

The Rise of Isolationism and Decline of Trust

9/11 changed life in the U.S. and around the world as Americans embarked on a new collaboration with world allies while simultaneously becoming more isolationist. Our First Responders became our heroes for months on end as they continued to clear away the rubble and the thousands of lost lives from the Towers, the Pentagon and the field in Somerset County, PA. We joined the ranks of Europe and the Middle East's more recent histories, as our nation was rocked by the unconscionable acts of terrorism.

American patriotism was awakened from a long slumber. Our society was shaken and our homeland safety was found extremely vulnerable. We gathered together to overcome the tragedy and to come to the aid of those whose lives were forever changed by that September day. This was a defining moment for Americans. The U.S. entered into a retaliatory war and continued conflict with Iraq and Afghanistan that has lasted for almost 20 years. Tolerance for the Iraq War is vastly different from its Vietnam predecessor of 50 years prior. The horrific events of 9/11 placed most Americans squarely on the side of defending our country by show of force. Unlike Vietnam, the Iraq War and continued conflict did not involve the requirement of a military draft.

With a war fought 50 years after Vietnam, the ability for the American military to “conduct” a war, technologically via drones, has vastly changed the level of human involvement and resulting casualties. Americans had more of a stomach for the Iraq War, and with far less casualties and no draft. The Iraq War droned on for years with a

certain public apathy. Vietnam held far more emotional trigger for a young generation unwilling to be forced by draft to serve.

9/11 increased Americans' distrust, with racial and ethnic profiling targeting those in our communities along with the practice of isolationism. It is an unfortunate byproduct of the event. There are examples in American communities where trying to be politically correct cost a missed opportunity to prevent additional acts of terrorism. There are also many examples of persecuting innocent groups of people who are trying to live their religion of choice in a country built of freedoms. Travel protocols became more complex to address illegal border crossings by persons of interest. Homeland vigilance is an inexact science. We have made mistakes.

Young Millennials during this time watched their Baby Boomer parents live this history and ironically, Millennial adults are more diverse and are a more accepting generation than their parents. They are curious about the world and the people who inhabit it. The world is an infinite social experiment in the eyes of the Millennials—with no limits.

Diversity Matters

Statistics reveal the shift in racial demographics of the Boomer generation in relation to the Millennial generation. Some key demographic statistics taken from the 2010 U.S. Census reveal the following evolution of racial diversity among Baby Boomers versus Millennials: Within the total 2010 U.S. Census population, 26% of the Baby Boomer generation identified as White, 20% as African American, 20% as Native American, 19% as Asian, 13% as Hispanic and 2% as Other. Contrast

those demographics with the younger Millennial generation against the total U.S. Census population and the same study found 16% of the Millennial generation identified as White, 18% as Asian, 18% as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 17% as Hispanic, 16% as African American, 15% as Native American.

The numbers show real change in what the next generation looks like in terms of race. Americans are a society of increasing diversity; perhaps for the first time since Ellis Island of our immigrant ancestors, and the Millennial generation is almost evenly distributed among race classifications. Additionally, in a Pew Research study almost 92% LGBT Americans felt society was more accepting of their sexual orientation than they had the decade prior. In June 2015 the Supreme Court struck down State bans on same sex marriages. Those groups who felt previously disenfranchised now have a more firm voice in society.

The New Patriotism—20 Years in the Making

The Millennial Generation of change is strong; they are the largest generation population in American history. Diversity is key in this currently 25–40-year-old generation, but so are the level of higher education and the rising age of marriage. Pew Research Center's data indicate that 39% percent of Millennials have completed a bachelor's degree or higher compared to their parents' Boomer generation of about 25%. Another noticeable education shift is in the percentage of Millennial women out pacing men in college degrees, with 43% of the women completing undergraduate education versus 36% of the men.

Between the ages of 25–37 only 46% of Millennials are married, during the same age range the Boomer generation was about 67% married. What this data may indicate is a shift that has most likely been influenced by empowered young women finding career advancement opportunities taking precedence over marital commitment.

Millennials are swift on change as technology has not only facilitated efficiencies in work and personal lives, but also in how we interact and collaborate in those spheres as well. Facebook, SnapChat, Airbnb, Instagram, the Honest Company, Pinterest, Lyft and WordPress are just a few of the Millennial-founded companies that have created monumental societal impact. They have forged the “experience economy” as well as defined a new personal and corporate accountability that strives for transparency, environmental priority while encouraging a self-expression that has further defined the American way of life. Companies such as Lyft, Airbnb, Booking.com, and Trip Advisor have taken the shift away from a corporate reliance on spending and offered inventive ways of enjoying a quality of life with self-expression and entrepreneurship. The mentality has become more “win-win” for the consumer, the entrepreneur and the corporation.

By the way, that’s exactly the priority sequence Millennials want to see the win taking place. They champion the individual and demand transparency from big business.

What’s happened as a result is that traditional corporations such as Marriott are taking notice and offering new product lines that cater to the individually tailored “experience economy.” Millennials are bringing back and redefining American cultural freedoms with greater diversity,

defined experiences and with greater influence. However, a red flag should be raised on how these expressive freedoms are being hijacked by the back channels of technology.

Aeternae Libertatis

Eternal liberty should find itself entrenched in the American lexicon, rather than endangered by division and chaos. American culture has been built on freedom and civil liberties. The Millennial generation is more inclusive than prior generations and they seek global collaboration. Against the rise of populism, the recent increase of xenophobia in the U.S. and in Europe speaks to a loud minority that would like to revert to a mentality that has been abandoned by the 21st century. This minority is vocal and place themselves in environments where they can promote racial bias. There is a clash of human wills that rather than courageously propel a society forward uses intimidation and hate because they are afraid of what lies beyond a new horizon.

Accepting racial diversity and equality is not the only issue threatening civil liberties and sustaining a future for the American society and clearing the path for a new definition of the American patriot. Unlimited information access has taught us empowerment. We have infinite possibilities to gather information.

We have infinite educational resources. From something as simple as watching a DIY YouTube video to taking online classes toward a degree, these technology efficiencies no longer confine an individual to a bricks and mortar classroom, or the financial handcuffs of exorbitant tuition. Our high tech lives have inspired a new generation to

think completely out of the box and the Millennials are here to teach us all, whether you are American or not; that change is here. Whatever your technology fantasies are, they will likely come to fruition in our lifetimes.

Our reliance on smart technology is a Pandora's Box of information for the consumer. The quest for knowledge online becomes an open gift, and technology can be the ultimate giver. As with all cautionary tales involving human nature, we are often caught off guard by the downside of the technology "woo." Totalitarianism is masked in technology swag when tech asks for information in return for what it offers the consumer. Smart tech's guiles are far more subtle when it is able to gather information without the consumer's tacit consent through GPS, allowing technology to monitor an individual's whereabouts virtually 24/7.

Technology has wrapped us in its arms and swaddled us. Empowerment is a powerful tool. However, the efficiencies that technology creates can enable humans to move through life without honing certain skills. What happens to problem solving if the answer is always a click away? What happens to reading body language and assessing the person you are interacting with if you are engaging with one another via text or video chat? Does it change and potentially evolve the nature of discourse and negotiation? These are skill sets that are powerful human tools required for diplomacy in personal, work life and government interactions. These are skills that require continuous refining so that we as humans can support our instincts.

One of the most important tenets to staying true to the American values of freedom is maintaining an open and transparent society.

The importance of understanding the ramifications of technology, artificial intelligence and central surveillance are huge. In 2018, two separate articles were published in The Atlantic and Business Insider that forewarned of the impending “Social Credit System” in China, a monitoring system that by 2020, will track the moves of every citizen of China’s extremely large populations, including law infractions and postings of dissent on social media outlets and resulting in a “score” that will impact their ability to find employment commensurate with their skill level, with the cascade effect of determining what housing and education status their families can benefit from.

We should be asking ourselves how our civil liberties are compromised—these vital core values of American patrimony—if we live in an increasingly surveilled nation via subverted technology. This is a question that belongs in every American conversation. Against the riptide of technology, what will the new American value system of civil liberties look like? China is transparent in announcing to its citizens that they are surveilled, judged and merited on the basis of their behaviors and conformity. American techno surveillance is not so transparent.

Unprecedented Times

COVID-19 reengaged some of the emotional moments of 20 years ago. By mid-May 2020, approximately 80,000 Americans and over 280,000 people globally had perished from an extremely contagious global virus and an invisible enemy. The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated the globalization of society while exposing the intrinsic nature of every society to isolate and defend in times of conflict.

What makes this event different is that the Millennial generation is now fully adult, spanning from 25–40 years old. Their parents are the age group at greatest risk during the pandemic and they are raising young children amidst these challenges. The “sandwich generation” torch has passed to the Millennials. This pandemic has reinforced this issue of national security in a new way. 9/11 closed borders and travel for a period of time. COVID-19 has far exceeded that by shutting down the country to travel and business for over two months. The result has been catastrophic, not just in terms of lives lost, but in crippling a U.S. economy that just two months prior was benefiting from the greatest economy in its history. Once again new protocols in safety are becoming centralized. For COVID-19, it will take 9/11’s protocols a step further into health care, restaurants and public spaces, altering the American way of life.

Changing the Conversation for the New American Patriot

There are challenges this brave new face of American patriotism will encounter. COVID-19 has thrown a fly in the soup of the global community that exists today on the ease of travel and the accessibility of once “exotic” goods and services. There will be mitigation and this will be a challenge for a generational culture of global diversity.

We have struggled with systemic racism for centuries. There is hope and there are efforts within this generation that suggest Americans may finally move in the direction that represents real democracy. The Millennial generation has the unique distinction of being the first

American generation in history with an almost equal percentage of the population spread across race. It is the beginning of the removal of the word minority.

Millennials have taught us to “change the conversation, change the narrative.” CHANGE. Learn how to have a conversation and it will change how people interact with one another. RESPECT. I APPRECIATE YOU. These words of kindness and gratitude are slowly finding their way back into the conversation. In the words of Stephen Covey, “Most people don’t listen with the intent to understand, they listen with the intent to reply.” Enter every conversation assuming you have something to learn and watch what happens: a culture open to acceptance and change rather than polarized by fear, anger and ignorance.

This Brave New World, This New New Patriotism

The last 20 years have changed the shape of American patriotism while the last ten have defined its course immeasurably. It becomes more than a beating drum for change. A new American patriotism becomes a fight for the soul of the nation. It becomes the realization that the American society—the civilization built on civil liberties—only survives time and the clash of human will if the culture is willing to change. The new American patriots are the change-makers of the culture.

If the millennial generation is the largest stakeholder, American patriotism is most likely in the best hands since the Greatest Generation

of the early 1900s. What makes Millennials so well prepared to handle change?

They prepare for it and, in their own words, they “curate” change. They are genuine in their collaboration efforts. Millennials have fostered a tremendously collaborative environment in all aspects of the lives they are building socially, personally, professionally and politically. They seek feedback constantly from a wide demographic. They invented the information junkie, the foodie, the bio hacker, the capsule wardrobe and virtual travel. Millennials reinvented lifestyle branding. This generation is brilliant at honing wants into needs.

This new American patriot is so self-expressive, collaborative and technologically advanced, they are masters of strategy and planning. They know how to gather information and develop metrics that determine outcomes. They know how to get results. Combine that with the fact that they were raised to be empowered, Millennials are extremely confident decision-makers and directors of protocol.

Social Consciousness

Because they have grown up with so many avenues of technology and conflicting accounts of information, they are also skeptical and ethical. They call out fake news. Social consciousness is front and center in all aspects of life. Millennials pay far more attention to how and where businesses spend their money, how they contribute to society, and the ethics behind the curtain of a company’s “sales floor.”