The real objective is to begin to grip the enormous and growing problems of relations between the center city of Detroit and the suburban ring.

The other major item on the agenda will be the area's efforts to try to get it together on mass transit in time to get in line for the fast-dwindling pile of federal funds stashed in Washington. In need of resolution are arguments about who should control SEMTA's board, what design characteristics a transit system should have, and how to tax people to pay for it. I expect some progress in each of these areas, but not enough to make it certain that a transit system can be started within the next year or so.

PERHAPS THE most important development on the horizon for 1976 is a subtle but important shift in the public's attitude toward government as a whole, and politicians in particular.

Skepticism of political claims is at an all-time high; doubts about the efficiency and proper function of government services are rampant. Increasingly, I see signs that the public will no longer put up with a government that costs more than it is worth and politicians who claim more than they can deliver.

If the net effect of this shift in public opinion is only to encourage more politicians to say they don't know, when in fact they don't, it will be a good year.

Tim Richard writes

Clean water's new dimensions

It was one of 16 presentations they had done all over the region on a hard-to-grasp subject—water quality management planning. But then an old-timer in the audience lived things up.

"I've been into this for 50 years," he said. "I've seen the quality of the Detroit River, the Rouge River and the Clinton River improved three times. What do you propose to do that hasn't already been done? Are we going to take what's been done, put it on the shelf, and let you children take over?"

The "children" were staff members of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, which has a \$5 million, two-year federal grant. SEMCOG is supposed to come up with a management plan to help the U.S. achieve clean water by 1985.

The "children" remark was annoying. Don Dvey, inter-governmental relations manager, is 38, the same age as "Federalist Papers" writer James Madison. Beverly Roth, environmental analyst, will be old enough to run for president this year. Roger Lennert, the public relations man with experience in industry, advertising and newspapering, is 32, the same age as Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton.

But they tried not to let any annoyance show, and they came up with some fascinating answers about water and its politics.

A belated Christmas story ends happily

My daughter got a citizens band radio for her birthday. Since she doesn't have a car, it was installed in my car.

A CB radio, for those of you who are neither truckers nor have teenagers at home, allows you to talk to your friends and neighbors who also have CBs while you are driving around town.

They are both fun and not expensive, and have really been a "hot" item in retail sales. Because they are small and valuable, they are also being stolen out of cars at a record rate.

Cars with CBs are easy to spot because they have an antenna sticking out of their trunk.

WHEN YOU GO downtown to Detroit, you have to park where you can lock your car because everyone knows that's where the criminals are.

Even if you lock your car, you are not absolutely safe, because a wire coxchanger will get you into most locked new cars.

My tale of woe did not occur in Detroit. While I was at The Community House in Birmingham a couple of weeks ago, I parked in the municipal lot. When I returned to my car, the doors were open and the radio was gone.

I SAID TO myself, "How can this happen in a community like Birmingham?"

It was tremendously disappointed because I felt that the person who took the radio probably could have bought one for himself if he had really wanted one badly enough.

I had a funny feeling in the pit of my stomach. The community was no longer the safe place it used to be. Would I have to spend the rest of my days worrying about who was going to break into



my car in broad daylight, in public view, in a public parking lot?

I knew I couldn't rationalize that someone from the inner-city had snuck out and done the dirty work. It had to be one of our own.

THERE IS A happy ending to the story.

The day before Christmas, the Birmingham police found a brown box next to one of their patrol cars.

At first they thought it might contain a bomb, but when the package was opened carefully, there was our CB radio with a note.

The note was both an apology and an explanation. It was written by a teenager who identified the car from which it was taken.

It told of the agony he had gone through because he had taken something that didn't belong to him.

HE PROVED that he was man enough that after making a mistake, his basic values made him do what was right.

It's a funny story because it means that there are still consciences telling people what is right and what is wrong. It means that the

world is not completely callous and insensitive to the rights of others.

It was particularly gratifying to me because it restored my faith in the community.

Watch those words

Words change their meanings with the times, but some words are deliberately manipulated to fool us.

Realtors have equated the word *home* with a single-family detached dwelling financed by a mortgage. But an apartment can be a home, too. So can a condominium, a townhouse, a trailer (whoops! mobile home) or a cave.

You can buy things after Christmas at a savings, they tell you. In truth, you are saving only when you sock away some money in a bank or similar investment. You don't save when you go to the store, you only spend less (maybe).

For some reason, a price adjustment always seems to go in one direction: up. Why can't they be called price increases?

Our city councils and school boards still say they're holding an executive session when in reality they're holding a secret meeting.

There are unions that still call themselves education associations, although the mere card members will admit they're a union. And there should be a better name for the trade groups and lobbies than "bar association" and "medical association."

Anyone care to tell us what *family size* means? Just another one of those lovely words that is exploited for marketing purposes.

The post-Christmas sales began Dec. 26. Actually, the Christmas season runs from Dec. 25 to Jan. 6. Only the moneyhungry call the days after Dec. 25 "post-Christmas."

The ranks of environmentalists contain many knowledgeable persons who care about the world we live in. They also contain many professional "agitors" who oppose everything. It's time to dump the word *environmentalist*.

Professional is a word which has been corrupted as badly as family. Charles Schultz, in "Peanuts," dealt that word a severe blow when he spoofed the "professional yo-yo consultant." It would be a delight to see a genuinely useful word like "craftsmanship" revived. It would be an even greater delight to see the entire concept of craftsmanship revived.

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THE OLD-TIMER was correct. Many of our rivers are actually cleaner than they were a generation ago, and even the Detroit River is a trout stream today.

No one wants to throw out the plans that have already been drawn up or discredit the efforts that have already been made.

What we all must do is improve on what we have, realize the new dimensions of our pollution problems, and think about the future. That's where we're going to spend the rest of our lives.