Although New Year’s Day of 1981 fell, as it always does, on January 1, hindsight tells us that the curtain rose on this dramatic year on January 20. On that day, former movie actor Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as President, and Americans held hostage for over a year in the US embassy in Iran were finally released.

Two months later, the second act commenced as Reagan nearly died at the hands of would-be assassin John Hinckley—a close call that was eerily replayed in the May attempt on the life of Pope John Paul II, and carried to tragic conclusion with the October killing of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat. Inter-spersed among these events were other developments of perhaps even greater import for the future: the launching of the PC by IBM; the identification by scientists of the AIDS virus; the successful first flight of a space shuttle; the nomination of Sandra Day O’Connor to the Supreme Court.

In historical terms, 1981 was no more than an eye-blink ago. But by the time the act was rung down in December, the world had changed in ways no one could yet imagine.

— Lisa Ferraro Parmelee
We’re Still Here

**Question:** How likely do you think it is that the US and Russia will become involved in a nuclear war sometime in the next five to ten years—very likely, fairly likely, fairly unlikely, or very unlikely?

- **Fairly likely:** 23%
- **Very likely:** 24%
- **Fairly unlikely:** 16%
- **Very unlikely:** 31%
- **Don’t know:** 6%

Source: Survey by the Roper Organization, December 5-12, 1981.

**Question:** Do you think it would be possible for one side to win a nuclear war, that is, come out of it as a functioning country with a reasonable size population, or do you think both sides would be annihilated?

- **One side could win:** 73%
- **Both sides would be annihilated:** 15%
- **Don’t know:** 12%

Source: Survey by the Roper Organization, December 5-12, 1981.

Going Too Far

**Question:** There are a number of things that have changed rather drastically over the past 20 years... Tell me whether you’d like to see continued advances and developments on...[item] in the future, or whether you think we’ve gone as far as we should on it now, or whether we’ve already gone too far on it now...

- **Percent saying gone as far as should or gone too far now**
  - **Biological and medical engineering to improve or correct defects in human beings:** 13%
  - **Compact computers for home use:** 40%
  - **Advanced weaponry (missiles, etc.):** 41%
  - **Automated and self-service shopping facilities (self-service food markets, gas stations, automated banking, etc.):** 54%


NASA Still Riding High

**Question:** Do you feel the recent success of launching the US space shuttle and then getting it back to a safe landing on earth was a major breakthrough for US technology and know-how, a minor breakthrough, or not much of a breakthrough?

- **A major breakthrough:** 76%
- **A minor breakthrough:** 14%
- **Not much of a breakthrough:** 1%
- **Not sure:** 10%


Get Over It

**Question:** If you had a choice between doing business with a teller in a bank or a computerized machine that does the teller’s job, would you prefer to do business with the person or the machine?

- **Person:** 89%
- **Machine:** 7%
- **No opinion:** 4%