



Millennials: The Next Generation

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They grew up plugged into the Internet, always cooked their popcorn in a microwave oven and never watched television without a remote control. They probably never played Pac-Man, and they think Kansas, Chicago, America and Alabama are places, not musical groups.

Meet the millennials, the generation that has taken over college campuses in droves as they head for class in the coming weeks.

Unlike some of their predecessors, they have no interest in sit-ins, anti-war marches or rebellions against authority. The post-1982 kids—sometimes known as “echo boomers,” “Generation Y” or “Generation Next”—respect their parents, want clear rules set for themselves and are determined to be successful.

At least that’s what authors Neil Howe and William Strauss learned in researching their books, “Millennials Go to College” and “Millennials Rising.”

“They are optimistic, team-oriented and they closely resemble the ‘Greatest Generation’ that fought World War II,” said Howe, a Yale-educated historian who is considered one of the nation’s leading experts on generations and historical cycles. “They are planners and goal-setters.”

That’s apparently true of many millennials entering metro Atlanta colleges. At an orientation program at Georgia State University last week, John Hardin, 18, announced that he was getting a degree in criminal justice. “I’ve had my career planned out for as long as I can remember,” he said.

Carmen Boykin, 18, an entering freshman at Spelman College, already knows what she wants to be doing five years from now.

“I plan to be in law school at Emory,” she said. “I’ve known what kind of career I wanted since middle school.”

Shirley Anne Cruz, 18, and LaToya McClendon, 18, are just as focused on their education at Georgia State.

“You have to be a planner now,” said McClendon, who wants to be a teacher and is majoring in education. “You really don’t get jobs unless you know what you’re doing and where you’re going.”

Cruz, who moved to Atlanta from Puerto Rico four years ago, has wanted to be a doctor since she was a little girl.

“I’ve always set goals,” she said. “Coming from a different background, you have to prove yourself.”

These students are part of the largest population group since the baby boom of the 1950s and ‘60s. More than 81 million millennials were born in the United States from 1982 through 2002, compared with 87.2 million baby boomers born before 1961. And more are coming. The Census Bureau predicts that the biggest segment of the new generation will reach its peak between 2005 and 2011.

Experts such as Howe expect enormous changes in society—and in higher education. Colleges already are struggling to meet surging enrollments while operating with smaller budgets. And educators are having to adapt to college students who are the most protected generation in history.

Parents of millennials have been obsessive about ensuring the safety of their children, Howe said. When the first wave was born in the early 1980s, "Baby on Board" signs began popping up on minivans. Children were buckled into child-safety seats, fitted with bicycle helmets, car-pooled to numerous after-school activities and hovered over by what Howe describes as "helicopter parents."

The result is a generation that feels secure, close to their parents and comfortable with authority, Howe said. That, say some educators, is good and bad.

"They're much more focused than students were a decade ago," said Catherine WoodBrooks, vice president for student life at Assumption College in Worcester, Mass. "Things are planned and their time is very structured."

The problem, said WoodBrooks, who has been studying the impact of millennials on education, is that they rely so much on their parents' guidance that they are maturing less rapidly.

"I've had to speak to some parents about their becoming so involved in their students' lives at college," she said. "But the students welcome it. They share the same values, the same political beliefs. They even dress like their parents."

This conformity is troubling to educators such as WoodBrooks, who believe college is a place for students to challenge authority and ask questions.

Other educators welcome students who respond well to structure and authority. "What we're seeing is a different kind of college student," said Brian Wooten, coordinator of student activities at Kennesaw State University. "They value teamwork and they're incredibly optimistic. And they've had more structured activities. They're used to being taken to soccer practice and things like that."

Millennials not only don't mind being overprotected and overscheduled, but many welcome it. Jessica Rhodes, 19, of Kennesaw State spent her high school years in numerous activities, including student government, chorus and track and field.

"I was pretty busy, and my mother always kept track of me," she said. "I liked it because we had a very close relationship."

McClendon, a Georgia State freshman, had freedom in high school, but her mother always knew where she was and who she was with. Now, even though her mother has encouraged her to move into the dormitory, she wants to stay at home.

Cruz, who grew up in a very structured home environment, credits her parents with her success in school. "Did I rebel? Every now and then I did something different, but I've never disrespected my parents," she said. "They've been great role models."

The millenials' cocoon-like upbringing is part of the reason Howe expects them to be the next "greatest generation."

"They feel like they are special," Howe said. "They have been treated that way by their parents, by the government and the school system. They are team players who tend to be conservative and much more cautious than previous generations."

In a survey Howe conducted, 94 percent of the group said they shared their parents' values.

"I believe in a lot of things my parents do," said Josh Evans, 18, a summer intern at CNN who is attending the University of North Carolina this fall. They're both politically liberal, for example. "But I've been able to expand my values, too. Because my parents are from the South and moved to New York, I have this sense of New York smarts and Southern hospitality."

They may share their parents' values, Howe said, but they don't necessarily want to emulate their behavior. He cites studies showing that rates of tobacco and alcohol use, violent crime, out-of-wedlock pregnancies and suicides are way down among today's teenagers.

This trend is part of a cycle, Howe said. Similarly to millenials, the "Greatest Generation" (born 1901-1924) followed the notorious "Lost Generation" (1883-1900), in which drug and alcohol abuse was rampant. The "Silent Generation" (1925-1942) grew up as the children of war and depression.

Baby boomers (1943-1960) rebelled against the conformity of the Silent Generation. The "Gen-Xers" (1961-1981) were criticized as slackers and grew up in a culture of rising divorce, parental neglect and a "reality bites" economy.

Changes occur when a generation realizes that it's no longer *the* generation, Howe said. "The boomers realized that when MTV and hip-hop hit the scene. Xers are beginning to realize that now. The future belongs to the millennials."

Who They Are

Baby Boomers (1943–60): Raised by parents who read Dr. Spock, they rebelled against authority in the 1960s.

Generation Xers (1961–81): Survived childhoods of divorce, "latchkey" homes, open classrooms and "devil child" movies. In jobs, they embraced risk and free agency over loyalty to corporations.

Millennials (Born 1982–?): Arrivals announced by "Baby on Board" signs on minivans. They were raised by protective parents obsessed with safety.

	Baby Boomers	Gen Xers	Millennials
Defining Moments	Assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.; the Vietnam War; landing on the moon	Challenger explosion; AIDS crisis; fall of Berlin wall; Gulf War	School massacres and Sept. 11
Fads	Mood rings, pet rocks, streakers, CB radios, shag carpeting, leisure suits.	Backward hats, baggy clothes, body piercing, grunge look, MTV, tattoos.	
Movies	"Star Wars," "All the President's Men," "Saturday Night Fever" (above), "Chinatown," "The Godfather" and "Apocalypse Now"	"The Breakfast Club," "Pulp Fiction," "Reality Bites" and "Wayne's World"	"American Pie," "The Blair Witch Project," "The Matrix," "There's Something About Mary" and "Titanic"
Icons	Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Harrison Ford, Clint Eastwood, Steven Spielberg and Oprah Winfrey	Jim Carrey, Kurt Cobain, Tom Cruise, Madonna, Michael Jordan and Bart Simpson	Brad Pitt, Christina Aguilera, Matt Damon, Leonardo DiCaprio, Eminem, Tiger Woods

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Connections

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