



# GENERATIONS:

GENERATIONS AS THEY AGE

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# The Who, What and Why of the GenerAges Project

**By 2040 the number of people age 65 and over living in the United States is expected to double from approximately 40.2 million today to more than 81 million. The number of individuals 85 and over will increase nearly three-fold by that time, from 5.7 million to 14.1 million.**

The GenerAges project is a compilation of the historical events and life circumstances that shape the lives of individuals turning 100, 85, and 65 years old in 2011.

Finally, the number of Centenarians, those aged 100 or more, will have tripled from 79,000 today to approximately 298,000 in 2040.<sup>1</sup> Included in this expected growth is the aging of the Baby Boom generation (those born 1946-1964) whose oldest members, known as leading edge Baby Boomers, turn 65 in 2011. The coming demographic shift requires knowledge about the wide range of experiences and events that have shaped the lives of older adults. With the GenerAges project, we hope to help in that effort.

At the Scripps Gerontology Center, we are focused on work that makes a difference in the lives of aging individuals, their families and their communities. For the GenerAges project, we set out to compile a list of the historical events and life circumstances that came together to shape the lives of individuals turning 100, 85, and 65 years old in 2011. The resulting report provides a snapshot of each of these groups, capturing the meaningful social changes and major

events that have affected their lives as they grew up and as they age. We hope that this report will be useful to those working with, caring for, and studying about older adults. In the following pages you will see that the experiences of these generations are unique. Yet, there remains a great deal of continuity across these three groups. Regardless of the decade of birth, the overarching message is constant: we shape and are shaped by events and circumstances that occur in the past and we carry those experiences and lessons with us as we enter older adulthood.

Our work for the GenerAges project is based on the same premise as the *Beloit College Mindset List*: to understand how each birth cohort or generation is different from those it precedes. Each August since 1998, Beloit College has released a list of “cultural touchstones that shape the lives of students entering college” in a given year as a way to enlighten and encourage faculty to discontinue the use of dated references





that are not likely to be meaningful to new students.<sup>2</sup> Although we are not focused on the use of dated references by faculty members, we are committed to understanding the lives of individuals based on *their* experiences rather than our own points of reference.

We trust that the information contained in the following generational snapshots will assist anyone interested in the lives of older adults to better understand the world as it was experienced by older generations. We hope that these insights will promote respectful and caring relationships that best meet the needs and expectations of older individuals, and that students of gerontology will look to the GenerAges project in order to develop a better understanding of the ways in which generations carry shared experiences into later life.

## A Brief Explanation of Terms

In this publication, we refer to three *generations* of individuals: those born in or around 1911, those born in or around 1926 and those born in or around 1946. It should be noted that by focusing on only those individuals turning 100, 85, and 65 years old in 2011 we are, by design, including only the leading edge of the Baby Boomers. Given the 18-year time-span between the youngest and oldest Boomer, it will be important to explore the multiple segments of the boomer generation in future iterations of the GenerAges project. The impact of shared experiences is a crucial component of the concept of generation; on the other hand, the term “birth cohort” usually refers to a group of people who were born at the same time. Clearly these two terms are interrelated, though not everyone born in a given time frame experiences social and historical change in the same way or with the same result. In this report, we use the term “generation” to refer to a group of individuals who were born at and have moved through particular historical milestones at approximately the same time. We are working from the idea that sharing “the same formative experiences contribute to a unique world view or frame of references that can be a powerful force in people’s lives.”<sup>3</sup>

We start with a discussion of the idea of “generation,” and the importance of an individual’s age when a particular event occurs. For example, the Great Depression had a different impact on those who were 5 years old than for those who were 25 years old. Next, we move to a broad overview of the three generations with a table of trends including the basic demographic composition of each generation. Finally, attention is given to each generation separately. To get a better understanding of the experiences of each generation, we have broken each generational page into three distinct categories: the world into which they were born, the world as it looked when they were growing up or “coming of age,” and finally, what the world looks like for them today because of their generational experiences.

Each fact will not be an accurate or meaningful representation of *all* the individual experiences of our three focus generations; people in the upper class will have had vastly different experiences than those in the lower class, Blacks will have had different experiences than Whites, women different experiences than men; older Baby Boomers different from younger ones. However, we hope that the information contained within this publication will open the door for discussions with those in each of these three generations about *their* experiences, and will serve as a reminder for all of us that aging is both an individual and a shared experience.



# The Importance of Generations

**While every generation has its own distinct associations – flappers and bobbed hair, hippies and tie-dye, millennials and cell phones – all generations remain linked by an ironic and immutable law: each will be on the cutting edge of fashion, technology and modern conveniences, and each will recede into history with relative rapidity, appearing amusingly antiquated in the process.**



For an example of this phenomenon, you need only to take a look at the overwrought dialogue and staccato motion of Hollywood’s earlier films – or the haircuts and homages of yesterday’s yearbooks.

Providing a chronicle of changed fashion, culture and society over the past century is a relatively easy and interesting enterprise; however, explaining the role and response of each generation regarding that change – or even precisely defining when one generation is over and another begins – is another matter altogether.

Sociologist Karl Mannheim offers a good place to start. He noted some 80 years ago in his seminal work, *“The Sociological Problem of Generations,”* that generations should be viewed as an important way that societies are organized, much the same as the distinctions based on social class.

*“The fact of belonging to the same class, and that of belonging to the same generation or age group, have this in common, that both endow the individuals sharing in them with a common location in the social and historical process and thereby limit them to a specific range of potential experiences, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action. ... Inherent in any (generational) location is a tendency pointing towards certain definite modes of behavior, feeling and thought.”<sup>4</sup>*

Mannheim observed that each generation is distinctly marked by the events and circumstances it grows up in, especially during the impressionable years of late adolescence, when the idealism of youth meets the reality of life as defined by their predecessors. He held that “early impressions tend to coalesce into a natural view of the world” from which all later experiences tend

to receive their meaning. In this view, our perspectives and philosophies are very much byproducts of the times and contexts in which they are formed and generations are distinctly shaped – and, in turn, shape society – via the bonds and energy of shared perspective and experience. Often, Mannheim writes, those perspectives and experiences will be formed in reaction to and opposition with the preceding generation. And, as University of Cambridge sociologists June Edmunds and Bryan Turner opine “the problem of cultural transmission (from one generation to the next) is that the stratified experience of the older generation does not correspond to the experience of the younger generation.”<sup>5</sup> That is, they are seeing and responding to their parents’ world with a fresh collective set of eyes. The result, the authors affirm, is a tendency for succeeding generations to alternate between passive and active responses to the society and culture that they inherit.

In that light, we see our Centenarians (born in 1911) experiencing the Roaring 20s, the Jazz Age, and bootleg whiskey, hard on the heels of World War I, the war to end all wars, with international notions of chivalry left for dead in the trenches of Verdun, the Somme and Gallipoli. The next generation of Americans, our 85 year olds (born in 1926), came of age quietly after the 1933 repeal of prohibition in the somber years of the Great Depression, with its 25 percent unemployment rate, dollar-or-two a-day civilian conservation corps and works progress administration jobs, soup lines and poorhouses. Later, although most of the country had hoped for neutrality, a good part of that same hardscrabble generation responded to the call of duty and put its heart and soul into the cause of allied victory in World War II.

Finally, then there is the beat generation, spiced with James Dean and Jack Kerouac, serving up a slice of moody disaffection as a prelude to the idealism and romanticism that was then incubating in our 65 year olds, the leading-edge Baby Boomers (born in 1946). These Boomers were the first to grow up with television and have their own cars, the first to be raised under the cloud of nuclear war, and the first to watch a man walk on the moon. They were the first to gravitate in large numbers, men and women, toward higher education, and the first to raise their voices en

masse in opposition to a war.

Mannheim and other sociologists concede the difficulty in setting time parameters and defining a generation; in fact, the first wave of the baby boom may be parents of those born near the generation’s end. Hence, we view generations as not just birth cohorts, but rather people growing up in proximity to a major, often traumatic, event (such as war, civil disruption or economic calamity). In the words of Edmunds and Turner, “A generation can be defined as a cohort that for some special reason ... develops a collective consciousness that permits that generation to intervene significantly in social change.”<sup>6</sup> The larger, more traumatic the event, the deeper the generational cohesion and imprint.

Accordingly, those who came of age during the Depression and WWII, as well as the 1960s, have retained very strong identities as generations throughout the years, allowing social commentators like Tom Brokaw to honor the former as “The Greatest Generation”<sup>7</sup> while a host of others routinely refer to the latter as the “Counterculture,” “the Flower Children,” or the “Woodstock Nation.”

To define the millions of Americans constituting any one generation in a handful of syllables is, obviously, to oversimplify. Still, as many generational sociologists agree, categorizations and generalization are useful when trying to understand those who have gone before or come after us. Jane Pilcher, in “*Mannheim’s Sociology of Generations: an Undervalued Legacy*,” opens her essay with the following: “The notion of generation is widely used to make sense of differences between age groupings in society and to locate individual selves and other persons within historical times.”<sup>8</sup>

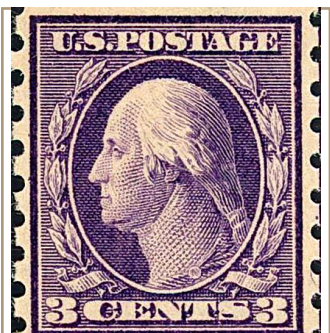
More recently, American scholar Richard Settersten supported Pilcher and the opinions of Mannheim, Edmunds and Turner regarding the general identities of generations, writing, “Their histories are not purely individual, for the lives of individuals, families, and cohorts are joined with events in the nation and the world, such as at times of war, that leave their mark on the individual and collective biographies.”<sup>9</sup>

Overgeneralizations of any kind are dangerous. Members of a generation can be more different from each other than alike; any individual or subgroup within a generation might be more similar in terms of values and preferences to those in an adjacent birth cohort than they are to age peers with whom they shared a set of particular historical events. Even so, the concept of a “collective biography” is compelling and instructive, as long as it is used with all due caution about inter-individual and inter-group differences. Interviews conducted for this project with those 80 years and older revealed a steady echo of the stoicism and other admirable attributes Brokaw found when exploring the generation preceding his own: hard work; honesty; humility; responsibility; frugality; respect for elders; hesitation to complain; and gratitude. No doubt, much of that comes from having grown up in a simpler time when a handshake was as good as a signature, when religion and church played a more central role in society and an individual’s life, when divorce was rare and the two-parent home was much more the norm; from having gone without and/or watching their parents and others do the same, and from knowing, first-hand and early-on the intrinsic value and rewards of a job, work, sacrifice, and providing for one’s family.

The Baby Boomers, having spent their grade-school days ducking under their desks in preparation for an enemy’s atomic bomb, re-

sponded enthusiastically to President John Kennedy’s call to “ask what you can do for your country,” joining the Peace Corps, marching in their quest for civil rights and equality regardless of race, creed and, later, gender. During Freedom Summer of 1964, in Oxford, Ohio bus loads of college students and volunteers from across the country were trained to help register African-American voters in Mississippi, most prominently the late Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner and James Chaney, murdered June 21 by Ku Klux Klan members just days after leaving Oxford.

The counterculture grew their hair long in contrast to the military crops left over from WWII and Korea, held rallies across the nation, often joined by clergy members of all denominations as well as soldiers returning home from combat, to stop a controversial war fought in jungles and rice paddies halfway across the globe. They gathered in utopian pursuit of peace, harmony, illegal smiles and sexual freedom during San Francisco’s *Summer of Love* in 1966 and at Woodstock in August 1969 – right after the birth control pill and some 15 years before AIDS – while the leaders and symbols of their social dreams, John Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy were gunned down within five years of each other. Some followed Dr. Timothy Leary’s advice to “turn on, tune in and drop out” as a way of coping while they lived through President’s Johnson’s disassembling on the Tonkin Gulf, Daniel



Baby Boomers, responded enthusiastically to President John Kennedy’s call to “ask what you can do for your country.”

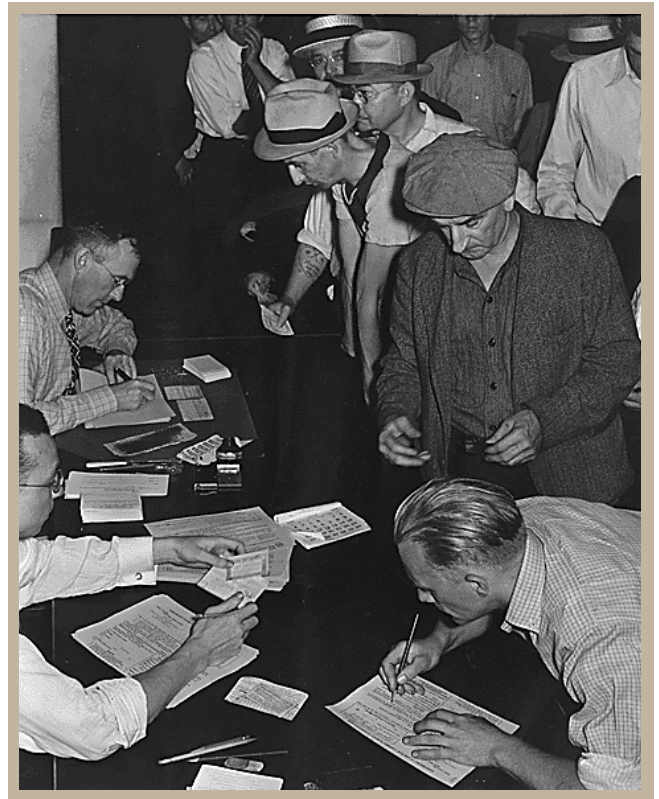


Ellsberg's publicizing of the Pentagon Papers, a term and a-half of Richard Nixon's presidency, the Kent State shootings, and secret bombing of Cambodia before the generation seemed to dissolve with the draft and Watergate in the early 1970s.

With all caution about overgeneralization and oversimplification in mind, the Baby Boom generation is rightly or wrongly forever known for its social and political activism, skepticism of politicians and other authority figures, and propensity to speak up, complain, and stir the pot when a situation does not add up to their liking. This generation, with its premium on individual rights and personal freedom, is expected to revolutionize long-term care and may be just as quick to question policies in nursing homes as it was those of its government.

The millennials, our current generation of young adults, are busy right now writing their own story, one that appears to contain the fastest rate of technological and communication progress yet. They are also the first generation to have benefit of widely available information and education about aging, the life course, and intergenerational relationships. Millennials have an opportunity to set new standards for understanding the processes of growing older, and for promoting meaningful interconnections across generations, not just within families but within society as a whole. U.S. Gallup Polls, initiated in 1935, show that when asking Americans what issues they consider most important to themselves and their country, they speak in surprising harmony throughout the decades. After polling Americans for forty years, George Gallup stated: "An examination of the public's major concerns in the last 40 years shows the issues of peace and prosperity have almost totally eclipsed every other problem in the minds of Americans."<sup>10</sup> That statement holds all the more true a few generations of Gallup Polls later.

It is reassuring to know that after a century of unimaginable change, what we Americans really want – a kinder less-troubled world for ourselves and future generations – has, essentially, stayed the same. That is something for all generations to remember when tempted to look askance at some fancy new gadget, corny old song or strange philosophy. Soon enough, a whole new generation will be looking upon today's latest wonders and technology in scrap heaps, antique shops and museums, wondering how in the world we ever made do. And they'll be smiling at the hairdos in the yearbooks.





## Important Trends and Changes in the 1900s and Early 2000s

The table below illustrates some of the important ways the United States changed during the 20th century—a century through which our Centenarians lived almost completely—but which our Baby Boomers entered at its halfway point.

The display below provides apt evidence of changes in the composition of our population, the world of work and education and finally, our economy.

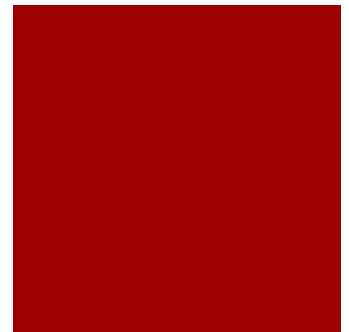
Trend	1920s	1940s	2000s
<b>Health and Family</b>			
Life Expectancy <sup>11</sup>	59.7	62.9	77.0
Leading Causes of Death <sup>12</sup>	Heart Disease, Flu, TB	Heart Disease, Cancer, Stroke	Heart Disease, Cancer, Stroke
Median Age <sup>13</sup>	26	29.5	37
Ethnic Composition <sup>14</sup>	90% white; 9% black; 1% Native American and other	90% white; 8% black; 1% Hispanic; 1% Native American and other	79.9% white; 12.4% black; 15% Hispanic; 1% Native American & other
Marriage Rate <sup>15</sup>	10.2 per 1000	16.4 per 1000	7.1 per 1000
Divorce Rate <sup>16</sup>	1.6 per 1000	4.3 per 1000	3.5 per 1000
Family Planning <sup>17</sup>	Catholic Church calls birth control a sin	Voluntary Parenthood book explains birth control	Birth control pill celebrates its 50th anniversary
Total fertility rate <sup>a, 18</sup> (Average number of children per woman)	3.17	2.22	2.05

<sup>a</sup> Birthrates shown are for white women; the total number of births per woman if she experienced the current period age-specific fertility rates throughout her life.

Trend	1920s	1940s	2000s
<b>Education<sup>19</sup></b>			
Proportion of 25-yr-olds with HS diploma	16.4	24.5	84.1
Proportion of 25-yr-olds with 4 years of college	3.3	4.6	25.6

Trend	1920s	1940s	2000s
<b>Work and the Economy</b>			
Proportion of Labor Force in Agriculture <sup>20</sup>	27%	16%	1.9%
Average Work Hours per Week <sup>21</sup>	49.3	43.3	34.1
Minimum Wage <sup>22</sup>	Massachusetts had the 1st state minimum wage decree in 1914 at \$ .16 per hour	First federal minimum wage set at \$.25 in 1938	\$7.25 in 2009
Inflation Rate <sup>23</sup>	\$1 in 1926=\$12.33 today	\$1 in 1946=\$11.19 today	\$1 in 2000=\$1.23 in 2009
Federal Surplus or (Deficit) in millions <sup>24</sup>	\$865 in 1926	(\$15,936) in 1946	(\$304,159) in 2003

Trend	1920s	1940s	2000s
<b>What Things Cost<sup>25</sup></b>			
Eggs (dozen)	\$. 17	\$.40	\$.88
Milk (gallon)	\$.15	\$.15	\$2.75
Bread	\$.12	\$.07	\$.88
Coffee (pound)	\$.40	\$.25	\$3.18
Sugar (pound)	\$.20	\$.06	\$.42
Vogue Magazine	\$.35	\$.35	\$4.99



## Centenarian Generation – 100 year olds

The current generation of centenarians (those born before or during 1911) were born into a world that was just beginning to benefit from common household appliances, like refrigerators for the safe storage of food;<sup>26</sup> they came of age as frozen foods were introduced;<sup>27</sup> and they are now living in a world where, with the click of a button, food can be delivered to their doorsteps.

To say that this generation, more so than subsequent generations, has experienced significant changes over their life course is a considerable understatement. The Centenarians of today may best be classified as having remained stable during times of transformation, a generation that sought and achieved social change, one that endured and prospered through war and economic instability; a generation born into a world absent many of the luxuries we consider necessities today.

### A picture of the world Centenarians were born into: 1910s

- Earning a merit badge through the Boy Scouts (1910) or reciting the Girl Scout Promise (1912) has always been a possibility for this generation.<sup>28, 29</sup>
- The Centenarians have always been able to enjoy Oreo cookies and Life Savers candy, both invented in 1912.<sup>30</sup>

- With the introduction of the electric dishwasher for home use in 1913 the way women managed the household was changed drastically.<sup>31</sup>

- The passage of the 16th Amendment in 1913 mandated the first U.S. income tax—highlighting the fact that this cohort has always had death and income taxes.<sup>32</sup>

- The Centenarians were born into a world entering its first global war (1914), in a country experiencing both significant highs – the election of the first woman to Congress (1917),<sup>33</sup> and lows – the first influenza pandemic (1918).<sup>34</sup>

- Defining the rapid technological change seen by this generation, near the end of 1919, 13 million phones in the U.S. provided service to 39% of all farm households and 34% of non-farm households. Electricity also surpassed the petroleum based lighting sources that dominated the 1800s.<sup>35</sup>



Oreos and Life Savers were invented in 1912

## A picture of the world as Centenarians grew-up and came of age: 1920s and Early 1930s

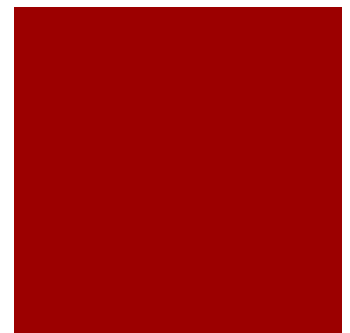
During the early part of the 1920s, this cohort saw the ban of alcohol through Prohibition (1920-1933), the discovery of penicillin,<sup>36</sup> and the opening of the first White Castle.<sup>37</sup> They also saw the Federal Highway Act,<sup>38</sup> which called for the designation of a national highway system of interconnected road ways, come into being.

- Standardized tests have always been giving these students a difficult time: the first SAT tests were administered in 1926 with test takers given a little over 90 minutes to answer 315 questions.<sup>39</sup>
- With the Tennessee vs. John Scopes trial and subsequent ruling, teaching evolution in schools became illegal.<sup>40</sup>
- During free time, commercial radio<sup>41</sup> and bubble gum<sup>42</sup> made life a little more relaxed for this generation.
- June 1929 marks the beginning of the first major economic downturn in the U.S. Later, the crash of the stock market in October marked the beginning of the Great Depression, an era which forever shaped how this generation handles money and resources.
- Having survived the difficult economy of the early 1930s, the Centenarians had a reason to celebrate

the end of Prohibition.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, women were introduced to the household use of washing machines that would wash, rinse and extract water from clothes and the first clothes dryer in 1935<sup>44,45</sup>—again changing the way women managed their household tasks.

- Moving from the height of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK)<sup>46</sup> movement with 2 million members nationwide in the early 1920s to the passage, in 1935, of the New Deal and Social Security, and the racial integration of the armed forces in the late 1940s, Centenarians saw great social change.

The generation of Americans turning 100 years old in 2011 has prevailed through difficult economic and social times. They witnessed the beginnings of government backed retirement income (Social Security) and have seen the implementation of the first government sponsored health insurance program (Medicare). The Centenarians of today came of age at a time when minority group membership was an excuse for lynching, and they now live in a world where a member of a minority group holds the highest position in the United States. They view their past with some degree of ambivalence, as both the good old days and the bad old days—times were simpler, but things required much more effort. They embrace the technological changes they have seen in a similar manner. These are our survivors, and change, in a manner of speaking, is the primary constant for this generation.



# The Greatest Generation – 85 year olds

**Those turning 85 in 2011 are part of a generation that has witnessed and contributed to some of the greatest historical, social and technological changes experienced by humankind.**

These changes occurred rapidly, and this generation adapted to and embraced them. For their experiences and contributions, journalist Tom Brokaw was inclined to dub them the Greatest Generation, a term readily adopted by the American public.

## **A picture of the world the Greatest Generation was born into: 1920s and 1930s**

- These are the first Americans to grow up as “children”<sup>47</sup> as we understand them today, with childhood no longer viewed as mini-adulthood but a period where kids had their own interests, namely, school, fun, and little responsibility.

- Entertainment for children came alive with this generation. Prior to this era, such entertainment was a rarity and a luxury, but the advent of talking movies<sup>48</sup> changed that. This generation grew up alongside movie screen kids like Mickey Rooney, Judy Garland and Shirley Temple.

- The increased use of electricity created new opportunities for entertainment to extend to the masses. The 1935 baseball game between the Cincinnati Reds and the Philadelphia Phillies at Crosley Field, was the first Major League Baseball game to be played at night.<sup>49</sup>

- Beginning in the 1930s, new U.S. standards<sup>50</sup> ensured that all children riding the school bus would travel in the yellow buses we know today.

- Invented in 1921, the Band-Aid took care of skinned knees for this generation.<sup>51</sup> At the dinner table, kids enjoyed the newly invented Spam<sup>52</sup> and Toll House cookies<sup>53</sup>

- Even though this generation was the first to experience childhood, that stage of life was often brief. Children could begin working at age 14 or 15 as long as it did not disrupt their education. By age 15 they could leave school altogether<sup>54</sup> and enter the workforce at age 16.<sup>55</sup>

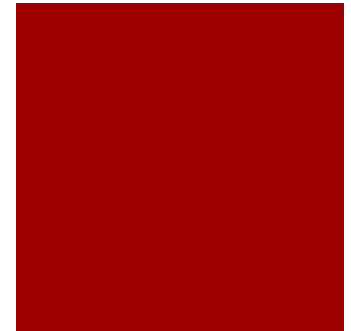


## A picture of the world as the Greatest Generation grew up: 1940s

- Today's 85-year-olds were our first "teenagers," as the word "teenager" was introduced in a 1941 Popular Science article.<sup>56</sup>
- Coming of age during war-time, many young men joined military ranks following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.
- As World War II progressed, women were called out of traditional roles and into the workforce. Women filled industry and production needs stateside and the muscled, rolled-up-sleeves image of "Rosie the Riveter" emerged as a symbol of women's new found strength and can-do mentality.<sup>57</sup>
- During the war when many foods were rationed, Americans answered the government's call to plant "victory gardens" as a way to increase their access to fresh fruits and vegetables.<sup>58</sup> By 1943, 40% of the nation's vegetables were grown at home, with urbanites planting roof-top gardens as well.<sup>59</sup>
- In August 1945, this generation experienced the horrors of the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the political and international advancements made through the chartering of the U.N.<sup>60</sup>
- Post-war, the Greatest Generation GIs were afforded college opportunities through the GI Bill; an opportunity that most of them would never have otherwise received.

- The educational atmosphere changed as well, with a 1948 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that made religious education in public schools unconstitutional.<sup>61</sup>
- The role of television in the life of the nation increased steadily, and the color television was introduced in 1949.<sup>62</sup> Even the personal computer came on the scene at the tail end of the decade, with Berkeley Enterprises introducing a \$300 desktop computer in 1950.<sup>63</sup>
- The percentage of homes with indoor plumbing reached 55% and home ownership passed 50%.<sup>64,65</sup> The Greatest Generation also spurred housing growth, with the birth of suburbia in Levittown, New York.<sup>66</sup>

After World War II, the Greatest Generation became parents to an unprecedented number of children, with more babies born in the five-year period from 1948 to 1953 than in the 30 previous years combined.<sup>67</sup> Of course, the children of today's 85-year-olds are the baby boom. As the parents of the largest generation our society has seen, the Greatest Generation spawned some of the greatest cultural changes in our nation, they were our first "children" and "teenagers," redefining cultural realities for Americans to come. Their pivotal roles in World War II and as the parents of the baby boom accelerated cultural, societal, and global change as well. Members of the Greatest Generation are innovators who created, adopted, and adapted to immense technological and social change throughout their lives and continue to do so today.



Color television was introduced in 1949.

# The Baby Boom Generation – 65 year olds

**Born on the heels of World War II, the first members of the Baby Boom will turn 65 years old this year with significant implications for American society.**

Baby Boomers are predominantly the children of the Greatest Generation and their membership profile includes those born from 1946 to 1964, encompassing individuals who experienced a range of social, economic, and political changes at varying points in their formative years. As 2011 marks a graduation for the first group of baby boomers, from categorization as middle-aged to the status of older-adults, the social implications for this generation and for society are significant. These leading edge Boomers, are the first of this generation to move through our social institutions and often to experience or elicit the changes that come with such shifts.

## A picture of the world Baby Boomers were born into: 1940s and 1950s

- Boomers were the first children to be born into a world ready to shield them from health concerns—they have always had access to flu vaccines<sup>68</sup> and fluoridated water.<sup>69</sup> In 1952, the nation was hit with a

major polio epidemic, but this time it was met with the development of a vaccine, essentially eradicating fears of the disease forever.<sup>70</sup>

- Boomers were the first children to have larger numbers of working mothers, with the number of wives who worked outside of the home increasing fifty percent in the 1950s over what it had been the previous decade.<sup>71</sup>
- Convenience and technology stepped into the home when mothers were out. The first microwave, the Radarange, was introduced in 1954<sup>72</sup> and Baby Boomers were eating ramen noodles by 1958.<sup>73</sup> Throughout their childhoods, these kids happily opened cupboards filled with Cheerios<sup>74</sup> and Betty Crocker<sup>75</sup> mixes.
- The concept of the nuclear family developed alongside young Baby Boomers, with the 'typical' middle-class family depicted on television shows like "Leave it to Beaver" and "The Mickey Mouse Club" kids learned to be good and obey their parents.



Baby Boomers were eating ramen noodles by 1958.

- Virtually all Boomers (90%) grew up living with both of their parents, compared to just two-thirds of children in 2005.<sup>76</sup>
- By the time our leading-edge Baby Boomers were school aged, the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling had ushered in desegregation in public schools.<sup>77</sup>
- Civil Rights issues would become a major marker of Boomers' developmental years, when at just 9 years old, they watched Rosa Parks go to jail for refusing to give up her seat on a bus in Alabama.<sup>78</sup>
- Baby Boomers were the first Americans to learn the Pledge of Allegiance with the words "under God," as Congress added them in 1954.<sup>79</sup>

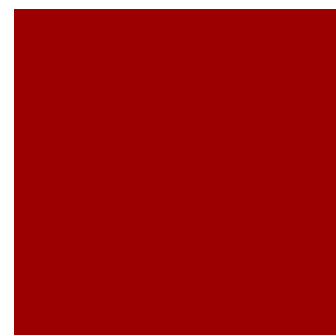
## A picture of the world as Baby Boomers grew up: 1960s and 1970s

- Boomers may have watched "The Lawrence Welk Show" with their parents when they were younger, but Elvis came on the scene almost simultaneously as the King of Rock and galvanized the youth with their own brand of music.
- As soon as they could drive, Boomers sped along the brand new interstate highways as if they had been developed and paved specifically for them.<sup>80</sup>
- At age 17, they experienced somber events like the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and they

heard echoes of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" all the way from Washington.

- When The Beatles debuted on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1964, American youth went crazy.
- Reaching college age, Boomers flooded unprepared U.S. universities and were greeted with emergency housing in basements, lounges, and trailers.<sup>81</sup> For women, opportunities in higher education advanced significantly. Yale admitted women for the first time in 1968.<sup>82</sup>
- The escalation of combat in Vietnam in the 1960s increased the number of troops through the draft.
- Boomers minds were opened to a world of possibilities when Neil Armstrong and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin were the first men to walk on the moon in 1969.

- In 1967, Civil Rights activists' persistence paid off when Thurgood Marshall became the first African American to sit on the Supreme Court.
- They became more "free" than any generation before them as they partied for four days in the rain at Woodstock.
- "The Pill" became the most popular form of birth control in the 1960s,<sup>83</sup> giving Boomers power over their reproductive lives, and the 1973 *Roe v. Wade*<sup>84</sup> decision in the Supreme Court extended that control into pregnancy.



Growing up, Boomers helped define suburban middle-class life as the group's sheer size demanded society pay attention to and accommodate their numbers. Perhaps most significant to the historic transition of Boomers as they hit age 65 is the fact that they will continue to place new demands on our institutions, this time, Medicare and Social Security. Although they have almost always known they could rely on these programs in old age, the system is unprepared. Boomers have shown adaptability, innovation, and a spirit that pushes through barriers to be well within their capacities. As Boomers age, we can expect these traits to accompany them, transforming institutions that serve our older adults and, subsequently, our picture of old age.



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## Illustrations:

Mrs. Catherine Herbster budgets herself carefully. She buys those vegetables and foods which are plentiful and cheap. Courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum website; version date 2011. Cover

Ticker Tape Machine, Oxford, Ohio. EJ Hanna. pg. 1

Grandma and Me, Oxford, Ohio. EJ Hanna. pg. 3

A canteen on the grounds of a large western aircraft plant serves workers hot food, drinks and refreshments during the lunch periods of all shifts, 1942. Courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum website; version date 2011. pg. 4

Tie Dye Guy, Oxford, Ohio. EJ Hanna. pg. 5

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US\\_stamp\\_1907\\_1c\\_Jamestown\\_Expo\\_John\\_Smith.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US_stamp_1907_1c_Jamestown_Expo_John_Smith.jpg)  
Stamp pg. 7

Social Security “Unemployed insured workers registering for jobs and filing benefit claims at a State employment office.” Courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum website; version date 2011. pg. 8

REA; “Little girl by radio.” Courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum website; version date 2011. pg. 9

Alton Lee carries a shock of wheat across the broad fields of the Saugstad farm where he works from sunrise to long after sunset to help rush more food

to United Nations’ fighting men all over the world. Courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum website; version date 2011. pg. 10

REA; “Woman plunges and scrubs.” Courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum website; version date 2011. pg. 12

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Theodor Horydczak Collection, LC-H822-T01-1999-008. pg. 13

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USW3-001467-D DLC. pg. 14

Vintage WW II military photograph of Rosie the Riveter wearing a red bandana and flexing her muscles, created by J. Howard Miller. [http://www.historical-stockphotos.com/images/xsmall/2014\\_rosie\\_the\\_riveter\\_flexing\\_her\\_arm\\_muscles\\_we\\_can\\_do\\_it.jpg](http://www.historical-stockphotos.com/images/xsmall/2014_rosie_the_riveter_flexing_her_arm_muscles_we_can_do_it.jpg)  
pg. 15

This former salesgirl, librarian, and sixth-grade school teacher has been repairing and servicing cars which used to be only open jobs for men. Photo by Ann Rosener, 1943. Courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum website; version date 2011. pg. 16

Photograph of Rosa Parks with Dr. Martin Luther King jr. (ca. 1955). National Archives record ID: 306-PSD-65-1882 (Box 93). pg. 17

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