

A 'lost' generation?

The Founders and subsequent generations mostly believed in virtues the young now reject

Washington Times, By Cal Thomas, August 29, 2019



There are people in every generation who believe the generation following theirs is either going to the dogs or will ruin the country. A new Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll lends credence to that way of thinking, especially where Generation Z/millennials (those born in the mid-1990s to mid-2000s) and Generation X (those born in the early-to-mid 1960s to the early 1980s) are concerned.

The poll of 1,000 adults earlier this month found that “younger generations rate patriotism, religion and having children as

less important to them than did young people two decades ago.”

The poll contrasts with a similar survey conducted by the Journal 21 years ago. When asked then which values were most important, respondents sounded like their parents and grandparents, saying “hard work, patriotism, commitment to religion and the goal of having children.”

Not only will these current findings likely impact next year’s election (most of those running for president with more than single-digit polling numbers are much older men and women and thus represent a generation gap), they could also have serious implications for the future of the country.

The Founders and subsequent generations — perhaps excepting the Gilded Age and the horrors of slavery — mostly believed in the virtues younger people either now reject or approach with indifference.

How can this be? What has happened between the World War II generation, which gave so much so their children and grandchildren might enjoy the blessings of liberty, and the current generation, which seems cool to what once seemed to matter most?

Generalizations are always problematic, but I have lived long enough and witnessed the general decline to make some.

Prosperity is one explanation. People who make more money than previous generations and possess a lot of stuff seem less inclined to participate in community (how many of us know our neighbors, who are here today and move tomorrow?). Stuff and the personal satisfaction of achievement lead to a decline in one's need for God — too much money, too little purpose.

Politicians become a god-substitute and politics their religion. Creeping secularism has affected theological truth to the point where people can believe whatever they want — or nothing at all — and escape correction. Heresy, even apostasy, has infiltrated many churches.

Then there is culture. Younger people are exposed to what we collectively call “media” more than any previous generation. Most of what constitutes culture proceeds from a singular worldview that denigrates, or does not promote, patriotism, belief in God and values previous generations not only took for granted, but instilled in their children. Unrestricted abortion has cheapened how many young people view the value of human life. For growing numbers of the young, marriage has become passé as children witness the pain of their parents' divorce and decide that living together without a formal, legal or spiritual commitment is better than risking the cost and pain of ending a marriage. For some, children are viewed as a financial burden and an intrusion on adult lifestyles.

Sociologists and historians will tell us these things are cyclical, like weather. That has been true in the past when spiritual revivals often followed a fallow period of faithlessness and a focus on self. I'm not sure that cycle will repeat with younger people, given what they are taught at public schools and in liberal universities. The values that shaped and sustained America through economic downturns and wars had to be taught and instilled in the next generation. Today's younger people, as reflected in the poll, seem intent on making their own rules (if they can be called rules) and creating their own gods.

They will eventually learn the impossibility of it all as their substitutions will fail them. The question is can America survive when our moral, spiritual and patriotic foundations are destroyed? If you don't love your country, what's the point of having one?

Cal Thomas is a nationally syndicated columnist. His latest book is “What Works: Common Sense Solutions for a Stronger America” (Zondervan, 2014).

https://washingtontimes-dc.newsmemory.com/?token=c12c2b922715a183548fec2a1275935d_5d67ee4f_6dbe28b&selDate=20190829