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Ten years on

By [Charlie Metzger](#) • January 8, 2010

Long before the ball dropped in Times Square or fireworks lit up Sydney Harbor this New Year's Eve, the mainstream media and popular opinion had condemned the past decade as a failure of epic proportions. Last November, Time magazine's Andy Serwer dubbed it "the Decade from Hell" and wrote that it will likely go down in history as "the most dispiriting and disillusioning decade Americans have lived through in the post-WWII era." BBC Radio 4 ran a special report last month called "Defining the Decade" that focused largely on the decline of American global pre-eminence. All the evidence I needed came on Oct. 5, 2005, when Stephanie Meyer's "Twilight" was officially released. Incidentally, that was the day literature died.

And the facts that naysayers have marshaled are extremely compelling. The '00s began with Y2K and 9/11 and ended with financial apocalypse and an attempt to blow up a plane headed for Detroit. Between those bookends were wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, genocide in Sudan, scandal at Abu Ghraib, Hurricane Katrina and the largest Ponzi scheme in history — not the stuff of which happy memories are made.

The past decade here at Princeton, though, was a success in almost every meaningful way. Over the past 10 years, the University opened the Frist Campus Center and Whitman College, built a new Butler and the Lewis Library, installed wireless internet access across campus and grew the endowment at an average annual rate of 9.7 percent. Not too shabby. So in honor of the arrival of a new decade, I thought I'd share a few stories the 'Prince' was covering the last time the decades changed: going into 2000.

On Feb. 1, 1999 (almost a full year before the change in decades, but close enough), the 'Prince' reported statistics from that year's round of sign-ins. Quadrangle Club had the biggest sign-in class that year, at 111. Colonial Club had 24, and Charter Club had 25. Ten years later, the story couldn't be more different: Charter was the only sign-in to fill to capacity in the first round last year, and Colonial had 87 recruits. Quad, by contrast, barely attracted 50 new members in total.

In the fall of 1999, the University officially banned the Nude Olympics. The plan to do so was the brainchild of Janina Montero, who was at the time the University's director of student life. In an effort to find a replacement activity for the first snowfall of the season,

students suggested burning Montero in effigy. The administrator who was given the task of determining whether students should be allowed to burn Janina Montero in effigy was ... Janina Montero.

Remarkably, she approved the plan. But on Dec. 11, the 'Prince' reported that the idea had been scrapped. Apparently, some students considered it disrespectful to torch a blow-up doll made to look like a University official. They decided instead to feed the doll to Dean Malkiel's dog, Skipper. (Kidding.)

Finally, at the beginning of the 1999-2000 school year, the University's longtime registrar, C. Anthony Broh, retired after spending 15 years at the helm of 101 West College. His retirement was a huge loss to the University, not only because he apparently used to send e-mails which included inspiring Newt Gingrich quotes (who wouldn't want an e-mail about finals to end with "Perseverance is the hard work you do after you get tired of doing the hard work you already did"?), but also because he was generally reported to have been a Broh. If only he'd served long enough for The Onion to write an article like "Bro, You're a God among Bros," as it did last September. He was later replaced by current registrar, John LOL.

What's remarkable about reading 'Prince' archives from years past, though, is how little the University seems to have changed in relevant ways. A decade ago, Princeton seemed to have more or less the same character and feel that it does today. But there's one glaring difference between papers the 'Prince' was printing a decade ago and the paper as we know it in January 2010: the full-page, full-color ads for investment bank recruiting sessions that dominated advertising in the late '90s and early '00s have largely disappeared.

The most ironic evidence of this are the ads that Lehman Brothers — which at the time was going strong — ran in the fall of 1999. One such ad, which appeared in the paper on Thursday, Oct. 14, includes a cartoon depicting Peter Pan leading Michael Darling off to Never Land. In it, Peter says, "I'm taking you to a magical never-never land that is unaffected by events in the real world." Darling replies, "We're going to Wall Street?"

A great advertising choice on Lehman's part.

But in the end, the joke was on them.

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