



Terry Waghorn, Contributor

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Optimism Is (Still) In



Image by sneakerdog via Flickr

A wave of optimism swept across the world in late 2008 when Barack Obama became the first African American president of the United States. Despite crushing global financial despair not seen since 1930, 80 percent of Americans were optimistic about the 4 years to come. It is perhaps easiest to be optimistic when things are at their worst.

Things may have settled down a bit and something resembling an optimism-pessimism balance might be in place now more-so than 3 years ago. Some might even call the 135th and final US Space Shuttle mission an end to an era of optimism.

However, we seem to sit at the edge of the next great step forward as a global population. One tends to tread lightly on the subject of climate change, global conflict, and ultimate catastrophe. These are, however, the times when human ingenuity and cooperation can outshine any amount of “the inevitable.” Space travel seems to be moving in the direction of private industry and green technologies are sprouting up everywhere.

Take for example, [a new report](#) asserting that unless action is taken quickly, the globe’s next massive extinction will likely take place in the ocean and occur within this generation. Bleak though it may be, problems as big as this offer an opportunity for human ingenuity to rise to the occasion and make global change possible. Already, scientists a gathering to drive actionable solutions.

The devastating tsunami in Japan showed a need for better early warning systems. Tony Song of NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory found a way to [track ocean floor movements](#) and rate the power of a tsunami within minutes of an earthquake. This program will likely save lives and money as alarms will be more accurate.

Tali Sharot’s book *The Optimism Bias* (a book I’d suggest to anyone) offers evolutionary, neurological, and even slightly philosophical reasons for optimism — a word which to many has a negative connotation. As someone

uniquely placed to see some of the best ideas on the planet, I can't help but feel a good bit optimistic.

Ideas like Song's tsunami tracker will change the way the world works for the better. Many business leaders, politicians, and experts are frantically looking for great solutions to tremendous problems. Without a basic belief in the existence of these solutions and our ability to find them (also known as optimism), these individuals would simply put up with things as they are.

In short, optimism is alive and well.

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