

Chris Erskine

The greatest generation?

Here's three more cheers for millennials

They aspire, adapt and conquer. All those trophies given to millennials will pay off in the Greatest Generation Yet.

Here I go thinking outside of the Xbox again. I believe that pizza is better than caviar, that Chicago is better than New York, that Venus is superior to Mars.

And I believe, sincerely and with all cheekiness aside, that the young people we sometimes dismiss as a bunch of coffee-swilling slackers will wind up being the Greatest Generation Yet, topping the one Tom Brokaw celebrated in his bestselling 1998 book¹.

That's right: The current crop of young people, the millennials (hatched roughly 1982 to 2004), show all the signs of becoming the greatest generation in human history, surpassing the legendary minds of the Renaissance, or the American Revolution or Brokaw's esteemed and very worthy WWII America.

I'm not merely being provocative or Pollyannaish² – because every generation of parents believes in the promise of its own progeny³, even as we mock their awful music. Nor have I been puffing on the wrong end of the peace pipe.

I'm simply stating what I've found, in teaching them, coaching them and working alongside the sassy little punks: They stand to become the greatest generation we've ever seen.

They are inherently more adaptive, they are idealistic, they are tolerant of differences.

They are aspirational in all the right ways. At our prodding⁴, they worked harder in high school than we ever did in college.

As a result, the older ones (26 to 33) are the best-educated segment of young adults in American history, according to a Pew Research Center study of millennials that was released in March. (One-third of that group has a four-year college degree or better.) The think tank's sweeping⁵ study of millennials' attitudes toward religion, race and politics also surveyed the group's view of the future.

"Millennials are the nation's most stubborn economic optimists," the Pew study found. More than 8 in 10 say they have enough money to lead the lives they want, or expect to in the future. No other segment is nearly as confident.

¹ *The Greatest Generation* (1998), titel på journalisten Tom Brokaws bog om generationen af amerikanere født mellem 1. og 2. verdenskrig

² overoptimistisk

³ afkom

⁴ *At our prodding*: På vores tilskyndelse

⁵ omfattende

25 About 49% of millennials think the nation's best years are ahead, the survey found. That's a higher percentage than among baby boomers (44%) and generation X (42%), the generation between boomers and millennials.

"The greatest generation yet?" asked Terry Kay, father of two millennials. "I have run it by a few friends. Their initial reaction is, "Why do you think that?" Yet, when we get to talking about it, it takes on new life and we really do start to believe."

30 Of course, there is that whole neediness thing that dogs⁶ young adults – that we've raised millions of demanding little Mozarts.

Just recently, I overheard a colleague on the phone checking a prospective intern's reference: "Is she one of these millennials who need a lot of encouragement and validation, because some of these kids..."

35 A Jet Propulsion Laboratory executive⁷ laughs at how needy his young hires can be – the right lighting, a better desk – then admits that they will turn around and accomplish the most complex task in a heartbeat.

"They do expect consistent rewards," notes a friend, Dr. Barbara Barber, who volunteers on the faculty at USC's⁸ Keck School of Medicine and is surrounded by high achievers, including her daughter, who's in her first year of medical school. "They don't have a lot of self-affirmation because they always relied on teachers, coaches and parents for that."

40 But author Paul Nourigat, who has written extensively on young adults and their financial futures, believes such neediness will pass.

"These issues are about growing up," says Nourigat. "Every generation goes through a period of formative fumbling⁹, and elders look at a new generation with wonder and perplexity, forgetting how they must have appeared to their parents' generation."

45 Opportunities for young Americans will soon abound, insists Nourigat, citing a Georgetown University study that projects 55 million job vacancies over the next six years, 31 million of which will come from boomer retirements.

He points to three key qualities that elevate them in such a market: technological savvy, ability to adjust and a hunger to succeed.

50 "Look, we need our younger generation to be different," he says. "To have them going forward with the old tools and approaches would not enable them to lead our country into a very different future."

Parents, take a little bow for all this. Yeah, you.

⁶ forfølger

⁷ leder

⁸ University of Southern California

⁹ a period of formative fumbling: (her) nogle udviklende fjumreår

55 Know how kids today receive sports awards just for showing up? What critics call “trophy inflation”? Or how, when they were potty trained, kids received standing ovations, as if they’d suddenly produced the Magna Carta¹⁰?

Well, none of that self-esteem movement was the children’s idea; their parents were behind it all.

And don’t apologize, because it produced a generation of eager and motivated children, not the worst qualities in an achievement-based world. Barber even sees in her USC med students¹¹ a higher sense of volunteerism and global thinking.

60 So, as this generation reaps the rewards of their own hard work, they will fully blossom only with our continued mentoring and cheering. Because they have almost everything except our wisdom and unconditional faith.

“Youth, like pristine¹² glass, absorbs the prints of its handlers¹³,” writes author Mitch Albom.

65 Hear their ideas, back their start-ups, cradle their dreams. Share with them your passion for a better future. Help them pursue yet another Renaissance.

With all the problems we’re passing along to them, we can at least gift them that last gleaming trophy.

From there, you little punks, it’s all up to you.

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¹⁰ *Magna Carta*: vigtigt engelsk frihedsbrev fra 1215

¹¹ *med students*: medicinstuderende

¹² uberørt

¹³ *the prints of its handlers*: aftryk fra de, som har med den at gøre