The Fabulous Future?

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Published by Northwestern University Press

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book emerged from an undergraduate course we have been teaching together for several years—Alternatives: Modeling Choice Across the Disciplines. One of our favorite topics is the examination of different approaches to predicting the future and to understanding the past. We thank our students and our exceptionally talented teaching assistants for inspiring us to produce this volume.

We received great advice and assistance from the staff at Northwestern University Press, and we single out in particular its director, Jane Bunker, and assistant director, Henry Lowell Carrigan Jr., along with three anonymous referees who reviewed the volume with uncommon insight. We thank also the wonderful people in the Northwestern President’s Office—Judi Remington, Lindsay Rathert, and Paula Peterson—for help in many ways, and especially Geneva Danko, who masterfully organized draft after draft in the most cheerful and efficient manner imaginable. Provost Dan Linzer provided helpful comments on our penultimate draft.

Finally, we thank the editors and authors of the classic 1955 book The Fabulous Future: America in 1980. While it is easy to scoff at so many of their predictions, we fully expect that, decades from now, much of what is written here will seem as hopelessly misguided. How could they, and we, miss the obvious? It certainly wasn’t because either volume suffered from the selection of the wrong authors. As was the case in the 1950s, we have here a collection of some of the most thoughtful and influential thinkers in the world. The problem, of course, is that the future remains as unimaginable as ever.

One thing we can know is that the future is not a given—it depends on what we do. It does not just happen to us. We make it.

While that sometimes terrifies us, it also gives us hope.