

Challenging the Apathetic Generation

by
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Putting a label on an entire group of people who just happen to have been born within a particular time frame is a risky generalization at best. But the designation of various age groups has been going on for hundreds of years. The Puritan Generation covers the period of people born between 1588 and 1617. Who ever nailed down those years? Sounds awfully specific to me. I'd rather think of the time period of a generation as being a little more open-ended.

But, there are many generalities that aptly fit the title that contemporaries share. I happen to be of the Baby Boom Generation. That designation, of course, refers to the massive influx of babies our country created from 1946 through the early 60s. Oh boy, there were a whole bunch of us puppies. Look out Social Security and Medicare.

The generation that is rightfully credited with the Greatest Generation moniker consisted of the younger adults who helped to win World War II. That heading is attributed to news journalist Tom Brokaw who wrote a bestseller by the same name. 'Greatest' sounds a bit pompous but the alternative of losing the war might have possibly branded them 'Worst.'

This group was closely followed by the Beat Generation. Although, that title was a real stretch since its roots were based in a small group of writers and intellectuals. Interest in jazz music was also an earmark of that age, but I think that most of the Beat Generation was really very busy making Baby Boomers at a rapid pace. Maybe that's why they were beat.

Coming forward from the Boomers we have Generation X followed by, guess what, Generation Y. That sequence seems very logical, but I've done some research and I can't find any exact reason for the meaning of the letters. They don't have that descriptive ring to them like most of the other names on the list.

Then follows a mish mash of generational names such as Generation C, Echo Boom, Internet, and New Silent. A more general title for these groups is the Millennial Generation. This is the first generation to use or witness, from an early age, technologies such as the Internet and cellular phones. Millennials are commonly referred to by their own peers as the Apathetic Generation. This term is used by both peers who are activists against such apathy as well as the apathetic non-activists themselves.

Within this group there is the notion that the daily news seems to make it clear that the world has so much wrong with it that each individual couldn't possibly take on every problem. In general, the Apathetic Generation believes that if they neglect the presence of world injustice, it will actually have no direct effect on them. This thinking sometimes leads to the shortsighted standpoint that one does not *have* to care about the injustices one is not directly affected by.

Because of this standpoint, older generations often criticize the Apathetics by describing them as "inconsiderate" or "unaffected." I tend to think of this group as embracing an attitude of blissful ignorance. For them, national and world issues are

viewed as too upsetting to think about. Sounds a little like Scarlet O'Hara in 'Gone with the Wind' saying "I'll think about that tomorrow." Doesn't seem like a very proactive approach to me.

In addition, the Apathetics often do not recognize authority in the same way as Baby Boomers or Generation Xers do. Accused of being rebellious, the Apathetics merely react based on what or how they feel when they are approached or spoken to by authoritative figures. Previous generations have tended to be more subservient to authority.

As this summer marks the 40th anniversary of the Summer of Love, which was held in San Francisco, there begs a comparison of that era with the youth and young adults of today. In 1967, the critical issues of the Vietnam War, racism, and the social injustices of minorities and the poor boiled over to the point that free thinkers turned to social action. This action gained momentum and continued relentlessly through the early 1970s. The voice of Baby Boomers was heard and policies changed as a result.

There are many similarities with the issues of today. The Iraq conflict substitutes for Vietnam, while other major issues compare somewhat equally. The difference is that the Apathetic Generation is full of--you guessed it--apathy. There is lack of interest in, or concern with, important matters. Indifference rules the day with young people in our country. There are, of course, evident exceptions within this group. From our volunteer military to firefighters to police and more, there are active members of the Apathetics who heed the call to get involved.

However, for the vast majority of this younger generation I throw down the gauntlet. Here is an open challenge to take a stand on crucial issues. Let your voices be heard. As the Baby Boomers before you, mistakes will be made. Errors in judgment will occur. But collectively, positive change can happen. Injustices can be corrected and negative situations can improve. We Baby Boomers did it and now we call out for your actions to speak for your generation. We are waiting to hear you. Now is the time.