

October 2004

Millennials Rising The Next Great Generation

<http://www.millennialsrising.com/>

By
Neil Howe and William Strauss

Neil Howe and William Strauss have been interested in generational histories since the early 80's. They published *Generations* in 1990, publicly naming and describing Millennials before the generation that preceded the Millennials—Generation X—was even named. They wrote two other relevant books: *13th Gen* in 1993 and *The Fourth Turning* in 1997. (See Web links at the end of the review.)

The Millennials are defined as those born in 1982 and approximately the 20 years thereafter. The book was written in the year 2000 when the oldest Millennials were graduating from high school. Part of the motivation for the book was the authors' enthusiasm for the generation and the disappointment with the poor news coverage it was getting.

A baby boomlet was noticed in the early 80's, and by the 90's, nursery schools, as well as elementary school classes, were overflowing. Now at the end of the generation, the Millennial is clearly the largest generation in history. It also ranks at the top in many other areas. Its members are the most affluent, the most educated, and the most diverse (36% non-white). They are self-described optimists and team-players. They follow rules more readily and accept authority easier than their parents did at their age. Not surprisingly, they surpass their parents in the use of technology.

The reason for the large size of the generation is the decision of many Boomers to delay childbirth (thus the much smaller Generation X). But as depicted in a 1982 Time cover story "a floodtide of thirtysomething Boomers [were] choosing at long last to become moms and dads." And, of course, many Gen Xers were also having children at a more traditional time.

Howe and Strauss set the stage this way:

"Wanted. Protected. Worthy. Thus did the heralded Class of 2000 arrive in America's nurseries and cribs. Soon a much longer glossary of (mainly) positive adjectives would describe them. From conception to graduation, this 1982 cohort has marked a watershed in adult attitudes toward, treatment of and expectations for children. Over that eighteen-year span, whatever age bracket those 1982-

born children have inhabited has been the target of intense hope, worry, and wonder from parents, pollsters, pundits, and politicians.” (p. 32)

As the focus of adults on the generation is different, so is the persona of the generation, which has seven distinguishing traits:

Special. From “precious-baby movies” to effusive rhetoric.

Sheltered. Explosions of child safety rules and devices.

Confident. High levels of optimism. Often boasts of power and potential.

Team-oriented. New emphasis on group learning, tight peer bonds.

Achieving. Accountability rising. Best-educated and best-behaved.

Pressured. Pushed to study hard, take advantage of opportunities.

Conventional. Takes pride in behavior. Comfortable with parents’ values.

The generation will be known for its reversal of most trends measuring poor behavior, including violent crimes, suicide, sex, and alcohol and illicit drug use. “Boomers started out as the objects of loosening child standards in an era of conformist adults. Millennials are starting out as the objects of tightening child standards in an era of non-conformists adults. By the time the last Millennials come of age, they could become...the cleanest-cut young adults in living memory.” (p. 46)

This generation will also be known for its hard work “on a grassroots reconstruction of community, teamwork, and civic spirit. They’re doing it in the realms of community service, race, gender relations, politics and faith.” (p.214) They have a tremendous capacity to mobilize volunteers for worthwhile causes, largely by using the Internet.

The bulk of the book goes into more depth describing the Millennials and discussing issues such as health and safety, schools, employment, discipline, spending patterns, the environment, homework, pressure, sheltering, cyberspace, music, etc. There is a wealth of information from studies and history and numerous sidebar comments, with quotes from notables as well as many teens and younger Millennials.

The last few chapters are an interesting historical perspective of the “hero” generations in America since 1588.

According to Howe and Strauss, the Millennials are in line to be the next “hero” generation because they follow a pattern common to the last four “hero” generations in American history. The pattern early in life is as follows:

- A hero generation arrives just after an era of society-wide upheaval in values and culture that many historians call a “spiritual awakening” and passes through childhood during a time of decaying civic habits, ebbing institutional trust, and resurgent individualism.

- A hero generation directly follows a youth generation widely deemed to be disappointing, reacts against the older “postwar” generation that fomented the spiritual awakening as young adults—and fills a void left by the passing of an elder generation known for civic purpose and teamwork.
- A hero generation, early in life, becomes the target of passionate adult efforts to encircle and protect the childhood world, to promote child achievement, and to attach a new sense of destiny to youth—to which it responds by meeting and beating adult expectations. (p.326)

Later in life, the pattern is as follows:

- The special treatment and protections follow them into young adulthood and blossom into a sense of collective confidence and power.
- They and their elders declare a new determination to rid society of dangers that had ravaged the prior youth generation, but which only now are deemed intolerable.
- Entering young adulthood, they undergo a heroic trial, a climactic moment in history in which their courage and fortitude are tested.
- In midlife, as an honored generation of civic heroes, they create powerful and enduring institutions, build big new infrastructures, craft a new modern world, and dominate politics and economics deep into their old age.
- Entering elderhood, they reveal a hubris that sparks angry quarrels with their own children, who help foment a spiritual awakening to challenge their parents’ social discipline and secularism. (p.345)

Howe and Strauss think we now have a “rendezvous with destiny.” It is simply “a *generational cycle*.” They believe that “a constellation of old Boomers, midlife Gen Xers and young-adult Millennials is a lineup of maximum power and civic risk.” What is clearly missing from a book published in 2000 is the effect of 9/11 and the war in Iraq. Could they be the surprises that Howe and Strauss predict?

Because my daughter was born in 1982 and my son in 1985, I was fascinated by the book. We are having several 1982 birth year Millennials over next week to talk about the last four years and “update” the book.

The nugget for the Group is that birth year and place in history is a major factor in how a person is wired and therefore how he/she operates in the workplace. So for coaching, teamwork, leadership, etc., it is always helpful information.

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Several Websites may be of interest:

- Millennialsrising <<http://www.millennialsrising.com/>>
- Past seven generations <http://www.millennials.com/ltn/sevengens.html>
- Generations and their historical eras <http://www.millennialsrising.com/generations.shtml>
- Fourth Turning <http://fourthturning.com/>