

**The Study of Generations: A Timeless Notion within a Contemporary Context**

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**Defended: April 4, 2016**

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**Abstract:** The study of generations has been timeless. Dating as far back as Plato's time (428 B.C.E) to present-day (2016), scholars of all fields have used generations to study large trends that emerge over time in specific groups of people. Generations are not typically analyzed, however, in a way that reflects a more complicated and polarizing relationship between each generation. Seen especially in the post-World War II generations of the Silent Generation, Baby Boomer Generation, and Millennial Generation, each generation has a unique identity and culture within it, making it difficult for older generations to relate to younger generations. This lack of similarity between post-war generations results in a generation gap. This generation gap influences uncertainty felt by older generations as they are unable to relate to the emerging cultures of newer generations. This thesis suggests that generations are not only used for studying large trends or collecting data, rather they are used as vehicles by which older generations are able to comment upon changes within society that they see in younger generations. The three post-WWII generations mentioned in this thesis will demonstrate the growing generation gap between generations and offer new insights into the ways we look at generations.

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# **The Study of Generations: A Timeless Notion within a Contemporary Context**

**Lauren Troksa**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Names have power. They can provide a title, definition, theme, or identity in a true, definitive way. Conversely, they can be misleading, misrepresentative, or misguided if framed in a way that differs from their true meaning. In that way, generations have been titled, defined and portrayed in ways that influence our understanding of history. They are named after large events in history and their collective charisma, influencing the ways in which they are defined and even understood by scholars of all fields. Thus, generations have power. They are not only judged and characterized by the assumptions their names bring, but they influence the ways that history is studied and even understood. Their influence on history should not be overlooked; if we understand the power of generations, we are able to discover the power of change within our own lives.

A quick Internet search of the Millennial Generation “gives the impression that bitter feelings about the younger generation are a new phenomenon and that Baby Boomers are the first generation to deal with the ‘ungrateful youth’ around them.”<sup>1</sup> Articles and conversations about the Millennials make it seem that this is the first time that generations have been different from its older generation peers. And yet, dating as far back as 428 B.C.E., the great philosopher and writer Plato critiqued the younger generation writing:

“The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Caraher, *Millennials & Management: The essential guide to making it work at work* (Brookline, MA: Bibliomotion), Chapter 1 Overview.

their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers."<sup>2</sup>

Plato's observations prove that older generations, at least since 428 B.C.E., do not appreciate nor understand emerging youth cultures that result from younger generations. The experiences that Plato writes about, that a newer generation is seen as having "bad manners" and are "tyrants," emphasizes that there is an apparent generational gap between older and younger generations. In order to understand why this gap exists, we must look at the why generations differ from one another in the context of generational discourse. Recently, generational discourse has become a main medium by which Americans reflect upon changes in the past, present, and future. In fact, in recent U.S. history, generations and generational progression have come to be treated as major mechanisms of change.

This thesis's primary focus will be on the ways in which current generations are used as vehicles by which older and younger generations are able to comment upon changes within society. This is less concerned with identifying erroneous or misrepresented aspects of generations and instead examines the generational discourse that provides an object and a vocabulary for public and cultural commentary about national change. In order to support this notion, I will analyze three main generations after World War II: the Silent Generation, Baby Boomer Generation, and Millennial Generation. I will look both at major progressions their members experienced and the discourse that arose in U.S. popular media about those apparent changes. I will examine the progression of ideas, the economy, and overall experiences in each generation in order to emphasize an apparent generation gap that manifests itself throughout these three generations. While analyzing this generation gap, we must ask ourselves: why do

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<sup>2</sup> Lee Caraher, *Millennials & Management*, Chapter 1 Overview.

older generations tend to interpret changes in American culture as problematic? Do these concerns arise as a result of the increasing gaps between generations? To answer these questions, this thesis will look largely at three key foci: the origins of each generation, the impact that consumerism had on the understanding of American progress, and the ways in which a generational gap emerges.

### **Why Do We Think In Generations?**

The history of America can be described as a history of generations. From the first American generation, the Liberty Generation, to the most recent generation, Generation Z, each generation in America has been dubbed with a unique name whose objective is to classify a large group of people that grew up in a certain time period. In each specific generation, there are events- social, political, and economical- that shape the ways that each generation is named and even perceived. Generational legacies are formed out of major events like wars, economic stability and instability, or population growth.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, major public events, like assassinations, moon landings, and/or terrorist attacks, shape the way generations are perceived years later.<sup>4</sup> These major events often impact the culture within each generation, making the experiences in each generation unique.

There are many advantages to clustering large groups of people together and calling them a generation- it makes data collection easier while also breaking down American history into sections in order to understand general trends. Although these advantages are useful in studying large chunks of history, they do not serve the individual members in each generation with any purpose. With this in mind, I believe that the purpose of using generations to study history is

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<sup>3</sup> For further reading on this subject, please see: William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069* (New York: Morrow, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Neil Howe, "Lifecourse Associates: What Is a Generation?," Lifecourse, 1999, accessed November 3, 2015, <http://www.lifecourse.com/about/method/phases.html>.

less to learn about individuals' own sense of identity and more to examine the nature of public commentary concerning the changes in direction of the country as well as popular understandings of hopes and anxieties about the future.

Speaking as a Millennial myself, I often see articles about the doomed state of my generation, offering no support for our accomplishments and no solutions to our failures. The experiences I have had as a Millennial originally pushed me to wonder why my generation was critiqued so harshly by older generations, and this is the original reason why I felt that the study of generations was important to look at. Placing my own experiences aside, looking at generations as tools for understanding the nature of public commentary offers a different perspective to the overall study of generations. This different perspective can offer the ability to think critically when looking at past or present commentaries on generations and understand why generations are perceived in the ways that they are.

### **Generations: 1900-2016**

The time periods of generations are not set in stone for many different historians, but for the purpose of this argument, however, the time periods that will be used for each of the three generations that I am examining are as follows: Silent Generation (1925-1945), Baby Boomer Generation (1946-1964), and Millennial Generation (1981-2003). Additional generations will be mentioned in this thesis as well, but each chapter will mainly look at the above three.

<b>GENERATION NAME</b>	<b>BIRTH YEARS</b>	<b>MAJOR EVENTS</b>
<b>WWII Generation (Renamed “The Greatest Generation” in 1990s)</b>	<b>1901-1924</b>	<b>The Great Depression World War II</b>
<b>Silent Generation</b>	<b>1925-1945</b>	<b>End of WWII &amp; The Great Depression</b>
<b>Baby Boomer Generation</b>	<b>1946-1964</b>	<b>Hippie Movement, Vietnam War &amp; Anti- Segregation Laws</b>
<b>Generation X</b>	<b>1965-1980</b>	<b>Lunar Landing &amp; Ending of Vietnam War &amp; 1973 Oil Embargo</b>
<b>Millennial Generation</b>	<b>1981-2003</b>	<b>9/11, 2008 Recession</b>
<b>Generation Z</b>	<b>2003-Present</b>	<b>Boom In Technology</b>

The criteria for when a generation begins and ends relate both to historical events and the generations that follow. The Silent Generation begins in 1925 because that is when there was a large boom of babies after WWI. The Silent Generation ends in 1945 because World War II ends and the birth rates that characterized the Silent Generation come to a swift end. The Baby Boomer Generation begins in 1946 because the post-war decades witnessed a massive increase in American birth rates. This generation ends in 1964 because large numbers of babies being born leveled off. Lastly, the Millennial Generation begins in 1981 because the early 1980s saw another large increase in baby births, and this generation ends in 2003 because in that year, the Millennial youth population outnumbered the Baby Boomers. To reiterate, there are no absolute and concrete dates for each generation, but laying out their timelines is necessary when discussing them as a whole in this thesis.

### **Historiography: Generational Theories**



While historians have studied generation gaps and generational conflict, particularly in regards to immigrant populations, no study to date has examined the ways in which older generations use younger generations as tools to comment upon social change.<sup>5</sup> Among present day scholars, there is a widely accepted practice of generalizing and simplifying generations for the sake of time. I implore that this common belief is wrong; in fact, studying the trends within generations sheds light onto the cultural differences between each generation. There is a more complex and fundamental history of progression behind each generation, but because they have been framed in a simple manner, this complexity tends to be overlooked.

In order to delve deeper into the proposed argument, it is essential to consider the already established works on generations. The Strauss-Howe Generational Theory, developed by historians Neil Howe and William Strauss, is an excellent place to start as they are the ones that spearheaded the study of generations. In their Generational Theory, they argue that generations have patterns and identities that tend to repeat themselves over time.<sup>6</sup> Strauss and Howe created four archetypes that help explain generational trends which are: Prophet, Nomad, Hero, and Artist. The Prophet generations are born after a large war or crisis. Nomad generations are born when long-norms are challenged by the incoming generation. Hero generations are the generations that continue challenging the norms established in the Nomad generation and lastly, Artist generations are born during a war or crisis and tend to become preoccupied with the wars or crisis in which they grow up in. Strauss and Howe offer that:

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example: David Yoo, *Growing Up Nisei: Race, Generation, and Culture Among Japanese Americans of California, 1924-1949* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Douglas Monroy, "Our Children Get So Different Here: Film, Fashion, Popular Culture, and the Process of Cultural Syncretization in Mexican Los Angeles, 1900-1935," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, v19 n1 Spr 1988-90, 79-108.

<sup>6</sup> Some of these works include: William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069* (New York: Morrow, 1991); William Strauss and Neil Howe, *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy* (New York City, New York: Broadway Books, 1997).

“The generations in each archetype have similar age locations in history, and thus share some basic attitudes towards family, risk, culture and values, and civic engagement, among other things. As each archetype ages, its persona undergoes profound and characteristic changes. Yet each also has an underlying identity that endures over the centuries.”<sup>7</sup>

Although Strauss and Howe’s Generational Theory changed the ways we look at patterns in generations, I do not particularly agree with their argument that each generation has an underlying identity that endures over the centuries. As this thesis will prove, generations are used as vehicles by which older generations can comment upon changes within society, highlighting that there is no underlying identity between multiple generations. Strauss and Howe’s well-established theory is helpful for my argument because it theorizes that historical events and trends help shape generational experiences and perceptions about them; but this argument misses two major points: a) that both cultural shifts and internal diversity undercut any underlying common identity a generation might appear to have, and b) how generational discourse is more significant in shaping the perceptions of a generation’s underlying identity than that generation’s experiences themselves.

### **Generational Progression**

Using the Strauss- Howe Generational Theory as a model for analysis, I have created five criteria that will be used when evaluating the ways that newer generations see progression that older generations did not see in the majority of their own lives. These criteria will be grouped together under what I will call Generational Progression. The purpose of this Generational Progression analysis is to compare newer generations’ experience of progress that older generations did not see across several key categories, resulting in a “generation gap.”

The criteria for Generational Progression are as follows:

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<sup>7</sup> William Strauss and Neil Howe, *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy*, accessed from: <http://www.lifecourse.com/about/method/generational-archetypes.html>.

1. The start of each generation marks the end of the prior generation. This means that the start of each generation has parents who are contributing members to the American workforce as well as focused on making their child's life better than theirs.
2. Because parents want their children to have a better life than they had as children, many use the popular media to gain perspective on the changes in society. By updating themselves, parents are able to look at their children's generation from the perspective of the media, giving them additional information about and opportunities to react to the changes in America culture.
3. After WWII, the perceptions about global war shifted. During and after WWII, the United States was established as a hegemon, meaning that it was a powerful global entity. Because of this, many Americans' perceptions about global war shifted as it seemed that WWII marked the end of global wars because of the United States' powerful position.
4. Due to the growing economy, generations did not have to work as many hours as their parents. Many decades saw rising incomes and greater security as a result. Even when these trends did not persist in the 1970s, expectations of fewer work hours and increasing salaries did.
5. Thus, with the above factors in mind, the start of each new generation sees progress that the generation before it did not experience. This progression aids in a generational gap between old and young generations, as older generations are unable to relate to the progress of newer generations.

These five criteria are evident in each generation studied in this thesis and will be important factors to consider when evaluating the role of generations in American society, along with the widening generation gap.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis argues that in recent U.S. history, generations have functioned as a vehicle by which older generations are able to comment upon the changes in direction of the country. In that way, generational discourse should be less about individuals describing their own identity and experiences and more about older generations' reflections on the changing American society. This idea will be explored by examining three generations: The Silent Generation, Baby Boomer Generation, and Millennial Generation. Each generation that will be discussed in this thesis has endured events that shape their own culture. As a result, the differing cultures that emerge in each generation have made it so that there is not one main identity throughout each generation as Strauss and Howe suggest. Rather, there are many identities and cultures within each generation that make it hard for generations to relate to one another. It may be perceived that this generation gap is bad for American society, but as this thesis will prove, this is not the case. By attempting to understand the differing cultures that manifest within each generation, we give each generation a chance to mature and develop in its own way.

In the three chapters that follow, each generation will be analyzed by their social, political, and economic contributions to America which will shed light onto the progressions that younger generations see compared to older generations. In the conclusion of this thesis, I will outline my own experience as a Millennial and how I have seen generational progression and a growing generation gap within my own lifetime. This thesis offers new perspectives on how to understand and study generations, offering insight into generational discourse and a means by which this understanding can lead to greater collaboration and cooperation as we move forward in time.

## CHAPTER I: The Silent Generation (1925-1945)

*“The most startling fact about the younger generation is its silence. With some rare exceptions, youth is nowhere near the rostrum. By comparison with the Flaming Youth of their fathers & mothers, today's younger generation is a still, small flame. It does not issue manifestoes, make speeches or carry posters. It has been called the ‘Silent Generation.’”*

-“People: The Younger Generation,” *Time Magazine*, November 5, 1951.

In 1951, Sociology Professor Carr B. Lavell of George Washington University sat down with one of his students to discuss life as a member of the Silent Generation. His student grew up on both sides of World War II and likely had family members involved in it, and in that way representative of much of the Silent Generation. Lavell’s student was top of his class at George Washington University and wanted to become a doctor after graduation. After asking about family, sports, and school, Lavell turned his questions towards the future of the Silent Generation. When asked why he wanted to be a doctor, the student said, “I am just like anyone else, I just want to prepare myself so that I can get the most out of it for me. I hope to make a lot of money in a hurry. I’d like to retire in about ten years and do the things I really want to do [which are] fishing, traveling, taking it easy.”<sup>8</sup> Lavell’s student, like many in his cohort, saw the devastating impact that World War II had on his family while being too young to be directly involved in the war. Professor Lavell’s student is one of many Silent Generation members that entered their lives in a time of great transition after World War II, consequently giving them access to the globalization of goods, ideas, and technology.

In November of 1951, *Time Magazine* published one of the first articles describing the newest generation after World War II. This article’s publication date fell six years after babies

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<sup>8</sup> “People: The Younger Generation,” *Time Magazine*, November 5, 1951.

were born into the Silent Generation, signifying that generational naming and analysis were not prominent concerns in the years directly after World War II. *Time Magazine*'s article explains that the Silent Generation, "does not feel as though [it] is living on the brink of disaster, nor does [it] flick on the radio and expect his life to be changed drastically by the news of the moment," rather it "is ready to conform."<sup>9</sup> One Silent Generation member commented on this conformity, saying that, "World War II had impinged on our adolescence, and we felt, quite selfishly, that society owed us some private time in which to consider the world and ourselves."<sup>10</sup> Like those who fought in WWII, the Silent Generation also needed to recover from the war, and its recovery was noted as "silent" in the eyes of older generations. This silence worried many parents and as a result, the fear of conformity emerged.

The Silent Generation thus came about during a complex transition in post-war American history. The complexities are due in part by the shifting post-war culture as well as its position between two greatly known generations- the World War II Generation and the Baby Boomer Generation. Nevertheless, much of the commentary and discussions about the Silent Generation tells us much more about its parents, the WWII Generation, than it does about the kids lumped into this cohort. Examined further below, the critique of conformity or 'silence' did not come from the Silent Generation itself. Rather, its WWII Generation parents witnessed the changing world through their children and were able to use the Silent Generation as a vehicle to express their concerns. Taking this into consideration, we must ask ourselves: why did the WWII Generation see silence and conformity as a problem? Did this concern arise from the new post-war culture that blossomed as a result of the war? To answer these questions, the following chapter will look at the origins of the Silent Generation, the impact that consumerism had on the

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<sup>9</sup> "People: The Younger Generation," 2, 7.

<sup>10</sup> James Gindin, "A Voice from the Silent Generation," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 60.

understanding of American progress, and the role of the booming middle class during this generation's timeframe in order to analyze why these details are so important to the overall study of generational discourse.

## **MEMORY AND "THE GREATEST GENERATION"**

To begin, we must look at the parents of the Silent Generation that will be categorized as the World War II Generation. The WWII Generation, later referred to as the Greatest Generation, is the generation that was born between 1910 and 1925. Known for bravery and sacrifice in World War II, this generation was thrust into the limelight in the early 1990s, as the nation marked a series of 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the war. News reporter and author Tom Brokaw played a major role in defining the protagonists of this era in his 1998 book *The Greatest Generation*. In this book, Brokaw describes the WWII Generation as one that was not deeply analyzed or understood during its early existence and involvement in WWI and WWII. Brokaw's book re-defined the memory of the WWII Generation, by diminishing misconceptions that this generation lived in a glorious time. He wrote that, "the young women became emotionally mature beyond their years just as their husbands were learning to grow up fast with the responsibilities and duties that came with military service."<sup>11</sup> The need to grow up fast had lasting impacts on the WWII Generation and because Brokaw brought this to light, we can further understand the origins and mindsets of the WWII Generation before understanding their Silent Generation offspring.

One main mindset for the WWII Generation was uncertainty. Recall the Strauss and How Generational Theory which mentions that often times after a large war or global disaster, a

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<sup>11</sup> Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998), 246.

new generation emerges that tends to embody a new social order within society.<sup>12</sup> Indeed a new social order emerges after WWII and at the start of Silent Generation births. Emerson Hynes, a past ethics and sociology professor at St. John's University and a past legislative assistant to Senator Eugene McCarthy, comments that this new social order was because his generation was "growing old without even having been young. We have been so occupied with the problem of security that we have scarcely had time to enjoy the heritage that rightly belongs to youth."<sup>13</sup> Hynes suggests that concerns for security trumped childhood experiences, making it harder for the WWII Generation to relate to the youth culture that emerges in the Silent Generation. Because the WWII Generation was forced to grow up fast, it feared the emergence of the post-war culture that comes about during the Silent Generation, further aiding in the uncertainty felt by the WWII Generation after the war.

Commenting upon the shift of culture between the WWII Generation and the Silent Generation, WWII Generation novelist Bettina Linn in 1942 interpreted what the post-war shift in American culture meant to her. She said, "it was easy at first to blame the war for every trouble. In people's experience and observation it stood out as a dividing chasm between the normal and habitual, the established and functioning way for the world to get a living and govern itself, and the disorder and confusion of the post-war period. [...] [And now] we have at last come to realize that we live in a revolutionary period."<sup>14</sup> Although Linn's comments are made three years before the end of WWII, her comments offer a first-hand account of the shift in American culture that begins to take place during WWII. While she does not explicitly reference generations in this quote, Linn acknowledges that the war propelled the world into different,

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<sup>12</sup> William Strauss and Neil Howe, *The Fourth Turning*, accessed from <http://www.lifecourse.com/about/method/generational-archetypes.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Hynes, *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark* (New York, Toronto: G.K. Hall, 1992), 530.

<sup>14</sup> Bettina Linn, "The Fortunate Generation" *Yale Review*, 31 (1942): 558-563.



even revolutionary, period. Linn's comments highlight that there was a changing culture in the United States as a result of WWII. Her idea of a "revolutionary period" emphasizes this change in culture and additionally lends support to Strauss and Howe's theory that a new social order tends to emerge after a large war.

Parallel to Linn's observations, Professor John Bodnar at Indiana University wrote in 2001 that, "consequently, war always involves cultural risks even if the nation wins."<sup>15</sup>

Commenting on the impact that WWII had on American culture, Bodnar continues by saying that:

"Recognizing the war's incredible scale of brutality caused ordinary Americans and probably people elsewhere to connect the cruelty of warfare with other forms of malevolence in their lives and society. Once war exposed how savage men could be, it did not take much of a cultural leap to see that everyone was threatened by warlike behavior wherever it was manifested."<sup>16</sup>

Using Professor Bodnar's observations, the war influenced many changes to the nation's psyche, propelling a new post-war culture that is seen in the Silent Generation. The "cultural leap" mentioned by Bodnar suggests that the cruelty seen in WWII aided in the post-war cultural shift as many of the Silent Generation did not have to experience the war's "scale of brutality" in their own lives.

Considering Strauss and Howe's theory on generations, Bettina Linn's comments on a coming "revolution" after the war, and John Bodnar's observations on the implications that violence had on the American psyche after WWII, there are many factors that aid in post-war uncertainty of the future of the country. As a result, many labels are applied to the Silent Generation (the Fortunate Generation or the Lucky Few) that highlight the differences between

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<sup>15</sup> John Bodnar, "Saving Private Ryan and Postwar Memory in America," *The American Historical Review*, 106, 805-17(2001): 810.

<sup>16</sup> John Bodnar, "Saving Private Ryan and Postwar Memory in America," 810.

the WWII Generation and post-war generations. Many of the WWII Generation reflected on their fears after WWII and considered the Silent Generation “lucky” because it didn’t have to endure a large-scale war like WWII. The experiences that the WWII Generation had during WWII make it difficult for the Silent Generation to be able to relate to its parents and vice versa. As explained further below, the Silent Generation did not have to endure a large global war like WWII, making its WWII Generation parents refer to it as a “lucky” and “fortunate” generation.

### **SILENT GENERATION ORIGINS**

As identified above, the Silent Generation is the first generation to fully experience the post-war shift in American culture. Because many Silent Generation members were unable to participate in WWII because of their age, it can thus be considered a post-war generation. Looking at it in this light, the Silent Generation can be analyzed from a post-war perspective where the shift in the direction of the country after WWII is evident within it. Described as the “Lucky Few Generation” by Elwood Carlson in his 2008 book *The Lucky Few: Between the Greatest Generation and the Baby Boom*, the “oldest members of the Lucky Few reached age sixteen as Germany and Japan surrendered, and Lucky Few children suddenly saw life change drastically. Their median members born in 1937 could look forward to a decade of peace and plenty before becoming the high school graduating class of 1955.”<sup>17</sup> The “peace and plenty” experienced by the Silent Generation is one factor that was considered “lucky” by the WWII Generation. The WWII Generation did not experience years of peace growing up, and thus considered its offspring lucky. Although this book was written in 2008, its title alone offers a deeper understanding into the Silent Generation. The idea of the Silent Generation being

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<sup>17</sup> Elwood Carlson, *The Lucky Few: Between the Greatest Generation and the Baby Boom* (Dordrecht, London, 2008), 23. Quoted in Rusty L. Monhollon, *Baby boom: People and perspectives* (Santa Barbara, Calif, ABC-CLIO, 2010).

“lucky” offers insight into the progression and change seen in its early years. In its pages, this book suggests that the Silent Generation was “positioned perfectly” within the context of the changing American society and “they were not too young, however, to take advantage of the longest economic boom in the nation’s history.”<sup>18</sup> Carlson’s book suggests that the Silent Generation was lucky in most aspects of life because the post-war culture boom made it so that, combined with being positioned perfectly within a booming economic and cultural period, the Silent Generation saw progress that its parents didn’t see, making it hard for the WWII Generation to relate to these changes.

## ECONOMY

In order to further analyze the post-war culture that emerges in the Silent Generation, it is necessary to take a brief look at the post-WWII economy. The peak of Silent Generation births was in 1939, a time just on the cusp of a large increase in economic productivity because of World War II. After the war, government spending on national defense decreased by thirty seven percent, while government spending on workers and industries increased.<sup>19</sup> The additional jobs produced during the war along with an increase in profits and trade after the war offered a significant jump in American capitalism after the war.<sup>20</sup> These increases propelled the state of the economy into a “Golden Age” of success.<sup>21</sup> This Golden Age is due, in part, by the changes

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<sup>18</sup> Elwood Carlson, *The Lucky Few: Between the Greatest Generation and the Baby Boom*, 23.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher J. Tassava, "The American Economy during World War II," *Economic History Association*, (2005), accessed November 17, 2015, <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-american-economy-during-world-war-ii/>.

<sup>20</sup> For more information on this matter, see: Sara Burke and Claudio Puty, "The Post-World War II Golden Age of Capitalism and the Crisis of the 1970s," *Gloves Off: Bare-fisted Political Economy*, accessed November 17, 2015, [http://www.glovesoff.org/features/gjamerica\\_1.html](http://www.glovesoff.org/features/gjamerica_1.html).

<sup>21</sup> Christopher J. Tassava, "The American Economy during World War II,"; For more information see: Louis Johnston and Samuel H. Williamson, "The Annual Real and Nominal GDP for the United States, 1789 — Present," *Economic History Services*, (March 2004), available at <http://www.eh.net/hmit/gdp/>; "Budget of the United States Government: Historical Tables Fiscal Year 2005," *Government Printing Office*, 2005.

in the labor force. “Over the course of the 20th century, the composition of the labor force shifted from industries dominated by primary production occupations, such as farmers and foresters, to those dominated by professional, technical, and service workers.”<sup>22</sup> Additionally, World War II was a “turning point in married women's labor-force participation, leading many to credit World War II with spurring economic and social change.”<sup>23</sup> The shift in the American labor force as a result of WWII resulted in the Silent Generation’s early beginnings to be more economically prosperous than that of their WWII parents. Additionally, the shift in labor produced a booming middle class in America, a very important factor that aids in the flourishing of the post war economy.

The new booming middle class after WWII allowed for new ways of living out the post-war American Dream. Certainly, “the unswerving expectation was that the onward meant upward, better meant more, and the pot at the end of the middle-class rainbow contained job security, financial well-being, and all the other fruits of society.”<sup>24</sup> These new additions to American society reinvented the American Dream, raising expectations for job security, finances, and family life. Part of this reinvented American Dream meant that many Silent Generation children did not have to work as young as their WWII parents did. The changes in the American economy as a result of increased labor forces led to further post-war progressions because the increased benefits that each middle class family received resulted in increased expectations for the American Dream. The post-war American Dream consisted of, as mentioned above, “job security, financial well-being, and all the other fruits of society” and as a

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<sup>22</sup> Government Printing Office, “U.S. Council of Economic Advisors, 2000, Economic Report to the President,” Washington D.C., (2000):279, <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/cwc/american-labor-in-the-20th-century.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Claudia D. Goldin, “The Role of World War II in the Rise of Women's Employment,” *The American Economic Review* 81,4 (1991): 741–56.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Kin Merton, *Social theory and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1968). Taken from: Samuel, Lawrence, *The American Middle Class: A Cultural History* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 7.

result of these higher expectations, more opportunities were revealed for the Silent Generation. For better or for worse, the rise of the middle class made it so that WWII parents could give their children more goods and opportunities that they themselves did not have growing up. Acknowledging the shift in focus from one of war towards the economy, one man said, “today we seem to be thinking of the world as a problem in economics, made up by consumers and producers, homemakers and business.”<sup>25</sup> His observations highlight the shift in focus after WWII towards the economy, a factor that influences the Silent Generation.

## CONSUMERISM

Anticipating the impact that the end of WWII would have on the American economy, “department stores, manufacturers, Better Business Bureaus are publishing leaflets on how to buy. Many have sprung up in the last few years. Magazines have been full of the subject, women’s magazines, trade journals, literary magazines, and publications for the businessman.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed because of this preparation *during* the war, many Americans easily adapted to consumerism *after* the war. Noted above, the shift in focus after WWII towards the economy made it so that money, not war, was the uniting factor for the country. One consumer good that fully illustrates the ways that Americans utilized this shift is the television.

The rise of the television depicts the rise of globalization and influences post-war culture because it signified a new beginning for the Silent Generation. Television unified American after WWII, giving many Americans something to talk about after the war. Because of the rise in televisions in families across the nations, “the mid-1950s, standardized hosted-programming

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<sup>25</sup> Bernice Dodge, "Trends in Consumer Education," *Journal Of Home Economics*, 30, 235-248 (1937):235, accessed February 29, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Bernice Dodge, "Trends in Consumer Education," 236.

genres became pervasive across the nation. Among some of the most common genres to emerge during this era included: children's cartoon shows, midday home fairs, late-night creature features, and local music shows that represented" audiences from all generations.<sup>27</sup> The plethora of television shows suited each generation watching them- cartoons for the younger Silent Generation and home fairs for their parents and united Americans across the country as they had something in common that wasn't WWII.

In that same way, "these early local television genres reflect[ed] broader social and institutional ramifications, factors that ultimately defined the form and effect of the new medium in the ensuing decades."<sup>28</sup> The "new medium" that emerges is especially seen in the Silent Generation because they were able to experience the television at a younger age than their parents, propelling a generational gap between the two generations. Although the television was a technology that depicted the shifting American culture and united many Americans, it was both adopted into American society and criticized at the same time. Many WWII Generation parents saw negative impacts that the television and radio could have on their children. After seeing its impacts on its children, many parents said that the television made their children addicted to cartoon shows. Although the television was a way to unite the country after WWII, it also fragmented the relationship between the Silent Generation and WWII Generation, seen especially when the Silent Generation is in elementary school.

## **ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

By the time the Silent Generation went to elementary school, parents were deeply concerned about their children's attention to new comic books, the television, and the radio in

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<sup>27</sup> Phillip J. Hutchinson," Marshall J and Cap'n Ken: The Lost History of Live Local Television in Fifties America," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 28, (2008):373.

<sup>28</sup> Phillip J. Hutchinson," Marshall J and Cap'n Ken," 373.

addition to learning. When critiquing the Silent Generation's interest in technology, older generations blamed the schools for lack of discipline, describing them as:

“In its attempt to ‘fill every cup, no matter how big or how small’ with learning, the public schools have failed to interest a great stratum of intelligent, but recalcitrant or lazy boys & girls. In what might be termed the era of the slob, young worshipers of the ‘television comic,’ the bookie and the comic-book monster can slip off into easy ‘general’ courses and finish their school years with their minds practically ungrooved by thought.”<sup>29</sup>

This quote, written by a WWII Generation author, comments upon the concerns that the WWII Generation parents had on the increased attention towards television. Seen especially in the above quote, post-war progression in the eyes of older generations was negatively impacting schools, causing concern for WWII Generation parents. This commentary is the epitome of the Silent Generation being used as a vehicle by which the WWII Generation commented upon the changes in society. Many Silent Generation children were accused of “worshiping” cartoons and were thus deemed as “ungrooved by thought,” suggesting that was a culture before the Silent Generation that was not lazy. The television serves as an excellent example in understanding the post-war culture that emerges during the Silent Generation because it highlights the differences between the Silents and their parents. The WWII Generation enjoyed the post-war economic perks, but did not specifically enjoy the impacts that it had on their children.

To comment upon why parents didn't understand the Silent Generation, Wallace Stegner wrote “The Anxious Generation” in 1949. In this article, Stegner found that the WWII Generation did not understand the culture of the Silent Generation because it couldn't relate to it. Stegner reflected on the ways the Silent Generation was viewed and found that because it was “considered by its elders to be going morally to the dogs, this generation tended to be loose in its

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<sup>29</sup> "Education: Boys & Girls Together," *Time Magazine*, October 19, 1953, accessed November 17, 2015.

personal morals, irresponsible politically and socially.”<sup>30</sup> He challenges these opinions by saying that, “far more has been taken from them than had been taken from preceding generations. [...] The atom bomb is a threat such as the world has never faced; if by a miracle we escape another war and bomb, there is always the longer term disaster of an incredibly multiplying world population and the shrinkage and wastage of world resources.”<sup>31</sup> This suggests that the WWII and Silent Generations experiences were so different that they were unable to relate to each other.

In his paper, Stegner uses the social and political changes that the atomic bomb and looming Cold War brought to American society, suggesting that these were some reasons for why the Silent Generation was different than its parents and for why parents were unable to relate to their children. He concluded his article by reassuring his audience, saying that the Silent Generation “contains about as much foolishness as any normal generation, and as much talent. [...] When it finally finds itself, or whatever it is looking for, it will turn out to have something.”<sup>32</sup> Unlike many of the older generations’ commentary on the Silent Generation, Stegner’s article highlights that major global issues, like the atom bomb and growing population, are seen as large changes to American culture, changes that older generations, like the WWII Generation, were not comfortable with and didn’t understand.

## **HIGH SCHOOL**

The shift in American culture after World War II is especially seen when the Silent Generation reaches high school. Many Silents were able to unite under beliefs that seemed

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<sup>30</sup> Wallace Stegner, “The Anxious Generation,” *College English*, 10, 4 (1949), 1.

<sup>31</sup> Wallace Stegner, “The Anxious Generation,” 4.

<sup>32</sup> Wallace Stegner, “The Anxious Generation,” 6.



foreign to their WWII Generation parents (television culture, consumerism culture, etc.) resulting in a boom in youth culture. High schools created an atmosphere for many students to work together and share their common beliefs with each other. As a result, the Silent Generation developed a sense of youth culture that trended longer than previous generations who were often already participating in the workforce by this age. The development of a youth culture additionally aided in a general delay in adulthood. This delay, seen as bad to the WWII Generation, made it so that the Silent Generation was able to enjoy its youth longer, resulting in a gap between the WWII and Silent Generations, as the former was unable to relate to the latter's youth experiences.

Commenting upon this youth culture in 1955, authors Frederick Elkin and William A. Westley say this culture is “distinguished in both the sociological literature and the mass media by its affirmation of independence, its rejection of adult standards of judgement, its compulsive conformity to peer group patterns, its romanticism, and a participation in ‘irresponsible’ pleasurable activities.”<sup>33</sup> The Silent Generation’s culture as a result had specific characteristics that differ from their parents that included: “a distinctive dress and argot, rambling telephone conversations, and interests in popular music, movie stars, sports, and dancing.”<sup>34</sup> The youth culture mentioned by Elkin and Westley further demonstrates the shift in post-war culture from the WWII Generation to the Silent Generation, as many seemingly superficial things, according to the WWII Generation, become a main part of American culture.

Commenting further on youth culture, Principal Maridieth Little in Indiana combines many things about the Silent Generation that he doesn't like. He says:

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<sup>33</sup>Frederick Elkin and William A. Westley, “The Myth of Adolescent Culture,” *American Sociological Review*, 20, 6 (1955), 680.

<sup>34</sup> Frederick Elkin and William A. Westley, “The Myth of Adolescent Culture,” 680.

“Boys and girls talk back in school nowadays without even knowing it. [...] There is [no] respect, dignity, discipline, responsibilities, and manners. They have too much money. I tested it out one day. I stood up before the assembly and asked who had change for a \$10 bill. Too many hands went up. All the children carry folding money. American children chew too much gum when they come to school. It isn’t the gum- it is what the gum-chewing signifies. Gum-chewing in school is like a kid studying in an easy chair alongside the radio. [...] Confused students are being turned out into a confused world.”<sup>35</sup>

Mr. Little uses the Silent Generation as a vehicle by which he is able to comment upon the changes in post-war American society seen in youth culture. He describes the booming youth culture in a negative way, suggesting that these changes are not for better but for worse. What is striking about this statement is the idea that the state of the world is “confused.” This confused state further supports the notion that even the adult population was confused about the direction of the world and used the Silent Generation’s culture as a way to express this concern.

Looking at actual high school curriculum, however, many WWII Generation parents were thrilled at its progress. A study done in 1947 on Glen Ridge High School in New Jersey gives an accurate depiction of the progression of high school curriculum for the Silent Generation. In its evaluation, Glen Ridge High School was able to implement a ten year plan from 1937 to 1947 that assisted students who wanted to go to college. This study concluded that:

“the graduates in the lowest quarters of their classes have the ability to take the college-preparatory course in high school; that thirty-two of the fifty-five, or 58 per cent, were admitted to college or junior college; and that the graduates who replied to the questionnaire were, for the most part, satisfied with the curriculum experiences which had been offered to them.”<sup>36</sup>

Glen Ridge High School serves as a microcosm to most high schools in America during the Silent Generation. Many high schools began to shift focus towards college-preparatory classes that would help influence well-rounded students whether they went to college or not. In a

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<sup>35</sup> “Education: Into a Confused World,” *Time Magazine*, Monday, June 09, 1947, <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,779071,00.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Alfred C. Ramsay, "Are We Meeting the Needs of High-School Students in the Lowest Quarter?," *School Review in Readers' Guide Retrospective 1890-1982*, 56 (1982), 610, accessed February 29, 2016.

reflection by WWII Generation parents Bob and Jan Henger, they said that “the teacher, students and parents all worked together to make the school a special place of learning and moral development. It was primarily a college prep curriculum with Latin, foreign languages, math and sciences, with the majority of students going on to higher education.”<sup>37</sup> Bob and Jan Henger’s comments show support for the progress in American schools. The progress in schools began to widen the gap between the Silent and WWII Generations because many of the WWII Generation did not experience a higher form of education during the war and it was difficult for them to relate to the challenges and accomplishment of higher education.<sup>38</sup>

Even though their parents were happy with the progress in high school curriculum, many Silent Generation students felt that they received unnecessary criticism and high expectations from their parents. Student Emerson Hynes reflects on why the Silent Generation was deeply criticized by its parents. He declares, “we deserve harsh criticism for accepting the cult of security. *But we cannot be accused of originating it.* Others have been at work. Our parents and our schools, for example, must bear much of the responsibility.”<sup>39</sup> Hynes’ comments suggest that the Silent Generation was blamed for originating much of the anxiety felt by the WWII Generation. He continues by concluding that “[what if] we pass placidly along and teach another generation to cherish the same values as we have chosen- then what? Will another generation be able to recapture the spirit of youth [?].” Hynes’ account places an emphasis on the ways that the Silent Generation was different than its parents. In his testimony, he acknowledges that older generations accuse the Silent Generation for “accepting the cult of security,” but explains that

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<sup>37</sup> Bob Henger and Jan Henger, *The Silent Generation: 1925-1945* ( Author House, 2012),250.

<sup>38</sup> After WWII, however, the GI Bill funded millions of veterans to obtain higher education. The point here is to highlight the progress in American high school systems that many of the WWII Generation did not see at a young age due to the demands of WWII.

<sup>39</sup> Emerson Hynes, “On Considering My Generation,” *Catholic World* (1940), 531-532.

they shouldn't be accused of originating it. Delayed adulthood and an increase in technology reliance were progressions that older generations did not see themselves growing up, and this increased the generational gap between the two. Because the Silent Generation was the first post-war generation to have a distinguished youth culture, many older generations did not understand the implications that came with it, and the youth culture that emerges during high school is one of them.

## **GROWING UP**

Put beautifully in an article called "The Irresponsibles," by Archibald MacLeish in 1940, "the country that was once the past and present brought together in the mind is now divided into past on one side and present on the other."<sup>40</sup> Although this article was written before the Silent Generation reached adulthood, it clearly depicts the division between past and present when this generation reaches adulthood. The past, seen in the WWII Generations need for normalcy after WWII, juxtaposed against the present, seen in the Silent Generations progression of money, values, and education, further supports MacLeish's ideas. Growing up, the Silent Generation "spearheaded the divorce revolution and popularized the term 'midlife crisis.' But in their economic lives, this age location has been very good to them—and given them a lifetime ride on the up-escalator coming off the American High."<sup>41</sup> Mentioned above, the Silent Generation's impeccable timing after WWII allowed them to see progress that its WWII Generation parents didn't have because of the war. The Silent Generation experienced an "American High" that is a result of this post-war culture.

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<sup>40</sup> Archibald MacLeish, "The Irresponsibles," *The Nation* (1940): 621.

<sup>41</sup> Neil Howe, "The Silent Generation, 'The Lucky Few' (Part 3 of 7)," *Forbes Magazine*, August 13, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/neilhowe/2014/08/13/the-silent-generation-the-lucky-few-part-3-of-7/#744a74151e54>.

Growing up, the Silent Generation was the archetypal generation in post-war culture due to its impeccable timing. Neil Howe explains that:

“Given their material good fortune, along with their instinct to help others in need, the Silent as elders have become economic anchors for America’s new renaissance in multigenerational family living. Many routinely pay for extended-family vacations or subsidize their grown Boomer or Xer kids. Many have set up college trust funds for their grandkids—and indeed, a record share have assumed formal custody of them.”

It seems that the notions of a Lucky Few Generation by Elwood Carlson were true: the Silent Generation *was* lucky and because of its lucky timing, it had enough money and resources to plan for big families and continue to utilize the “Golden Age” economy. By the time many of the Silent Generation entered adulthood, they were more monetarily successful than their WWII Generation parents due to the booming post-war economy. Although the Silent Generation may not have achieved *all* of its success due to excellent timing, much of it was the product of being the first generation to experience post-war progress.

## **PARENTING: SPOCK AS INSPIRATION**

As Silent Generation births dwindled and many of the Silent Generation began to have children, 1946 was the start of a new generation. It was not, however, the end of the Silent Generation’s cultural impact on American society. At the start of this new generation, many Silent Generation parents wanted to continue in the WWII Generation’s footsteps and give their children as much access to goods and education as they received. Because of the post-war progression of ideas, it became socially acceptable to seek help in regard to parenting. Because many Silent Generation members grew up with a different culture and ideas than their parents, it was difficult for them to know exactly how to parent. Thus, a new concept erupted in American society in 1946: Parenting Manuals. Benjamin Spock’s book, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, was just the invention that Silent Generation parents needed to ensure that they

were parenting the “right” way. Although this parenting manual overlaps the tail end of the Silent Generation and beginning of the Baby Boomer Generation, it mainly affected the latter. Spock’s book, although helpful for the Silent Generation, made many of the WWII Generation fear the direction of parenting methods. As a result, anxieties towards the future of parenting came about after the introduction of Spock’s book because many WWII Generation parents felt that the Silent Generation was “not strong enough” to parent on their own and needed help from a book. All the same, the gap between the WWII Generation and Silent Generation widened during the late 1940s because of this difference in parenting styles.

Among *Time*’s Top 100 Books of All-Time, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* gave parents a helpful hand in raising their children. Between its publishing date of 1946 and 1957, this book sold nine-million copies to parents seeking additional help and support in raising children. In his book, Spock told parents that, “the more people have studied different methods of bringing up children the more they have come to the conclusion that what good mothers and fathers instinctively feel like doing for their babies is usually best after all.”<sup>42</sup> Spock’s manual indicated a major cultural shift in the ways that American society viewed parents’ roles in raising children. This shift let “kids be kids” and encouraged parents to let the natural progression of childhood to adulthood ensue, something the Silent Generation did not receive from its parents. There is an important progression in American culture that happens when the Silent Generation reaches adulthood.

The progression of the parenting manual emphasizes the shift in post-war American culture. Recall that WWII Generation parents feared that the young Silent Generation was a

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<sup>42</sup> Benjamin Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946), 4.

confused group that would eventually be released out into a confused world. Spock's parenting manual rejected this worry and emphasized that it was normal for parents to be worried about their children's future. Spock's book brought confidence to Silent Generation parents during a time where they were misunderstood by their own parents for being different. His understanding made many of the Silent Generation rely on his book for advice, and "the book sales click[ed] along as steadily as the birth rate, and Dr. Spock gets a daily drift of thank-you letters from grateful parents."<sup>43</sup> And so, Spock's book widened the gap between the WWII Generation and the Silent Generation while at the same time changing parenting methods to this day.

The importance of Benjamin Spock's parenting manual is twofold. First, it started a trend in American society of seeking outside help in raising children. Secondly, it further raised expectations for what parents are supposed to give their children. Looking closer at the second reason, parenting manuals made it so that parents were able to justify their parenting methods through books written by well-known authors. These parenting manuals made it so that it was expected for a parent to purchase parenting manuals and magazines in order to make their children's lives better than they themselves experienced. This was a new concept introduced into American culture that continues to this day as many parents refer to parenting manuals for help raising children. Parenting manuals serve as the perfect example of the post-war shift in parenting methods, as they emphasize the progression between the WWII Generation and the Silent Generation in the ways to raise children.

## **GENERATIONAL PROGRESSION**

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<sup>43</sup> "Personality, Jul. 21, 1952," *Time Magazine*, July 21, 1952, 3.

Keeping the above information in mind, it is appropriate to turn to the idea of Generational Progression. As stated in the beginning of this thesis, Generational Progression has five criteria that help explain the progressing state of the economy and society, and thus the general progression each generation sees in its lifetime. Within the context of the Silent Generation, Generational Progression is deeply rooted within the post-war culture that emerges during this time. Within the first criteria of Generational Progression, the Silent Generation's parents (WWII Generation) were contributing members to the American workforce and as contributing members of the workforce, the WWII Generation made it so that their Silent Generation children would have a better life than they did (seen in the increase in the middle class alongside an increase in educational opportunities).

Secondly, according to Generational Progression, a specific role that the WWII Generation had as parents was to comment upon the progress of their children. In reflecting on their children's progress, the WWII Generation used the terms "silent" and "conformity" to categorize its children's behavior. These terms are ultimately used as tools by which the WWII Generation is able to comment upon the changes in American society as they suggest that the emerging post-war culture is not what they expected. Thirdly, the Silent Generation did not have the same notions of war as the WWII Generation did, shifting the notions of war between the two. Thus, with the above factors in mind, the start of the Silent Generation saw progress that its parents never had.

Generational Progression is significant to note because it demonstrates that the WWII Generation's goals of making their children's lives better than their own were a success, while also highlighting the generational gap that this brings. Consequently, once the WWII Generation realized that their children did not grow up with the same ideals as it did and were reliant on



consumerism and youth culture, many parents became worried about their children's future and the future of the country. This uneasiness was then seen in several articles and interviews about the Silent Generation; it was easy for the Silent Generation's parents and older generations to complain about their children's youth culture and reliance on things like television because most of them did not understand it. Yes, the WWII Generation wanted to provide their children with things that they did not have growing up in WWII, but once American consumerism and post-war culture became popular, a generational gap was inevitable. Due to Generational Progression, the Silent Generation saw progressions that its WWII Generation parents did not understand, dividing these two generations, as Archibald MacLeish suggests, between "past on one side and present on the other."

## CONCLUSION

While analyzing Professor Lavell's student's response, a member of the Placement Bureau at Stanford University concluded that the Silent Generation is different than its parents because it is mostly interested in working for large companies while also wanting to be able to choose location, hours, and work uniform.

"Half the time a guy will turn down a good job because he has to work in the city. They figure there's no future in being holed up in a little apartment in town for ten years or getting up at 6 in the morning to commute to work and then not getting home until after dark. So they all want to work down on the peninsula where they can have a little house in the country and play golf or tennis and live the good life."<sup>44</sup>

This reflection on the Silent Generation upholds the idea that, due to Generational Progression, a generation's culture shifts drastically from that of its parents. The Silent Generation's early life was, to their parent's dismay, consumed by television ads, comic books, and new technologies, making seemingly superficial ideas part of American culture. Once consumerism (in the eyes of

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<sup>44</sup> "People: The Younger Generation," 3.

the older generations) spiraled out of control, the progression that this generation saw was commented upon as dangerous to the future of the country. Progression was not, however, viewed as bad for the Silent Generation as the youth culture that emerged while the Silent Generation was in high school quickly united it. Because WWII Generation parents did not understand the youth culture because they didn't have one, the gap between the two generations began to widen. Additionally, when the Silent Generation began to have children, they continued to change American culture in parenting styles. These above factors are reasons why the Silent Generation was so different from its parents. Both of these generations saw different events in their lifetimes, making it difficult for a common identity between the two.

In summary, Chapter One has investigated the origins of the Silent Generation, the economic factors that shaped the growing middle class, and the role that education played in defining this generation. Generational Progression is thus evident between the WWII Generation and the Silent Generation as the Silent Generation was born as the "Lucky Few" and "Fortunate Generation" compared to its parents. As a preview for Chapter Two, once the Silent Generation began having children of their own and used Spock's books to aid in its parenting, the cycle of generational progression continues to increase even larger generational gaps between the Silent Generation and its Baby Boomer Generation offspring.

## CHAPTER II: The Baby Boomers (1946-1964)

*The presence of a large contingent of young people may make for a cumulative process of innovation and social and cultural growth: it may lead to directionless, acting-out behaviors; it may destroy old institutions and elevate new elites to power.*<sup>45</sup>

-Historian Herbert Moller

When asked about her relationship with her parents, seventeen-year-old Dana Nye, a student at Pacific Palisades High School in Los Angeles says, “I don’t get authority at home. We’re just a bunch of people who go about our business and live under one roof. One of these days I’d like to sit down and find out from my parents what they really believe in.”<sup>46</sup> When asked the same question, senior Candace McCoy says, “my mother just gave up on me about six years ago and decided I was destined to enjoy life, nothing more.”<sup>47</sup> Moving on to the subjects of college and marriage, sixteen-year-old Jamie Kelso expresses his concerns saying, “and what if I go along, get married, have a good job and raise kids? Do we know what it is all about? Are the people around us really alive?”<sup>48</sup> These Baby Boomers are prime examples of the changing direction in American society seen through an emerging youth culture, and serve as a microcosm of the changing American culture that many Baby Boomers experienced in the 1950s through the 1970s.

Comparing these students’ stories to the one at the beginning of Chapter 1, both stories reveal a similar kind of carefree and unhurried nature about the future, exhibiting similar post-war traits. However, a main shift between the Baby Boomers and their Silent Generation parents lies on the ways that the Baby Boomers dealt with change. Exemplified in the interviews above,

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<sup>45</sup> Herbert Moller, “Youth as a Force in the Modern World,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 10 (April 1968): 237-60.

<sup>46</sup> “Education,” *Time Magazine*, January 29, 1965, 58, <http://time.com/vault/issue/1965-01-29/page/58/>.

<sup>47</sup> “Education,” *Time Magazine*, 57.

<sup>48</sup> “Education,” *Time Magazine*, 57-58.

Baby Boomers didn't seem to care that they were different from their parents, and outwardly expressed their visions for their own culture rather than standing by in "silence" like its parents.

As a result of the differing cultures between the Baby Boomers and Silent Generation, "we tried to cover it with labels. War Babies. Spock Babies. Sputnik Generation. Pepsi Generation. Rock Generation. Now Generation. Love Generation. Vietnam Generation. Protest Generation."<sup>49</sup> The many names given to the Boomers signifies that there was not just one way to describe this diverse group and sheds light onto the different phases that it went through. This group was so diverse and experienced many social changes early on, in fact, that older generations notice a generation gap early on in the Baby Boomer Generation. Because it was the second post-war generation to emerge, perhaps this generation gap was noticed even more than during the Silent Generation's post-war culture boom because the economy and technology progressed even further.

From the Cold War to the Vietnam War, from Brown vs. The Board of Education to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and from John F. Kennedy's assassination to Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, the generation gap between the Silent and Baby Boomer Generation can be largely attributed to these culture-shaping events. Because this generation lived through a tumultuous time, cultural and social changes were rampant as a result and made it so that many Silent and WWII Generation parents feared for the future of the country. Many older generations were concerned that the gap between generations would negatively impact the country. All the same, much of the commentary and discussions about the Baby Boomer Generation tells us much more

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<sup>49</sup> Landon Y. Jones, *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1980), 1.

about its parents, the Silent Generation and WWII Generation, than it does about the kids lumped into this cohort. Many events shape and define this generation, but what is truly unique about it are the ways that the Silent and WWII Generation's reacted to the societal changes made by the Boomers. Examined further below, the critique of a mass culture and changes to American society did not come from the Baby Boomer Generation itself. Rather, its Silent Generation and WWII Generation parents witnessed the changing world through their children and were able to use the Baby Boomers as a vehicle to express their concerns. Taking this into consideration, we must ask ourselves: why did the Silent Generation and WWII Generation see the emerging Baby Boomer culture as a problem? To answer this question, the following chapter will look at the origins of the Baby Boomer Generation, the impact that consumerism had on the understanding of American progress, and the role of the middle class in order to analyze why these details are so important to the overall study of generational progression.

## **ORIGINS OF THE BABY BOOMERS**

Totaling all of the births between 1946 and 1964, around 76,441,000 babies were born to both WWII Generation and Silent Generation parents.<sup>50</sup> Because most Baby Boomers tended to be the offspring of those WWII Generation members born towards the end of 1924 as well as the offspring of older members of the Silent Generation, there were more complexities within this generation at its start. Nevertheless, this population boom influenced the ways that American consumerism, education, social security, and culture shaped post-war American society, while also making many older generations even more nervous about the future of America because of these changes. Landon Jones, in his book *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boomer*

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<sup>50</sup> U.S. Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, "Demographic and Social Aspects of Population Growth," *United States Government Printing Office*, (1972).

*Generation*, refers to this generation as having “affected every aspect of our society, from fads, fashions and music, to education, crime rates and Social Security.”<sup>51</sup> And so, the Baby Boomers affected many aspects of American society because of its large amount of births. This boom in births aided in the naming of this generation because the idea of a “boom” in population stuck with many Americans. Commenting on the naming of the Boomers, Jean Twenge, a psychology professor at San Diego State University, claims that the name “may have stuck partially because their adolescence and young adulthood was tumultuous, so the idea of it being a boom had some resonance.”<sup>52</sup> Indeed the Baby Boomers lived through a tumultuous time, especially during the 1960s, where there was a “boom” in a counterculture that shaped many aspects of American society as a result alongside its “boom” in the American population.

Additionally, the Baby Boomer Generation is the only generation that the United States Census Bureau categorizes under its official generation title. Howard Hogan, the Census Bureau's Chief Demographer, explains that “the Baby Boom is distinguished by a dramatic increase in birth rates following World War II and comprises one of the largest generations in U.S. history” and “unlike the baby boom generation, the birth years and characteristics for other generations are not as distinguishable and there are varying definitions used by the public.”<sup>53</sup> Because the Baby Boomer Generation births are fairly well-distinguished, it is categorized under its own name in the Census Bureau. Seen as an “unofficial government arbiter of what is and

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<sup>51</sup> Eddy S. W. Ng, Linda Schweitzer, and Sean T. Lyons, “New Generation, Great Expectations: A Field Study of the Millennial Generation,” *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Volume 25, Issue 2, 81-292 (2010), accessed August 8, 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Samantha Raphelson, "From GIs To Gen Z (Or Is It IGen?): How Generations Get Nicknames," *NPR*, October 6, 2014, accessed November 18, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2014/10/06/349316543/don-t-label-me-origins-of-generational-names-and-why-we-use-them>. Also see: Jean Twenge, *Generation Me - Revised and Updated: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled--and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York City, New York: Atria Books, 2006).

<sup>53</sup> Philip Bump, “Your Generational Identity is a Lie,” *Washington Post*, April 1, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/04/01/your-generational-identity-is-a-lie/>.

isn't a generation" the Census Bureau is a "catalog of aggregated data on the lives of Americans [that] recognizes only one official generation: The Baby Boomers." All other generations, like the WWII Generation and the Silent Generation, are merely categorized as "populations" in the census. Using this information highlights the idea that the Baby Boomer Generation triggered massive changes in American culture because of its large boom in population, resulting in not only cultural changes but institutional changes as seen in the Census Bureau.

### **THE ECONOMY/CONSUMERISM**

In 1965, Gardner Ackley, chairman of President Lyndon Johnson's Council of Economic Advisers, had trouble "finding any dark spots" within the American economy.<sup>54</sup> The post-war boom in the American economy that was mentioned in Chapter 1 continued to blossom in the early days of the Baby Boomer Generation. Indeed the "ballooning of the American middle class in the 1950s had fundamentally altered the geometry of social and economic status," and aided in an increase in the numbers of Americans in the middle class.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, many economists projected that this booming middle class would have lasting effects on the American society throughout the Boomer Generation. Commenting on the impacts of the middle class in 1948, *Time Magazine* hastily predicted that "manufacturers of children's clothing and toys [...] will spread to every corner of the economy."<sup>56</sup> The growing American middle class especially affected young Boomers in that they were introduced to consumer goods at a younger age than the Silent Generation, something that aided in the generational gap between older younger generations.

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<sup>54</sup> "The Economy: Excellent, Buoyant & Ebullient," *Time Magazine*, April 23, 1965.

<sup>55</sup> Lawrence R. Samuel, *The American Middle Class: A Cultural History*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 40.

<sup>56</sup> "The Economy: Baby Boom," *Time Magazine*, 1948.

An example that aided this generation gap was children's toys. Because of the large increase in population, there was an increase in demand for children's toys. This increase is especially celebrated on the cover of *Life Magazine*, where dozens of Baby Boomer children hold a sign that saying "Kids: Built-in Recession Cure- How 4,000,000 a Year Make Millions in Business."<sup>57</sup> An additional headline within this article read: "ROCKETING BIRTHS: BUSINESS BONANZA."<sup>58</sup> This article, like many others written about the Boomers and the economy, predicted that these new babies were not only babies, but exceptional *consumers*. The WWII Generation and the Silent Generation were not named "consumers" at an early age, highlighting the progressions of the economy seen in the Boomer Generation. Also depicting them as consumers, *Time Magazine* writes, "thanks to the rise in marriages during the war, and to general prosperity, the U.S. added 2,800,000 more consumers to its population in 1947."<sup>59</sup> It is interesting that even in 1947, one year after the start of the Baby Boomer Generation, babies were referred to as consumers. This terminology was not as rampant in the Silent and WWII Generations, providing further evidence of the growing dependency of the economy and consumerism after WWII.

The increase in population additionally shifted the ways that companies marketed to parents. Once the Baby Boomers grew out of diapers, "advertisers looked at the figures and discovered that American mothers had created the biggest market in history."<sup>60</sup> Marketing consultant Eugene Gilbert said that, "an advertiser who touches a responsive chord in youth can

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<sup>57</sup> "1958 Life Magazine," *LIFE*, cover and 83.

<sup>58</sup> 1958 Life Magazine

<sup>59</sup> "The Economy: Baby Boom," *Time Magazine*, 1948.

<sup>60</sup> Landon Y. Jones, *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation*, 43.



generally count on the parent to succumb finally to purchasing the product.”<sup>61</sup> Gilbert’s observations were correct in that once the Baby Boomers dominated the American market because, “diapers went from a \$32- million industry in 1947 to \$50 million in 1957”<sup>62</sup> and additionally, the “toy industry set sales records annually after 1940, growing from an \$84- million-a-year stripling to a \$1.25-billion giant.”<sup>63</sup> Advertisers knew exactly how to market to mothers and their success is shown in the sheer amount of baby products that were purchased in the early years of the Baby Boomer Generation.

Companies not only targeted parents in their own advertisements, but many magazines advertised to *other* businesses on how to properly appeal to mothers. Seen in an advertisement placed in *Time Magazine*, a specific advertisement reads: “What if she’s dressing the baby when your commercial’s on daytime TV? If you want to get your message to women TV doesn’t reach and to women with more income than daytime TV delivers, advertise in LIFE.”<sup>64</sup> This advertisement depicts the need for advertisers to make sure that women were enticed to buy products within every form of media. Further evidence of this appeal to women is seen in an advertisement published by Motorola. This advertisement claimed that watching more television would *benefit* children, get homework done *faster*, and *strengthen* the family, appealing to concerned mothers.<sup>65</sup> These advertisements specifically appeal to mothers and demonstrate a post-war shift in the growing marketplace that is especially aimed at mothers. The increase in advertisements led to an increase in consumer goods bought which introduced the Boomers to

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<sup>61</sup> Eugene Gilbert quoted in Archie Bunker, *TV in an Era of Change 1968-1978*, (Southern Illinois University Press, 2003).

<sup>62</sup> Thomas V. DiBacco, *Made in the U.S.A: The History of American Business*, (Beard Books, 2003), taken from Landon Jones, *Great Expectations*, 37.

<sup>63</sup> Landon Jones, *Great Expectations*, 38.

<sup>64</sup> Time Magazine, 1950s.

<sup>65</sup> Motorola Ad, “How Television Benefits Your Children,” advertisement in 1950 by *New York World Telegram*, [http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess\\_TV0677/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess_TV0677/).

consumer goods at an even younger age than their Silent Generation parents. This increase in toys aided in the further delay of adulthood as children were able to enjoy children's toys for a much longer time than their parents, resulting in an increased concern from parents.

Aside from focusing on mothers, advertisements sold millions of children's toys based on hit comic books and early television shows. A television show that especially sparked consumer buying was Davy Crockett. Within seven months of that shows airing, over \$100 million of merchandise was sold.<sup>66</sup> Director Stephen Spielberg recalled that:

“I was in third grade at the time. Suddenly the next day, everybody in my class but me was Davy Crockett. And because I didn't have my coonskin cap and my powder horn, or Old Betsy, my rifle, and the chaps, I was deemed the Mexican leader, Santa Anna. And they chased me home from school until I got my parents to buy me a coonskin cap.”<sup>67</sup>

Stories like Stephen Spielberg's were common amongst young Baby Boomers and further demonstrate the injection of consumerism into American society when they were young. An additional product that appealed to many young Baby Boomers was the Hula-Hoop. By 1958, 20,000 Hula- Hoops were manufactured a day within months of the Hula-Hoop's first commercial airing.<sup>68</sup> Seen in Davy Crocket toys and the Hula Hoop:

“Marketing, and especially television, *isolated* their needs and wants from those of their parents. From the cradle, the baby boomers had been surrounded by products created especially for them, from Silly Putty to Slinkys to skateboards. New products, new toys, new commercials, new fads- the dictatorship of the new- was integral to the baby-boom experience.”<sup>69</sup>

This 'dictatorship of the new' molded young Baby Boomers into consumer-loving members of society at a young age. Mentioned in the excerpt above, new products isolated Boomers from

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<sup>66</sup> Landon Jones, *Great Expectations*, 44.

<sup>67</sup> Steven Spielberg, 1980 Interview by Chris Hodenfield in “1941: Bombs Away,” *Rolling Stone*, 1980.

<sup>68</sup> Mark Rich, *Warman's 101 Greatest Baby Boomer Toys*, (Krause Publications,2000),54.

<sup>69</sup> Landon Jones, *Great Expectations*, 45

their parents, causing the generation gap to widen even further as parents couldn't relate to their children's television and toy culture as a result.

## **ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

As Baby Boomers started to grow out of diapers and into kindergarten, many parents noticed a large shift in education from when they were children. At the beginning of the 1950s, the rise in population resulted in increased demand for more seats in the classroom. The amount of children per classroom became the “most widely discussed architectural challenge after World War II.”<sup>70</sup> Between 1949 and 1950, enrollment in public schools was at 25.1 million and between 1959 and 1960, enrollment increased by 11 million.<sup>71</sup> The addition of over 11 million students in ten years was a serious problem for American schools and many parents feared that this would result in less educated children. To try to combat this increase in enrollment, in 1952, California opened a school a week and Los Angeles was spending \$1 million a week on opening new schools.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, by 1959, “nearly 100,000 of the nation’s 1.3 million public school teachers were working with substandard credentials.”<sup>73</sup> The education system in America was overloaded with too many students and not enough schools or teachers. Recall that the WWII Generation parents felt that schools were progressing positively for their Silent Generation offspring. Contrastingly, the Boomers’ parents were upset that the seemingly most successful post-war generation was not getting the education that it deserved, highlighting the shift in perceptions about education between the WWII Generation and the Baby Boomer Generation.

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<sup>70</sup> Amy F. Ogata, "Building for Learning in Postwar American Elementary Schools," *Journal Of The Society Of Architectural Historians*, 67, 4 (2008), accessed February 8, 2016.

<sup>71</sup> American Association of School Administrators (AASA), “Planning America’s School Buildings: A Report of the AASA School Building Commission,” Washington, D.C., (1960), 18.

<sup>72</sup> California Department of Education, “Data & Statistics,” accessed January 2016., accessed in Landon Jones, *Great Expectations*, 50.

<sup>73</sup> California Department of Education..

Moving away from education, the Cold War had a large impact on Boomer youth culture. Growing up in the Cold War during childhood and adolescence, many Boomers were exposed to bomb drills in school and constant threats from communism.<sup>74</sup> In the early 1950s, Joseph McCarthy began his anti-communism campaign which quickly stirred fear in American society. Indeed,

“the advent of the atomic bomb also brought the Cold War into the classroom. Studies conducted by psychologists and sociologists offer insight into children’s concerns about the Cold War and the threat of nuclear attacks, confirming that fears of communism and nuclear war indeed loomed large in the minds of many children, even the very young.”<sup>75</sup>

Nuclear war loomed in the minds of children so much so, that they started to write to President Kennedy. In 1961, a child wrote “I am too young to die” addressed to the president.<sup>76</sup> Finis Dunaway analyzes the impact that the Cold War had on visual media in: “Dr. Spock Is Worried: Visual Media and the Emotional History of American Environmentalism.” In this piece, Dunaway suggests that the articles written about the Cold War “challenged the spectacle of the bomb blast through the counterspectacle of innocent children” and he uses articles about Benjamin Spock to prove his point.<sup>77</sup> By using Dr. Spock as the posterchild for the Cold War’s impact on children, the media continued its appeal to mothers, as many of them deeply trusted him. Dr. Spock explained, “I am worried. Not so much about the effect of past tests but at the prospect of endless future ones. As the tests multiply so will the damage to the children.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> For more information on the bomb threats see: Bill Ganzel, “Duck and Cover Drills Bring the Cold War Home,” Living History Farm, 2007, accessed November 20, 2015, [http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe50s/life\\_04.html](http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe50s/life_04.html).

<sup>75</sup> Kirk Ankeney, Richard Del Rio, Gary B. Nash, David Vigilante, and The National Center for History in the Schools, Los Angeles, CA, *Bring History Alive! A Sourcebook for Teaching United States History*, (ERIC Clearinghouse, 1996), 190.

<sup>76</sup> Kirk Ankeney, *Bring History Alive!*, 190.

<sup>77</sup> Finis Dunaway, “Dr. Spock Is Worried: Visual Media and the Emotional History of American Environmentalism,” in *Rendering Nature: Animals, Bodies, Places, Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 149.

<sup>78</sup> New York Times, April 16, 1962, 30. Taken from Finis Dunaway, “Dr. Spock is Worried.”

Dunaway's inclusion of Dr. Spock in his work supports the idea that the media used reliable figures, like Benjamin Spock, to aid in anti-war sentiments. By including Dr. Spock in its advertisements, the media appealed to the ethos of each parent because Dr. Spock was associated with protecting children. One mother wrote to Benjamin Spock after reading the above quote. She says, "I was very moved by your statement. Mothers have looked to you for advice regarding children for years, I sincerely hope they heed your voice at this time."<sup>79</sup> This mother's reactions were common for many mothers and Dr. Spock's comments on the Cold War only aided in the uncertainty of the future of the country.

## **HIGH SCHOOL**

With the threats of communism and overcrowded public schools, young Boomers turned their attention to the fantasy world of comic books. The comic book is a great example of a medium by which Boomers were able to unite together at an early age. They not only portrayed strong, independent, and socially conscious characters, but they further influenced the youth culture established in elementary school because of their content. By the 1950s, comic books shifted their focus from concentrating solely on the Superhero Comics to Action Comics, Adventure Comics, and Detective Comics while adding new stories of Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman. Although comic books were used as mental breaks for young Boomers, many depicted issues prevalent in American society. For example, many Crime Detective Comics discussed crime rates, fraud, and racial tensions that were evident in American society. Additionally, several covers of *Hillman's* comic books depicted thieves stealing money and hardworking middle class workers committing crimes. These comic books kept Boomers subconsciously aware of the problems in America without getting them directly involved. Even

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<sup>79</sup> Finis Dunaway, "Dr. Spock Is Worried," 149.

characters like the *Hulk* were used as “a mouthpiece against conventional American culture” and “soon became a symbol of a new American generation.”<sup>80</sup> Comic books, then, are important to look at when discussing the generation gap seen between the Silent and WWII Generations and the Baby Boomers. Comic Books gave the Boomers an interactive way to discuss the world’s problems through fictional characters, alarming many parents that their young children were exposed to violence at a young age.

The use of comic books increased the uneasiness about the future of the country for many older generations. In fact, in 1950, a Parents Committee in Cincinnati began rating almost all comic books based on their own criteria of content and illustrations. Their ratings became published annually in *Parents Magazine* in order to inform other parents of the dangers that comic books could have on their children.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps many parents were concerned that their young children were becoming too aware of violence and crimes. To highlight this concern, psychiatrist Fredric Wertham dedicated a book called *Seduction of the Innocent* where he comments upon the surge in comic books by saying: “why does our civilization give children not its best but its worst- in paper, in language, in art, in ideas?”<sup>82</sup> Wertham’s book criticized the comic book for introducing bad forms of language, art, and ideas, which highlights the many fears that parents had. One mother who was interviewed for Wertham’s book said, “you’d be astonished at what these children from these good middle-class homes do nowadays” as a result of the comic books.<sup>83</sup> Wertham’s book can then be referred to as an example in which older

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<sup>80</sup> Jeffrey K. Johnson, *Super-History: Comic Book Superheroes and American Society, 1938 to the Present* (NC, McFarland, 2012), 93.

<sup>81</sup> Jamie Coville, “The Comic Book Villain, Dr. Fredric Wertham, M.D.,” Pennsylvania State University, (n.d.), [http://www.psu.edu/dept/inart10\\_110/inart10/cmbk4cca.html](http://www.psu.edu/dept/inart10_110/inart10/cmbk4cca.html).

<sup>82</sup> Fredric Wertham, M.D., “What Parents Don’t Know About Comic Books,” *Ladies’ Home Journal* (1953): 52.

<sup>83</sup> Frederic Wertham, “Such Trivia As Comic Books,” (1953), taken from Henry Jenkins, *The Children’s Culture Reader* (NYU Press, 1998), 491.

generations viewed the shifting youth culture after WWII. He was able to use the comic book as a medium by which post-war culture changes are evident in youth culture, commenting on the worries that many older generations had about the comic book and changes that form alongside it.

Additionally in 1954, the Federal Government conducted studies into the effects that comic books had on influencing juvenile delinquency. In the United States Senate Subcommittee Investigating Juvenile Delinquency, Chairman William Langer came to the conclusion that comic books do not influence juvenile delinquency, rather they:

“represent[ed] a greater medium of entertainment and education than most persons realize. The phenomenal rise of this industry indicates that the books fill a definite need among the intellectually undeveloped and the young. Unfortunately a bunch of literary ghouls have chiseled into the shadows of the industry, and have brought disrepute on the whole industry. It must be repeated that the majority of comic books are harmless; some are amusing, others are educational.”<sup>84</sup>

Langer’s findings highlight the concerns that older generations had with the emerging youth culture. The fact that the United States Government had to conduct a study on the impact that comic books had on America’s youth demonstrates that many parents and older generations were very worried about the new emerging Boomer culture. Perhaps much of the uneasiness came from the fact that many Silent and WWII Generation parents did not indulge in comic books to the extent of the Baby Boomers when they were younger and thus misunderstood their children’s fascinations with them. To reinforce this idea, one parent said, “many adults ambivalently relish and resent the teen-ager’s freedom and spontaneity” and much of this freedom was a result of comic books in the 1950s and 1960s, as they encouraged the Baby Boomers to be independent and active.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> United States Senate Subcommittee Investigating Juvenile Delinquency, April 22, 22, and June 4 1954.

<sup>85</sup> Time Magazine Jan 29, 1965, 57.

Additionally, many magazines joined comic books' success and published articles that appealed to many high school students. *MAD Magazine* in particular was a source in which its targeted audience was young high school Boomers. *MAD Magazine* focused on depicting many post-war culture shifts in America, saying that its purpose was to be "able to create the opportunity for a different perspective that would shape a generation."<sup>86</sup> Comedian Danny Jacobson accredits the rising generation gap to magazines like *MAD* saying, "like a lot of us, I grew up with a hard-nosed dad [that went through the] Depression era, World War II, all of that. And when I looked at Mad magazine, I knew it was OK to think like this."<sup>87</sup> Jacobson's comments uphold the notion that there was a post-war culture shift in America and that many magazines and comic books stood as outlets by which Boomers could sympathize with. *MAD Magazine* was so influential to the Baby Boomers in fact that by the 1960s, *MAD Magazine* continued to influence the anti-war protests and counterculture by supporting the YIPPIE Party (Youth International Party).<sup>88</sup> It is thus evident that countercultural magazines as well as comic books were resources available to many Baby Boomers during their high school years, unlike their parents, and supported a post-war culture that challenged societal norms. Magazines and comic books thus widened the generation gap between parents and their children because they created outlets for a youth culture to emerge and unite the Boomers at a younger age than their parents making it hard for parents to relate to their children.

## **COLLEGE/ The 60s**

When thinking about the Baby Boomer Generation, popular memory emphasizes elements such as long hair, bell-bottom jeans, and social movements during the 1960s. The 60s

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<sup>86</sup> Rusty L. Monhollon, *Baby Boom: People and Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 39.

<sup>87</sup> David Noonan , "Boomer Humor: The Way We Laughed," *Newsweek*, February 18, 2007.

<sup>88</sup> Rusty L. Monhollon, *Baby Boom: People and Perspectives*, 39.



were a time for many Boomers to expand their culture even further within institutions like universities. Recalling life in the 60s, a 32-year-old told *Boston Globe*, “our parents’ generation was sure of certain values. We weren’t. We had freedom.”<sup>89</sup> Once in college, many Baby Boomers constructed their freedoms in social movements that are known as the Counterculture Movement. In these movements, Boomers were able to challenge the long-term norms of society and offer alternatives to American culture. Up to this point, many Baby Boomers “found it difficult to live in an ambiguous world devoid of meaning and purpose. They craved the certainty that their parents, schools, and religions had been unable to give them” and by the time they entered college, they were ready to voice their opinions.<sup>90</sup>

The Vietnam War was one of the first major events that sparked widespread protest amongst Baby Boomer college students. Recall that before college, many middle class Boomers lived a well-off life: they were able to enjoy toys and technology as well as indulge themselves in the imaginary world of comic books. But by the time they were in college and of age to be drafted into war, their privileged lives began to crumble from underneath them. One Baby Boomer recalls, “I didn’t want to go to Vietnam. I didn’t think I had anything to fight for. I don’t think anyone knew why I was over there ... I often wondered what they would have told my parents if I had been killed. That I died for my country?”<sup>91</sup> This Boomer’s (and many others) attitude is drastically different than that of the WWII Generation whom willingly entered WWII. This change in attitude could be that Boomers joined social networks of like-minded anti-war peers that encouraged anti-war sentiments, whereas the WWII Generation did not. Indeed, “antiwar sentiments could have pushed people to associate with antiwar crowds and adopt their

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<sup>89</sup> Dennis E. Mithaug, *Self-Determined Kids: Raising Satisfied and Successful Children*, (Lexington Books, 1998), 31.

<sup>90</sup> Landon Jones, *Great Expectations*, 257.

<sup>91</sup> R.W. Mullen, *Black’s in America’s Wars* (Pathfinder, New York, 1973), 80.

constellation of leftist attitudes.”<sup>92</sup> These social networks fueled many students’ anti-war sentiments felt in the early 60s, setting themselves apart from the WWII and Silent Generations who grew up with war as the ‘norm.’

As a result of these social networks, many anti-Vietnam protests turned violent. In 1970, four students were killed and nine wounded at Kent State, and two students were killed and twelve wounded at Jackson State because of these protests. As a result of the Kent State killings, “448 campuses were either on strike or were completely closed down” and “campus unrest [was] the nation’s most important problem.”<sup>93</sup> These protests only furthered the concern and uncertainty felt by older generations because of their radical ideas and violence. Many older generations sensationalized these protests by framing them in ways that targeted the counterculture, not the Vietnam War. One WWII Generation member recalled that, “many of us drafted into WWII because we knew it was our duty, but now these kids don’t seem to appreciate the American military.”<sup>94</sup> The countercultural movement further enhances the post-war culture that emerges and tended to be a culprit of fear felt by older generations as the mass protests and radical ideas presented by the Boomers fueled greater uncertainty.

So then why did this generation, which seemed to have been given everything as a child, protest the very system that gave them everything? The answers to this question are complex in nature and indeed part of the emerging generation gap seen between older generations and the Baby Boomers. Seen in the protests against the Vietnam War, it seems that the Baby Boomer Generation was more vested than the Silent Generation was at their age in its understanding of the new post-war freedoms that emerge. It found comfort in expressing itself outwardly rather

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<sup>92</sup> Bruce Edewitz, “The Vietnam Draft Cases and the Pro-Religion Equality Project,” *University of Baltimore Law Review*, 43, 1(2014): 1.

<sup>93</sup> Landon Jones, *Great Expectations*, 100.

<sup>94</sup> Landon Jones, *Great Expectations*, 102.

than the Silent Generation did and the anti-war protests highlight this comfort. Subsequently, the exploration of post-war freedoms that the Boomers displayed in the 1960s further concerned older generations as many of the movements rejected the culture created by the Silent Generation and replaced it with a new one. One mother whose son died in Vietnam said, “my son was a victim, my family was a victim, all boys of draft age were victims in one way or another.”<sup>95</sup> Indeed much of the American population fell victim to the protests, war, and the countercultural movements that emerge in the 1960s, and these events influenced a new American culture as a result.

Shifting gears, even though the Baby Boomer Generation is often considered instigators of great unrest, the social changes that it brings also unified the nation as many large-scale Supreme Court decisions and laws were passed. Two of these events, the Civil Rights Act of 1965 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965, are examples of positive progress that many Boomer protests brought to American society. A Baby Boomer editor of a magazine in New York said “if you went through it and emerged from it, you emerged so much stronger. [...] I weathered my father’s death, a suicide, and the sixties. Nothing scares me.”<sup>96</sup> This Boomer’s experience was common for many Baby Boomers and those that emerged from the 1960s had lived through events that undoubtedly changed American culture. Like Bettina Linn’s comments in 1942 on the Silent Generation’s “revolution,” one Boomer said that, “we were utterly convinced that the revolution was coming and that we were making it.”<sup>97</sup> Thus, both generations experienced changes that were looked at as revolutions, highlighting the changes in American culture within each respective generation.

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<sup>95</sup> Ursula Diliberto in an interview for William Strauss, “The Wounded Generation: The Twenty-seven Million Men of Vietnam,” *American Heritage*, 29,3 (April/May 1978).

<sup>96</sup> Lawrence M. Baskir and William A. Strauss, “The Draft, the War, and the Vietnam Generation,”

<sup>97</sup> Lawrence M. Baskir, “The Draft.” Found in Landon Jones, *Great Expectations*, 101.

## GROWING UP

The drastic changes to American society in the 1960s brought a large change in the American economy. In the 1960s, “real hourly productivity increased by 22.3%” and the “real median family income grew by 9.4% from 1961 to 1969” due to the “Golden Age” of capitalism.<sup>98</sup> But by the early 1970s, the American middle class was in trouble. Because “its foundation was still shaking from the cultural revolution,” the middle class went through “a gauntlet of challenges that would threaten its very existence.”<sup>99</sup> Combined with the Vietnam War, the 1973 Oil Embargo, and increased federal spending under President Johnson, the “Golden Age” of capitalism ended at the beginning of the 1970s and the “stagflation” of the American economy ensued. This “stagflation” made it so that the middle class had little impact on the economy and several American anxieties shifted from social concerns to economic concerns.

Realizing that many middle class families could no longer afford the lifestyle they had before, there was a “major sense of confusion, and the disturbing feeling that one was no longer in control of his or her life.”<sup>100</sup> Rose Mary Moore, a middle-class woman living in Nebraska, said that “I always felt that when I got to the middle class I would really be living,” but as a result of “stagflation,” “you work, but you don’t get all the things you want. The economic outlook is scary.”<sup>101</sup> Rose Mary was not the only Boomer that felt this way, and the shift in the American economy during the 1970s altered perceptions of the economy in ways that no one predicted. As a result, the Baby Boomer Generation was largely blamed for this economic

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<sup>98</sup> David M. Gordon, "U.S. Economic Boom in '60s Beat 'Greatest' in '80s," *Los Angeles Times*, April 22, 1990, accessed November 18, 2015, [http://articles.latimes.com/1990-04-22/business/fi-491\\_1\\_economic-expansion/2](http://articles.latimes.com/1990-04-22/business/fi-491_1_economic-expansion/2).

<sup>99</sup> Lawrence R. Samuel, *The American Middle Class: A Cultural History*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 68.

<sup>100</sup> “Middle Class Suffers the Most from ‘Stagflation,’” *Marketing News*, October 5, 1979.

<sup>101</sup> Rose Mary Moore quoted in “Middle Class Money Blues,” *Ebony*, August 1980, 72-76.

change. Its large population boom changed the American market and was subsequently blamed for its failure.

On the other hand, as the “Golden Age” of the economy ended, hopes for its resurrection ensued in the Baby Boomer Generation. The worry and uncertainty of the failing economy united the Baby Boomers together like the 1960s did; only this time, they were united in their faith in the economy and not in mass social changes. Even government officials spoke highly of the economy’s booming return. Ronald Kutcher of the Labor Department said in 1984 that, “we see no evidence that jobs associated with the middle range of society are disappearing.”<sup>102</sup> Kutcher’s statement reassured worried Boomers that the American middle class was safe but in reality, inflation surged at 13.5 percent and unemployment was at an all-time high since WWII of 10.8 percent in the 1970s.<sup>103</sup> Thus, Kutcher’s comments depict what many Americans believed: that although the economy was experiencing a downfall, there was “nothing to worry about” because of the perceptions of a prosperous economy. This demonstrates that the perception of a prosperous economy was a hard notion to get rid of.

## **GENERATIONAL PROGRESSION**

Taking all of the above information into consideration, it is appropriate to analyze how the Baby Boomer Generation fits in to the Generational Progression guidelines. By the start of the Baby Boomer Generation in 1946, the Silent and WWII Generations were in their mid-twenties and thirties, meaning that a large majority of them would be contributing to the American work force. This contribution created an environment in which the Baby Boomers were able to benefit from the increase in family income in the form of toys, education, and

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<sup>102</sup> Lawrence R. Samuel, *The American Middle Class*, 99.

<sup>103</sup> Harold Meyerson, “The Forty-Year Slump” *American Prospect*, 24, 5 (2013).

technology. Additionally, a specific role that these generations had as parents was to comment upon the progress of their children as well as the progress of society. Because there were many social changes in American society during the Baby Boomers lives, older generations used the Baby Boomer Generation as a vehicle to comment upon social, political, and economic changes. Described as the Hippie and Protest Generation, many articles written about the Baby Boomers focused on the negative repercussions that the Boomers had on American society. This commentary created a strong disconnect between the Baby Boomers and their parents especially seen in the opening interviews of this chapter. Contrasting this progression with the Silent and WWII Generations, the Baby Boomers saw mass amounts of social, political, and economic changes during their high school, college, and adult lives that immensely shifted American culture. This progression influences further disconnect between older and younger generations as older generations were unable to relate to the experiences their children went through, resulting in a large generation gap. By applying Generational Progression to the Baby Boomers, we can acknowledge that the Baby Boomer Generation saw progress in the economy and society that it's Silent and WWII Generation parents did not experience, making their experiences immensely different than their parents' experiences at their age.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Baby Boomer Generation experienced mass social, political, and economic changes that forever changed American culture. Highlighted in its education, feelings about war, and key social movements, these events illuminate the complexities that the Baby Boomer Generation brought to American society. Additionally, this chapter has offered an explanation as to why the drastic changes in American society caused older generations to fear progress and younger

generations to embrace it. This difference influences disconnect between older and younger generations and made it difficult for the WWII and Silent Generations to relate to the Boomers. As a preview for Chapter 2, once the Baby Boomers began having children of their own, perceptions of a booming economy increased even further and technology and consumerism continue to boom in during the Millennial Generation.

## CHAPTER III: Millennial Generation (1981-2003)

*“We do have a sense of entitlement, a sense of ownership, because, after all, this is the world we were born into and we are responsible for it.”<sup>104</sup>*  
-CEO Evan Spiegel

When asked about his parents, disappointed sixteen year old Ian Bauer says, “our parents grew up on the ‘60s and lived a life of rebellion. They challenged authority at every chance. Now our generation is filled with rules.”<sup>105</sup> Additionally, sixteen year old Kirsten Johnson adds that, “our parents expect us to go to college. [...] The Boomers would leave high school, and, if it didn’t suit them to go and get a higher education, they would get a job for a while, and when they had the means or the intuition they would go back to school.” She continues that, “this is an abnormality now. You would be considered a failure by your peers.”<sup>106</sup> Both Ian and Kirsten notice a change in the ways that their parents grew up compared to their own experiences, representative of what many Millennials have noticed. By the time Millennials went into high school and learned about their parents’ past, they began to question how and why their generation had more rules than their parents. The generation gap present in the Baby Boomer Generation continued to widen within the Millennial Generation, only this time it wasn’t led by large social movements or protests, rather it was in the form of questioning the institutions established by the Baby Boomer Generation.

Up to this point, I have discussed the Silent Generation’s need for normalcy after World War II and the Baby Boomer Generation’s support for drastic social, political, and economic changes in America. I have explained that Generational Progression is a key factor in explaining

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<sup>104</sup> Evan Spiegel, “Commencement Speech at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business,” May 16, 2015.

<sup>105</sup> Ian Baur in an interview for: Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 51.

<sup>106</sup> Kirsten Baur, in an interview for: Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 149.



many shifts that occurred between the Silent and Baby Boomer Generations and part of the progress that influences a wider generation gap between them. A large majority of these generations' histories are in the past, making it easier for historians to analyze the trends in generational gaps. For newer generations, however, this longitudinal perspective is harder to achieve- given that the oldest Millennials are just now thirty-five, and the youngest are still in high school.

Like the Baby Boomers, the Millennial Generation has had many different names given to it that attempt to portray this generation's lifestyle. Originally called Generation Y, as it was a placeholder until more information was gathered on it, the Millennial Generation is one of the newest generations defining America today.<sup>107</sup> Neil Howe, the historian who coined the term "millennial" to describe the generation born between 1981 and 2003, "thought that an upbeat name would be good [to describe the generation] because of the changing way they were being raised. They would be the first to graduate high school in the year 2000, so the name millennial instantly came to mind."<sup>108</sup> Others suggested different names for the Millennial Generation that consist of: "Don't Label Us," Generation Y (or Why?), Generation Tech, Generation Next, Generation.com, Generation 2000, Echo Boom, Boomer Babies, and Generation XX.<sup>109</sup> Like the Baby Boomers and unlike the Silent Generation, there are a plethora of different labels for the young Millennial Generation, and it is important to note that many of these names were created before Millennials reached adulthood.

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<sup>107</sup> "Generation Y," *Ad Age* 30, August 1993, 16.

<sup>108</sup> Samantha Raphelson, "From GIs To Gen Z (Or Is It IGen?): How Generations Get Nicknames," *NPR*, October 6, 2014, accessed November 18, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2014/10/06/349316543/don-t-label-me-origins-of-generational-names-and-why-we-use-them>.

<sup>109</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000).

Examined further below, the critique and naming of the Millennials' mass culture did not come from the Millennial Generation itself. Rather, its Baby Boomer parents witnessed the changing world through their children and were able to use the Millennials as a vehicle to express their concerns. Taking this into consideration, we must ask ourselves: why did the Baby Boomer Generation want to protect their children from the very post-war culture it created? Did this concern arise from the social and economic fragmentation of the 1970s? To answer these questions, the following chapter will look at the origins of the Millennial Generation, the impact that the weakening sense of cohesion within American society had on the understanding of American progress, and the roles that parenting played in order to analyze why these details are so important to the overall study of generational discourse.

## **CAN'T FORGET GENERATION X**

For the purpose of this thesis, I am clumping Generation X with the Baby Boomers as they each have shared experiences. I am not committing an entire chapter to Generation X because it is, as the Pew Research Center puts it, "bookended by two much larger generations- the Baby Boomers ahead and the Millennials behind- that are strikingly different from one another."<sup>110</sup> In Paul Taylor and George Gao's article called "Generation X: America's Neglected 'Middle Child,'" they describe that the Gen Xers are "a low-slung, straight line bridge between two noisy behemoths."<sup>111</sup> Hinted from this article's title alone, Taylor and Gao suggest that Generation X is a "neglected middle child" and unlike the Silent Generation, Generation X was not born in a "lucky" time period as it inherited the economic collapse of the Baby Boomers and saw the end of the Cold War. Additionally, Gen X did not experience mass

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<sup>110</sup> Paul Taylor and George Gao, "Generation X: America's Neglected 'Middle Child,'" *PewResearchCenter* (June 5, 2014).

<sup>111</sup> Paul Taylor and George Gao, "Generation X: America's Neglected 'Middle Child.'"

social and cultural changes like the Baby Boomer Generation and did not experience world-wide terrorism like the Millennials.

In 2010, Pew Research asked several adults if they thought their own generation was unique compared to the other existing generations: about six-in-ten Boomers and Millennials said yes but only around half of Gen Xers thought their generation was unique.<sup>112</sup> For those Gen Xers who thought they were unique, there was very little agreement as to why they were different.<sup>113</sup> Looking at this evidence, Pew Research claims that:

“One reason Xers have trouble defining their own generational persona could be that they have rarely been doted on by the media. By contrast, Baby Boomers have been a source of media fascination from the get-go and Millennials, the ‘everybody-gets-a-trophy’ generation, have been the subject of endless stories about their racial diversity, their political and social liberalism, their voracious technology use, and their grim economic circumstances.”<sup>114</sup>

It is true that Generation X did not have as much coverage in the media as the Baby Boomers and the Millennials, and so Generation X tends to be clumped together with either the Baby Boomers or the Millennials when analyzing it. This is a main reason why Gen X is not as key when examining generational discourse. While Gen X likely does have its unique experiences and perspectives, for various reasons this generation did not emerge as a useful vehicle for older Americans to comment upon national change.

## **ORIGINS OF THE MILLENNIALS**

In September of 1982, traces of Cyanide in Tylenol were found in the Halloween candy of young children and “the era of the protected child had begun.”<sup>115</sup> This event, which marked the beginning of the Millennial Generation, is a fitting beginning to this generation. Seen in its

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<sup>112</sup> Paul Taylor and George Gao, “Generation X: America’s Neglected ‘Middle Child.’”

<sup>113</sup> Paul Taylor and George Gao, “Generation X: America’s Neglected ‘Middle Child.’”

<sup>114</sup> Paul Taylor and George Gao, “Generation X: America’s Neglected ‘Middle Child.’”

<sup>115</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 31.

labeling as the Entitled Generation, Millennial babies were given the world and protected from everything in it. Because the Baby Boomers lived through a tumultuous era and Gen X saw the ending of Vietnam and the Cold War, they each vowed to do everything to keep their children safe from the evils of the world. Two parents recall, “I distinctly remember being perfectly aware, on a conscious level, of the change in attitude toward children that happened around the early ‘80s, at the time it was occurring.”<sup>116</sup> This recollection can be attributed to the social fragmentation and weakened feelings of cohesion felt during the 1970s and 1980s because of the failing economy. Recall that the nation experienced a “stagflation” in the economy in the early 1970s, the end of the Vietnam and Cold Wars, and increased social tensions after the 1960s. Even though there was still a perception of a prosperous economy for older generations, the Millennial Generation was the first to actually experience the repercussions of the failing economy. This difference in perceptions made it so that many Baby Boomers were unable to relate to their children’s experiences because they themselves grew up with a prosperous economy.

Because of the changed economy and institutions by the Boomers, many Boomer parents parented their children in an overprotected way to ensure that they were protected from the outside world. To comment upon this change, one parent said, “Boomers seem to me to overreact about everything. It is like this overemotional sentimental weepiness and protectiveness that is saturating everything from the presidency to advertising.”<sup>117</sup> The increase in “overemotional sentimental weepiness and protectiveness” revealed itself through anti-child sentiments that were felt across the nation. Many parents thought that a lack of social cohesion

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<sup>116</sup> Laura in an interview for: Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 46.

<sup>117</sup> Joe Bexton quoted in: Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 48.

would result in a doomed Millennial Generation and so anti-child politics came into American society. Even magazines began focusing their articles on saving Millennials from this anti-child society. “Save the Next Generation!” was posted in the *Los Angeles Times* editorial section and author of *When the Bough Breaks: The Cost of Neglecting our Children* Sylvia Ann Hewlett wrote “an anti-child spirit is loose in the land.”<sup>118</sup> It seems that parents, because of their own experiences, were given an ultimatum: overprotect their children to ensure that they would have a chance at success in America, or do nothing and risk total social destruction. Many parents chose the former option and as a result, the Helicopter Parent was born.

In an extensive study by Jim Settle and Patricia Somers on Helicopter Parents, a main reason for the rise in this style of parenting is due to the fact that “families and parenting have changed. Parents fear that their children may make ‘wrong’ academic or career decisions and so end up overeducated and underemployed. This fear leads to over chaperoning and reluctance to ‘let go.’”<sup>119</sup> Additionally from this study, Settle and Somers found that technology is a main contributor to the Helicopter Parent. They found that:

“advances in technology enable helicoptering. From cell phones to parents’ masquerading as students online using purloined passwords, information is available 24 x 7. Armed with more data, some overzealous parents bypass communicating with their children because their children’s professors, academic advisors, or even college presidents are only a phone call or e-mail away.”

Settle and Somers’ observations suggest that increases in access to technology as well as changes in parenting methods have fostered an environment where parents are able to surround their children with constant guidance and availability. Indeed, the cell phone has even been

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<sup>118</sup> Sylvia Ann Hewlett, *When the Bough Breaks: The Cost of Neglecting our Children*, (Perennial, June 1992),18.

<sup>119</sup> Patricia Somers and Jim Settle, “The Helicopter Parent,” *College and University*, 86,2 (Fall 2010): 2-9.

considered the “world’s longest umbilical cord” giving parents full access to their children.<sup>120</sup> These changes have made it so that Millennials, at a young age, did not have to do very many tasks on their own because their parents didn’t want them to get hurt and wanted to make their childhood less tumultuous than their own.

## **EDUCATION**

As discussed above, because of increased worry about the future of the country, it was up to parents to take control of their kids, especially when it came to school. Nine year old Meghan Collard recalled that, “my father teased me. He said I might be a dropout if I don’t pass... I lied in bed wondering what was going to happen, if I was going to fail or pass.”<sup>121</sup> Meghan’s experiences were common for young Millennials and the pressures of being perfect often times stressed young Millennials out. As parents started to ‘helicopter’ over their children at a young age, they pressured them to get straight A’s in as early as elementary school in order to prepare them for college. Parents were so dedicated to preparing their children for college that if the schools weren’t living up to their standards they homeschooled them.

There were times when parents felt that their children were not being treated in the ways that they wanted in the classroom and subsequently took their Millennial children out of school. Estimated by Strauss and Howe, “the number of homeschoolers has risen from maybe 100,000 in the early 1980s to nearly 1.5 million today.”<sup>122</sup> In the comments by Baby Boomer father Rich Tauchar, he says, “can I provide a better education than schools? Academically of course I can.

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<sup>120</sup>K Keppler, R.H. Mullendore, and A. Carey Eds, “Partnering with Parents of Today’s College Students,” *National Association of Student Personnel Administrators*, 2006.

<sup>121</sup> Meghan Collard, “New York State Education Test” in an interview for: Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 157.

<sup>122</sup> George Thampy, interviewed in: Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 150.

Why? It's a 1-on-1 instruction vs. 1-on-20 (or 30). [...] My wife and I are fully capable of introducing the material."<sup>123</sup> Tauchar's comments are true for many parents that were dedicated to homeschooling their children and because parents valued protecting every aspect of their children's lives, a shift in education styles emerges. Recall that schools during the Silent Generation were seen as progressing in a positive way and by the time the Baby Boomers went to school, schools were seen as overcrowded and as having low standards. Many Boomer parents continued their negative view of schools and thus homeschooled their children, demonstrating the progression of the ways that American schools were viewed between all three generations.

As a consequence of home schooling, many parents lost sight of their own interests and became immersed in their children's lives. Twelve year old winner of the 2000 National Spelling Bee George Thampy said, "home schooling all of us takes a lot of time, effort, and commitment on their part. As a consequence, my dad and mom do not have much time for themselves."<sup>124</sup> Perhaps the reason why many parents wanted to homeschool their children is because they wanted to make a statement that the progress of the American education system was not up to their standards, and by homeschooling them, they were able to pass along their own knowledge of the world that schools couldn't give. Even the U.S. Department of Education agreed that schools were ineffective, saying that there was, "a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens the very future as a nation and people."<sup>125</sup> Seen in the words of the Department of Education, the fear that American schools weren't successful was not only perceived by parents.

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<sup>123</sup> Rich Tauchar in an interview for Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 150.

<sup>124</sup> George Thampy, interviewed in Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, 150.

<sup>125</sup> "A Nation At Risk," *National Commission on Excellence in Education*, April 1983, <https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>.

Aside from homeschooled children, many Millennials were exposed to competitive sports at a young age. Seventy-three percent of students by the late 1980s were involved in extra-curricular activities, and consequently, parents become just as involved driving their children around and/or coaching them.<sup>126</sup> Going into Elementary School, many children began mandatory P.E. classes. SPARK, an organization created in 1989 to combat childhood obesity, claims that physical education for elementary students, “develop[s] a variety of basic movement and manipulative skills so they will experience success and feel comfortable during present and future physical activity pursuits.”<sup>127</sup> Even non-governmental organizations were looking to the future wellbeing of the Millennials as seen in SPARK. The fun atmosphere of P.E. classes further encouraged students to join extra-curricular activities like soccer, basketball, and baseball and as a result of the increase in extracurricular activities, a new name for the Millennial Generation floats to the surface of American society: the Trophy Generation.

Concerned with their children’s emotional well-being, many parents felt that giving every child a trophy, even if they didn’t win, was essential in making sure their children felt the love and support that they needed. Perhaps parents thought that giving all children a trophy would aid in mending perceived social fragmentation from the failing economy and that their children would feel a sense of unity with each other. This, however, is not what happened. The name Trophy Generation actually further fragmented society because many children exposed to “always winning” at sports translated it into their adolescent and adult lives. Manager Natalie Griffith at Eaton Corporation says that the Millennials’ “attitude is always ‘what are you going to

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<sup>126</sup> Alia Wong, “The Activity Gap,” *The Atlantic*, January 30, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/01/the-activity-gap/384961/>.

<sup>127</sup> “SPARK Objectives,” *SPARK: Countering Childhood Obesity Since 1989*, 1989, <http://www.sparkpe.org/about-us/objectives/>.



give me.”<sup>128</sup> Griffith’s comments highlight that the increase in trophy winners created a new type of employee in the Millennial Generation. Commenting further on this, Ron Aslop has dedicated an entire book called *Trophy Kids Grow Up* in order to analyze the implications that giving every child a trophy had on maturing Millennials. In his book, he interviews several employers about what it’s like to work with Millennials. It seems that the overall consensus of these interviews is that employers tend to blame the Millennials’ work ethic on their childhood experiences. In a sampling of many comments made by employers, they say:

“Enormous sense of entitlement, less willingness to earn their keep.”

“Expect too much too soon; very self-centered.”

“Lazier, more entitled.”

“Want it all delivered to them on a silver platter.”

“So entitled they expect to fly up the corporate ladder.”

“They believe two years of experience is enough to run their own company.”<sup>129</sup>

These comments are proof that giving children trophies for losing a game actually widened the generation gap because they changed the work ethic between the Millennials and Boomers. In a study conducted in the *Journal of Business and Economics Research*, Millennials have, “been given constant feedback and praise. Employers fear this places impossible expectations on organizations.”<sup>130</sup> Parts of these “impossible expectations” are from the new role that employers

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<sup>128</sup> Ron Aslop, *The Trophy Kids Grow Up: How the Millennial Generation is Shaking up the Workplace* (Jossey-Bass, 2008.)

<sup>129</sup> Ron Aslop, *Trophy Kids Grow Up*, 24.

<sup>130</sup> Suzanne M. Crampton and John W Hodge, "Generation Y: Uncharted Territory," *Journal of Business & Economics Research (JBER)*, 7, 4 (February 2011): 4.

have in “parenting” the Millennial Generation. They are worried that there are increased expectations for themselves to parent their “employee-kids” rather than focus on the development of their companies. Thus, the childhood experiences of the Millennials furthered the generation gap because they viewed work differently than older generations as older generations felt that had to parent the Millennials, emphasizing that the parenting was a large concept in the Millennial Generation.

## **CONSUMERISM AND ECONOMY**

Taking a step back to the economy, after the “stagflation” of the American economy in the 1970s and 1980s, many Boomers “were increasingly asking themselves why they were not rich like the dot-commer or investment banker down the block.”<sup>131</sup> To try to mend the failing economy, many Boomers and Gen X’ers took to shows like *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* or *Survivor* where large sums of money were essentially given away for free. The “stagflation” of the American economy made it so that many middle class workers turned to instant-winning money, a concept that manifests itself in the Millennial Generation. Aside from gameshows, the 1980s and 1990s also saw an increase in dual-income families where both parents worked. The Census Bureau reported that, “the proportion of households earning \$15,000 and \$50,000 decreased from 65 percent in 1970 to 58 percent in 1985” and the *U.S. News & World Report* added in 1986 that, “America’s economy is in a fix.”<sup>132</sup> As a result of the decrease in household earnings, many middle class families turned to dual incomes, where both parents worked. Although not all middle class workers turned to gameshows for instant money, many of them did find instant gratification in buying consumer goods.

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<sup>131</sup> Lawrence R. Samuel, *The American Middle Class: A Cultural History*, 140.

<sup>132</sup> Beth Brophy, “Middle Class Squeeze,” *U.S. News & World Report*, August 18, 1986, 36-41; Lawrence R. Samuel, *The American Middle Class*, 103.

Recall that advertisements during the Baby Boomer Generation were mainly dedicated to the mothers of the family. Now, Millennials were the ones bombarded with advertisements. Many “advertisers for parental products have learned that it costs a lot less to reach millions of kids on *Rugrats* than adults on prime-time shows- an opportunity that is helping boost children’s programming more than any act of Congress.”<sup>133</sup> Because both parents were at work, advertisers knew that in order to increase their sales, they would need to reach their youngest audiences. Commenting the increase in sales, the *Chicago Tribune* wrote that, “the formula goes like this: Boomer parents, double incomes, highly cherished children and the busy schedules that come with two jobs. \$2,500 for a swing set? No problem... Don’t think for a minute that the purveyors of the play systems don’t know their audience.”<sup>134</sup> Indeed advertisers knew their audiences. Because the Baby Boomers had toys when they were younger, it was viewed as normal to give Millennials toys at a young age.

In an effort to appeal to parents more, many advertisers started selling “edutainment” toys. Reyne Rice, from the Toy Industry Association in New York, claimed that parents tend to “consider education a No. 1 priority for their children” and they “are willing to do whatever it takes to give their kids a head start in life.”<sup>135</sup> Because companies “knew their audience,” the “edutainment” toys, “reached \$1.7 billion in 2005” and during the 2005 Holiday season, “more than 50 percent of all money lavished on toys during the holiday season will be spent on

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<sup>133</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, 269.

<sup>134</sup> Chicago Tribune cited in Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 266.

<sup>135</sup> Barbara Wall , “Ambitious Parents Spend on Educational Toys for Toddlers,” *International Herald Tribune New York Times*, November 24, 2006.

preschool products that purport to enhance specific motor skills.”<sup>136</sup> As a result of “edutainment” toys,

“Millennials were raised in an entirely different ecosystem than their parents and grandparents. Not just surrounded by, but assisted by technology and all of the advances and advantages (or disadvantages depending on your point of view) that technology brought to entertainment, education, and communication.”<sup>137</sup>

The rise in technology aided in the development of the Millennial Generation’s young lives but further widened the generation gap between older and younger generations. Because many older generations did not experience the benefits of technology when they were younger, they were unable to fully connect with the Millennials.

When all three generations (Silent, Boomer, and Millennial) were compared to in a study by Strauss and Howe, it was found that:

“the young Silent regarded computers as necessary adjuncts to American technology, with mainframes at the apex of vast institutional pyramids. Young Boomers shattered the telescreen and invented the new personal computer, which allowed each person to be his own creative island. [...] Now Millennial teens are using computers to do group projects and communicate among networks of friends.”<sup>138</sup>

This shift in the ways technology is regarded in each generation is important to examine because it provides information about why there is a growing generation gap seen between these three generations. Elizabeth Weil, a member of *Fast Company Business Magazine*, says that, “adults tend to see all things computer-related as work, even when they’re play; kids tend to see them as play, even when they’re at work. It’s a profoundly different mindset.”<sup>139</sup> Weil’s findings support that, as a result of these differing mindsets, many older generations used the Millennial’s

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<sup>136</sup> Barbara Wall, “Ambitious Parents Spend on Educational Toys for Toddlers.”

<sup>137</sup> Lee Caraher, *Millennials & Management*, Chapter 1 Overview.

<sup>138</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, 274.

<sup>139</sup> Elizabeth Weil, Fast Company quoted in Ron Aslop, *Trophy Kids Grow Up*.

reliance on technology as a way to comment upon the changing society, and the Millennial Generation was subsequently blamed for becoming addicted to technology

## **THE SHIFT**

Moving away from the economy and consumerism, on September 11, 2001 the United States was attacked, changing the Millennial culture forever. Many Millennials were old enough to remember these attacks and thinking back to that day, twenty-three year old Anna Henry recalls “it suddenly became very clear. You are not safe.”<sup>140</sup> Like many other Millennials, Anna remembered what class she was in and what clothes she was wearing when her teachers and parents explained what had happened. Similar to the effects that the Vietnam War had on the Baby Boomer Generation, the terrorist attacks unified Millennials while at the same time increased parental caution. Morley Winograd, who recently co-authored the book, *Millennial Momentum: How A New Generation is Remaking America* says that, “parents who were already prone to coddling their children suddenly upped the ante following the terrorist attacks.”<sup>141</sup> Winograd additionally said that “going forward, that will continue to leave a pro-institutional attitude on many of the generation. They see the value of institutions in making the world safer.”<sup>142</sup> 9/11 did leave a pro-institutional attitude in the Millennial Generation that has begun to surface itself in politics today. The impact that 9/11 had on the Millennial Generation increased parental roles as well as unified the Millennials. 9/11 changed the culture of the Millennial Generation not only in the increased parenting seen as a result of the fear experienced after the attacks, but it left a profound impression on the minds of many Millennials.

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<sup>140</sup> Amanda M Fairbanks, “Post-9/11 Generation: Millennials Reflect on Decade since terrorist Attacks,” *Huffington Post*, September, 9, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/09/september-11-anniversary-millennials-worldview\\_n\\_951000.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/09/september-11-anniversary-millennials-worldview_n_951000.html).

<sup>141</sup> Amanda M Fairbanks, “Post-9/11 Generation: Millennials Reflect on Decade since terrorist Attacks.”

<sup>142</sup> Amanda M Fairbanks, “Post-9/11 Generation: Millennials Reflect on Decade since terrorist Attacks.”

## HIGH SCHOOL

Because 2000 was the turn of the century, all eyes were on the Millennial Generation and what they would do for the future of the country; but after 9/11 there was even greater uncertainty circulating around. As Millennials began to grow up and enter high school, parents noticed something different about the ways their children viewed the world as seen in this chapter's opening interviews. Growing up under their parents' wings, Millennials were unable to truly express themselves as children, but as they began to enter high school, their whole identity shifted from being the *victim* of 'anti-child' politics to the *problem* with progression.

Sheltered throughout their lives until high school, many Millennials did not have the space to formulate their own ideas about the world: they were given everything, doted upon by their parents, and received trophies for placing last. By the time they went to high school they began to act in ways that their parents, and the rest of American society, did not expect. Old enough to learn about the 1999 Columbine High School shootings paired with 9/11, many Millennial high schoolers, for the first time, felt unsafe. Out from under the supervision of their parents, Millennials learned in-depth about the horrific events of the past as well as the uncertainty of the future. As a result, social justice classes and clubs sprouted up in high schools. In a study from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health and the National Education Longitudinal Survey, it was found that, "participation in a number of high school extracurricular activities positively related to early adulthood voting."<sup>143</sup> This study also found that, "those who get in the habit of participating and engaging in their high school community tend to continue those behaviors and kind of associations into adulthood."<sup>144</sup> A result of club

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<sup>143</sup> "The Case for High School Activities," *The National Federation of State High School Associations, 2015*, <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/the-case-for-high-school-activities/>.

<sup>144</sup> "The Case for High School Activities."

involvement in high schools was an increase in awareness of the problems the world faced, and many Millennials turned to community service and activism to help combat these problems. This is a different reaction than the Baby Boomers had, as they sparked mass protest to change society while the Millennials turned to hands-on service.

Compared to the Silent Generation who viewed community service through the Selective Service Law which, “pushed young males towards socially acceptable deferments such as teaching, science, or even marriage” and the Boomer’s notion of community service as “cleaning hospital bedpans to avoid Vietnam- or, for the more radically minded, spurring oppressed neighborhoods to vent their grievances against the ‘establishment,’” the Millennials had a different notion of community service.<sup>145</sup> In its community service, the Millennial Generation became more involved in clubs like the Boy Scouts of America and Girl Scouts, which made them further aware of the world’s problems. Additionally, some schools made community service a requirement for graduation, further exposing many students to injustices within their own community. Demonstrated by their involvement in community service, many Millennials learned that in order to make changes to the world, one would have to do so quickly, and technology aided in making many changes. The Baby Boomer Generation had to make changes by word of mouth, but because the Millennials had technology, they were able to do it faster more efficiently.

The differences in the ways that the Baby Boomers and Millennials handled social change reflect the growing generation gap. As a result of this shift, the Millennial Generation was branded a failure in the media because they turned to technology to help solve problems. Articles with the headlines of, “Millennials: The Me Me Me Generation” and “The Numbers Behind

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<sup>145</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 216.

Why Millennials Are 'Generation Frustration'” and “The ‘Participation Trophy’ Generation” seemed to dominate popular media.<sup>146</sup> The Millennials use of technologies to solve problems made it so that, “unfortunately, a lot of their [the media] appeals to millennials are based on the idea that the generation is some kind of homogeneous entity that only speaks in emoji’s, rather than the diverse group that millennials actually are.”<sup>147</sup> Many older generations projected their uncertainties on to the Millennial Generation especially seen in the nickname: Generation.com.

## **GROWING UP AND THE FUTURE OF THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION**

Now enter present day: many older generations and employers are worried about the future of the country when the Millennial Generation dominates the workforce in a few years. Anthony Carnevale, director and research professor for Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce claims that, “by 2020, millennials will be an estimated 46 percent of all U.S. workers. Millennials are going to dominate all the numbers, employment and unemployment, from here on out.”<sup>148</sup> Perhaps many older generations are concerned about the future of the economy because the Millennials will dominate it in a few years. With this in mind, it seems that many older generations expect that when Millennials reach adulthood they will suddenly adapt their ways to the Baby Boomer’s workforce, but this is not what will happen.

In the 1960s, the Baby Boomers wanted society to change for them, not the other way around, and we see that again as the Millennials enter the workforce. As mentioned earlier, many companies see Millennials as a detriment to their company because they don’t want to

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<sup>146</sup> Joel Stein, “Millennials: The Me Me Me Generation,” *Time Magazine*, 2013, <http://time.com/247/millennials-the-me-me-me-generation/>.

<sup>147</sup> Ana Swanson, "28 Advertisements Show the Most Awkward times Brands Tried to Target Millennials," *Washington Post*, June 22, 2015, accessed November 3, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/06/22/the-most-awkward-times-brands-tried-to-target-millennials/>.

<sup>148</sup> Leah McGrath Goodman, “Millennial College Graduates: Young, Educated, Jobless,” *Newsweek*, May 27, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/2015/06/05/millennial-college-graduates-young-educated-jobless-335821.html>.



“babysit” them. Gail McDaniel, a corporate consultant and career coach for Millennial college students, says that, “we all want to feel valued and get rewarded in the workplace; the millennials are just more vocal about it.”<sup>149</sup> It is true that Millennials are more vocal about their concerns in the workplace and thirty year old Liz comments upon it saying, “I can give you lots of examples of slacker Gen Xers and Boomers in my office” but the reality is that because Millennials are more vocal about their concerns, other “slacker” generations aren’t noticed as often.<sup>150</sup> Gail McDaniel continues this idea by saying that, “companies need to understand that something’s gotta give here. If they behave the same as they have the past 40 years, they won’t have people to run their operations down the road.”<sup>151</sup> The Baby Boomer Generation, like the Silent Generation before it, will have to adapt its ways to the Millennial Generation in order for businesses to be successful when the Millennials take over the workforce.

The *Wall Street Journal* and Harris Interactive Survey of Corporate Recruiters agrees with McDaniel, saying that many employers believe that Millennials are “unwilling to stick out tough situations that take more time to solve than they are willing to give. [...] This generation is very fickle. They are not necessarily looking for a career relationship with a company.”<sup>152</sup> What is not mentioned in articles like this one, however, is that the shift in work ethic that rises in the Millennial Generation is what makes it so different. *Fortune Magazine* says that, “for the generation that will soon become the majority of America’s workforce, flexible work hours and personal fulfillment are more important than a bigger paycheck.”<sup>153</sup> Recall that Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis contain interviews in which students comment about their hopes of making a lot of

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<sup>149</sup> Ron Aslop, *Trophy Kids Grow Up*, 37.

<sup>150</sup> Lee Caraher, *Millennials & Management*, Ch 3 Overview.

<sup>151</sup> Ron Aslop, *Trophy Kids Grow Up*, 37.

<sup>152</sup> Ron Aslop, *Trophy Kids Grow Up*, 32.

<sup>153</sup> Adam Miller, “3 Things Millennials Want in a Career (hint: it’s not more money),” *Fortune Magazine*, March 26, 2015, <http://fortune.com/2015/03/26/3-things-millennials-want-in-a-career-hint-its-not-more-money/>.

money. There is an apparent shift in the Millennial Generation as it doesn't want to *only* work to make money. As stated in *Fortune Magazine*, Millennials do not want long career relationships because that would require them to have the mindset of making a lot of money. Sure, Millennials want money, but they are not willing to put in the amount of hours that they saw their parents put in while growing up, and they are also dealing with the changing middle class that their Baby Boomer parents ignored.

Although there are some companies that have yet to understand the shift in Millennial work ethic, there have recently been companies who have begun to cater to the Millennial mindset. Companies like IBM have started to shift their mindset around Millennials in the workplace. Diversity Programs Manager for IBM Rachel Robards says, "we find it's a huge retention benefit that young employees can switch jobs every year or two, but still stay in IBM."<sup>154</sup> If other companies do what IBM has done, Millennials will be more inclined to stay within one company for many years. To support this theory, Ron Aslop's book, "Trophy Kids Grow Up," explains the necessary steps that employers must take in order to create a Millennial-inclusive environment. He suggests that companies:

1. Show new hires how their work makes a difference and why it's a value of the company.
2. Never try to bully Millennials. They prefer a collaborative, team-oriented environment in which they can be heard.
3. Don't tell millennials that they'll have a job for life with your company. That will sound like a death sentence.<sup>155</sup>

To an older generation reader, these three rules may seem a bit light-hearted compared to the hard-working environment they are used to working in. These rules may seem like companies are teaching the Millennial Generation to focus less on work and more on inclusiveness. The

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<sup>154</sup> Rachel Robards, IBM found in Ron Aslop, *Trophy Kids Grow Up* , 39.

<sup>155</sup> Ron Aslop, *Trophy Kids Grow Up*, 38.

reality is that in order for employers to even get Millennials to stay within a company for more than a year, Alsop's rules should be taken into consideration.

Therefore, it would behoove employers to shift the focus on Millennials from one of disappointment in its "entitled" attitudes to one of acceptance. A main concern that arises from employers is that the Millennial Generation should have to adapt to the company, not the other way around because many Boomers are familiar with society adapting to its own needs. Indeed employers should not have to change their entire company's dynamic in order to let Millennials wear jeans to work every day; rather employers should be aware of the environments in which Millennials thrive in. Acknowledging these factors will keep Millennials in jobs longer and result in a hard-working Millennial employee.

## **GENERATIONAL PROGRESSION**

The Millennial Generations oldest member, born on January 1, 1981, is 35 years old today. The Silent Generation's oldest member is 91 years old, and the Baby Boomer's oldest member is 70 years old.<sup>156</sup> In Chapters 1 and 2, it was found that the Baby Boomers lived in a time that was economically, socially, and politically more progressive than their Silent Generation parents. As offspring of their Baby Boomer and Generation X parents, Millennials entered this world with consumerism, technology, and the media at their fingertips. Similar to its parents, the Millennials are living in an even more progressive time which is why in order to explain these generational differences, it is necessary to turn to Generational Progression for the answers.

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<sup>156</sup> Subtracted the first day of each generation from 2016.

The progression of the dollar seen in the Millennial Generation is much different than that of its parents and grandparents. During the Silent and most of the Baby Boomer Generations, America was in a “Golden Age” of success. Within the Millennial Generation, the economy wasn’t as successful, causing a change in perceptions of what a “good” economy is, and many unsolved economic issues were simply handed down to the Millennial Generation. According to the American Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average workweek was 45.2 hours for each worker during and after World War II and the average family income was \$2,000. By 1999, the average workweek was 34.5 hours and the average family income was \$33, 700.<sup>157</sup> This proves that as a result of economic progress seen within the Silent and Baby Boomer Generations, working hours have gone down and income has increased. This is important to acknowledge while studying the Millennial Generation because the opposite is beginning to take effect. Within the Millennial Generation, many Americans have to work longer hours to make minimum salaries. Now, “even what’s left of the middle class disdains a middle-class life.”<sup>158</sup>

Progression within the Millennial Generation has immensely helped and hindered it, more-so than its parents. Because Generational Progression, the idea that newer generations tend to be better off economically and socially than older generations, is seen in the Millennial Generation, it was/is able to benefit from certain things, like college, that its parents didn’t have. The Executive Office of the President’s Council of Economic Advisors found that: “Millennials are also somewhat less likely than previous generations to major in fields like business and health (which includes pre-med and nursing). The share of Millennials studying STEM fields is slightly lower than that of past generations.” This study additionally found that: “Millennials are

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<sup>157</sup> Inflation is accounted for. Government Printing Office, “U.S. Council of Economic Advisors, 2000, Economic Report to the President,” *Economic Report* (2000), 279, accessed from: <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/cwc/american-labor-in-the-20th-century.pdf>.

<sup>158</sup> Lee Siegel, “Death of a Salesman’s Dreams [Op-Ed],” *New York Times*, May 3, 2012.

more likely to study social science or applied fields—like communications, criminal justice, and library science—that do not fit into traditional liberal arts curricula.”<sup>159</sup> Even the subjects that Millennials study in college have progressed from that of their parents because there is less pressure to get a degree in a field that will guarantee a job. Recall that the Baby Boomers and Silent Generation mainly went to college to get a degree in something that would guarantee a mechanical job, and because of this progression to the Millennials, it is hard for older generations to understand why the Millennials choose degrees that don’t guarantee a job. Generational Progression simply tells us that generations see progression that previous generations may not have experienced. This is an important concept to understand when looking at the Millennial Generation because a lot of the negative comments about this generation are that they are entitled in the ways that they think about money and the world.

Described as the Entitled Generation and Generation Me, many articles written about the Millennial Generation have focused on the negative aspects of the Millennial Generation. This commentary created a strong disconnect between the Millennials and older generations seen in the opening interviews of this chapter. Contrasting the Millennial experience with its Baby Boomer parents, Millennials experienced an economic downturn, 9/11, and large amounts of homeschooling that immensely shifted American culture. This progression influences an even wider disconnect between older and younger generations because older generations are unable to relate to the experiences Millennials went through as children. By applying the Generational Progression explanation to the Millennials, we can acknowledge that they saw different types of progress in the economy and society that its Boomer parents did not experience.

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<sup>159</sup> “15 Economic Facts About Millennials,” *Office of the President of the United States: Council of Economic Advisors* (October 2014): 12-14, accessed August 9, 2015, [https://m.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/millennials\\_report.pdf](https://m.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/millennials_report.pdf).

## CONCLUSION

In the final seconds of CEO Evan Spiegel's commencement address at ESC Marshall, he addresses the Millennial Generation saying:

“you are capable of all of the growth that will be expected of you and that you expect for yourself. You will tackle every challenge headed your way – and if you don't – it won't be for lack of trying. Someone will always have an opinion about you. Whatever you do won't ever be enough. So find something important to you. Find something that you love. You are going to make a lot of mistakes [...] but it will be okay.”<sup>160</sup>

Spiegel's final words in his commencement speech remind the Millennial Generation that they will be successful members of American society, something that is less evident in many articles about the Millennial Generation. This chapter has explored the origins of the Millennial Generation, including facts about the changes seen in the economy and culture which shed light onto the ways in which it entered American life. Its Baby Boomer parents witnessed the changing world through their children and were able to use the Millennials as a vehicle to express their concerns. Much of their concerns rose from a feeling uncertainty caused by the changing world; concerns for education, concerns for the economy, and concerns for technology were at the forefront of many older generations' minds. In order to combat these fears, many parents sheltered the Millennial Generation, giving it unlimited amounts of potential through trophies, consumer goods, and other opportunities that ultimately shaped this generation upon adulthood.

By the time the Millennials reached high school, they were introduced into a world without their parent's guidance, resulting in a boom of socially-conscious adolescents who

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<sup>160</sup> Evan Spiegel, “Commencement Speech at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business,” May 16, 2015.

wanted to change the world quickly. Being introduced to social issues, many Millennials used technology (social media) to express their concerns, which is something that their parents did not understand. As a result, the generation gap seen in the Baby Boomer Generation began to widen in the Millennial Generation as technology and ideas were more easily accessible. Especially joining the workforce, many Millennials were misunderstood by older generations because of this widening gap, generating a fear for the future of the American workplace seen by older employers. Although the Millennial Generation has not lived long enough to study its entire impact on American history, it has lived long enough to be commended for its accomplishments and failures. It uses new technologies and ideas to question the ways of the world and although its future is uncertain, what is certain is that the experiences that it has lived through has molded it into a socially-conscious and determined generation that will only continue to strive for American excellence.

## CONCLUSION: MY STORY

*“Your generation doesn’t know what working hard looks like.”*

Often times when I turn on the news or read an article, I hear about how disappointing my generation is. I was born in 1993 and so I am a member of the Millennial Generation, meaning I am one of the “entitled” and “lazy” members we so often read about. As I entered college and became an athlete, I further noticed that even my coaches were disappointed in my generation. They said, “your generation doesn’t know what working hard looks like. You expect everything to be handed to you on a silver platter.” After hearing this accusation from my coaches several times, I began to question why my generation was viewed this way and what I could do to fix its negative perception. At first, I researched my generation on the internet and to my dismay, I found many articles *supporting* my coach: “Millennials: The Me Me Me Generation,” “The Numbers Behind Why Millennials Are ‘Generation Frustration’” and “The ‘Participation Trophy’ Generation” were the first articles that came up in my search. These articles piqued my interest as I wondered why I couldn’t find any negative articles written about my parents’ Baby Boomer Generation or my Grandparents’ Silent Generation and I wanted to find out why this was the case. As a result, I dedicated this thesis to discovering the roles that generations play not only in history, but in my own life.

As I dug deep into the archives of popular media, I found that the Silent and the Baby Boomer Generations were accused of the same things that my own generation is accused of: being lazy, entitled, and different than generations before it. I learned that many articles expressed that older generations were worried that newer generations don’t know how to handle “adult problems” of the world and were concerned with the future of the country as a result.



These articles made me angry because I felt that older generations didn't know what it was like to grow up in my generation because they didn't go through the same events as I did. I felt that my generations overall experience was different from the older generations that were criticizing me and yet it was subject to the same critique. I discovered many shifts in American culture in my research and upon my findings, I decided that I was going to dedicate my entire senior year to answering the following questions: why do young generations make older generations fearful about the future of the country, and why is there an apparent gap between older generations and younger generations? Selfishly, I wanted to answer these questions to prove to my coach that I was not like the others in my generation; I was hard working and did not expect the world to be handed to me on a silver platter. However, as I fully immersed myself in the progression of American culture from WWII to my Millennial Generation, I found that generational discourse was much bigger than me and my own generation.

This thesis has introduced me to an entirely new way of thinking about generations. I realized, from sixth grade history, that different generations saw different events in their lifetimes, but what I didn't realize was that these separate experiences have molded American culture one generation at a time. As a result of these differing cultures, older generations have little knowledge of newer generations' culture. With this in mind, the following will be a reflection of my own experiences as a member of the Millennial Generation, highlighting that the findings of this thesis are evident in my own family's story.

## **THE SILENT GENERATION**

My Grandparents were born in the 1930s, making them members of the Silent Generation. Upon asking them about their experiences growing up, my Grandpa Rich says, "I

was too young to remember the war [WWII] but I do remember the bomb drills in school and that my neighbor's kid died in it."<sup>161</sup> My Grandpa Rich specifically remembers, seventy-two years after WWII, when he was at his neighbor's house when they received news that their son had been killed in the war. He says, "I remember seeing the looks on my parents and neighbors faces when they heard the news and even when you watch these war shows on TV, people don't realize how bad it was." My Grandpa Rich's experiences with WWII are tangential to the experiences that many other Silent Generation children experienced during the war- he was too young to understand the gravity of it, but was involved just enough for it to effect his childhood.

Additionally, my Grandpa Armand recalls that, "I was too young to know how serious it was, but I do remember my Uncle being called out every time the sirens went off."<sup>162</sup> His uncle was an Air-raid Warren for his neighborhood during WWII, which meant that every time a bomb siren went off, he would go secure the neighborhood. Armand's wife, my Grandma 'Lil, had two brothers who fought in WWII and she recalls that, "we had to have our lights out every night at 10 o'clock. Three of my brothers fought in WWII and I remember that my parents made us write them letters to them every week. My parents were very troubled by the war."<sup>163</sup> Lastly, my Grandma Mary chimed in by saying, "I was so removed from the world after WWII that I don't even remember much of the Cold War. I stayed inside and took care of my family."<sup>164</sup> My grandparents' experiences support the ideas presented in Chapter 1- that many Silent Generation children, although not in the war, experienced WWII from behind the scenes. Seen especially in the experiences of my Grandma Mary, many in the Silent Generation focused internally on raising their families, perhaps a reason why so many of them were called "silent."

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<sup>161</sup> Richard John Troksa II, interview by author, Munster, Indiana, December 2015.

<sup>162</sup> Armando Lopez, interview by author, Merrillville, Indiana, December 2015.

<sup>163</sup> Lillian Lopez, interview by author, Merrillville, Indiana, December 2015.

<sup>164</sup> Mary Troksa, interview by author, Munster, Indiana, December 2015.

## THE BABY BOOMER GENERATION

Both of my parents were born in the early 1960s, meaning that they were born at the tail end of the Baby Boomer Generation. Because they were too young to experience the extreme social and political changes of the 1960s, my parents recall that their young childhood was filled with uncertainty due to the Cold War. My mother recalls that when she was young, she was exposed to bomb drills. She mentions that, “when I was a little girl in grade school, I distinctly remember ‘bomb drills’ at my school. The siren would go off and we were instructed to put our hands up over the back of our necks and crouch down along the wall of my classroom.” She continues that, “it seemed a little scary, but all of my friends in my class were required to do it too and that normalized it for me.”<sup>165</sup> My mother’s recollections coincide with the experiences that many young Baby Boomers had during the Cold War- it was normal to them to have bomb drills in grade school, but there was always a looming threat of war.

Additionally, my father recalls life as a young adult after the economic “stagflation” of the 1970s and 1980s. His father, my Grandpa Rich, was a meat cutter and my father recalls that, “my dad always told me ‘I don’t want any of you guys to be meat cutters’ and he told us instead to ‘use your brain versus use your skill set.’ I interpreted this to mean that, because of the changing economy, labor professions weren’t where you would make money. My dad’s words of caution emphasized that many older generations were worried about the job market and so he encouraged us to go to college.” My father continues by saying that, “I went to college and became an engineer because it was an assured job, and after my conversation with my father, I knew that I needed a secure job.”<sup>166</sup> My father’s recollections depict what many other Baby

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<sup>165</sup> Lisa Troksa, interview by author, Boulder, Colorado, March 2015.

<sup>166</sup> Richard John Troksa III, interview by author, Boulder, Colorado, March 2015.

Boomers experienced after the “stagflation” of the economy in the 1970s and 1980s. His parents encouraged him and his siblings to get an education and a job as a result of the failing economy.

Both of my parents’ experiences relate to the differing cultures seen between the Silent Generation and the Baby Boomer Generation. The Silent Generation’s young lives consisted of uncertainties due to war, while the Baby Boomer Generation’s young lives consisted of uncertainties due to the economy. Both of these generations have different events within their respective generations that made it difficult for each generation to relate to each other.

## **THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION**

Because my two brothers and I were born during the Millennial Generation, we all can recall the increased gap between our generation and older generations. I distinctly remember that, after Halloween, my brothers and I had to dump all of our Halloween candy on the floor so that my parents could inspect it. I remember meticulously examining the wrappers to make sure that no “bad person” could have put poison in it. It is only fitting then, that this memory coincides with the 1981 case of cyanide-tainted candy that began the Millennial Generation. My older brother additionally remembers that the Millennials have more discussions about the rise in technology and how it is viewed to older generations. He says, “one main shift that I see in our generation compared to older ones is that we rely on technology for everything. It’s getting to the point that that’s all the media talks about.”<sup>167</sup> My younger brother adds, “I bet that because older generations didn’t have social media when they were younger, that’s why they don’t understand it.”<sup>168</sup> Both of my brother’s recollections involve the shift in the reliance on technology in the Millennial Generation, while my own memories highlight the increased

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<sup>167</sup> Kyle Troksa, interview by author, Boulder, Colorado, March 2015.

<sup>168</sup> Blake Troksa, interview by author, Boulder, Colorado, March 2015.

concerns that parents had over their children. The gap between the Baby Boomer Generation and the Millennial Generation results from the differing events and experiences within them as the Baby Boomer Generation had uncertainties about the economy while the Millennial Generation is concerned about technology.

## **GENERATIONAL PROGRESSION**

The above stories of my family highlight the different experiences that we have all faced in our childhood and adulthood. Each of these experiences formed different types of cultures within each respective generation: my Grandparents' culture was more reserved because of WWII, my parents' culture was more concerned about protection because of the Cold War, and my siblings and my culture is more concerned about technology. These different cultures are what influence the generation gaps seen between each generation; my "silent" grandparents and outgoing parents differ from my technology-driven generation, supporting the notion that Generational Progression is ever-present in post-war generations.

Generational Progression, then, serves as a reminder that each generation sees progression that the ones before it have never seen. My own family highlights this progression and I believe that we are better because of it because we each have experiences that shape our own identities. In writing this thesis, I have learned that although my grandparents and parents don't understand many things in my own generation, and I don't understand many things in theirs, we are all products of our own culture. I don't know what it's like to learn that a neighbor's son has died in World War II, nor do I know what it was like to have bomb drills during the Cold War. Our lack of shared experiences, however, doesn't mean that one

generation is better than the other. It means that we can learn from each other's own experiences and understand why our generations are so different.

## **CONCLUSION**

This thesis has attempted to bring a new perspective to generational discourse. It has examined three very different generations in order to understand why each generation's experiences makes it harder for other generations to relate to them. Beginning with the Silent Generation, its perceived silence came as a result of its experiences with World War II. It was the first post-war generation to emerge and many of its post-war experiences (a boom in the economy and increased educational opportunities) made it hard for its WWII Generation parents to sympathize with it. As a result, the beginnings of a generation gap begin to form during the Silent Generation. Next, this thesis examined the Baby Boomer Generation, the offspring of the Silent Generation. There is a further widening of the generation gap during this generation because of the youth culture that develops within it. Because many young Boomers were able to unite with each other at a young age, there was great social and cultural change in America that separated the Silent Generation from the Baby Boomer Generation.

Finally, this thesis examined the Millennial Generation, the offspring of the Baby Boomer Generation. There is an even further widening of the generation gap found in the Millennial Generation because of the increased use of technology, as they were not exposed to it in the same ways as the Baby Boomer and Silent Generations. Because many Millennials were able to bond in high school over their own youth culture, the early 1990s saw an increase in technology dependency, mainly in the form of social media. As a result, many Baby Boomer parents were unable to relate to the Millennials' use of technology. The Millennial Generation is

the third generation to experience post-war culture, and many of the changes seen in its beginning years are a result of the different social, political, and cultural changes seen in the Silent and Baby Boomer Generations.

Each generation discussed in this thesis endured events that helped shape its own culture. As a result, the differing cultures that emerge in each generation have made it so that there is not one main identity throughout each generation as Strauss and Howe suggest. Rather, there are many identities within each generation that make it harder for generations to be able to relate to one another, resulting in a generational gap. It may be perceived that this generation gap is bad for American society, but this is not the case. Recall that Plato, in 428 B.C.E., saw a gap between his generation and the younger generation, reminding us that this gap is neither a new concept nor one that will hinder American progression.

Now that it has been determined that generations lack a coherent identity with each other, it is necessary for us to try to understand why newer generations act in ways that we don't understand or agree with. If we attempt to recognize the differing cultures that manifest within each generation, we are giving that generation a chance to mature in its own ways, not in the ways we perceive or want it to. We must remember that names have power and indeed the names given to generations have power beyond their superficial names suggest. Delving deeper into generations gives us the chance to really understand the progressions that are unique to each generation. The study of generations has been a timeless notion, but our understanding of them is only really beginning.

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