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Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation

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Neil Howe and William Strauss. *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.

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Do you remember John Kennedy's assassination? Do you remember the explosion of the shuttle Challenger? What you do not remember may be a better way to identify your membership in a generation. Your collective memory helps to shape the distinctive nature of your generation. The authors of the bestseller *13th Gen* have again sought to define and understand a new generation of young people. "Who cares?" you might ask. "You should," is the answer for those in any area of higher education. Increasingly this incoming generation of first-year students has been labeled as the "why," "XX," or "NeXt" Generation. In "*Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*," Howe and Strauss aggressively challenge the negative view of this generation. Calling them the "Millennials" (a name chosen by members of this generation to describe themselves), the authors suggest, with statistical, anecdotal and historical data, that the United States is on the verge of another "great generation."

The significance for those in higher education is that a generation shift is taking place across North America. As the Millennial generation becomes college freshmen, they will stand in radical contrast to their elders in the Boom and X generations. Howe and Strauss have provided a provocative apologetic for the generation that is graduating from high school after 1999. After extensive surveys of students and countless interviews with children, adults, parents and educators, they believe that they have

discerned the significant priorities and values of this coming generation. While many suggest that they are just another representation of previous generations, Howe and Strauss suggest that this conclusion is baseless. While seeking to present the descriptive extremes of the pressures facing this group of students, they present the realism of this generation's context. They conclude that Millennials are unique and vastly different from the two previous generations.

The volume ranges over many areas and topics; however, it all focuses on bringing about more understanding of the Millennial character. It examines many topics, including Millennial drug use, sexual mores, and approaches to school and family. The descriptions are laced with humor, anecdotes and reflections from many sources. The volume also examines the notions and implications of what the authors describe as "generational cycles." They examine how past trends might affect and shape this generation. These components are seen as part of the heritage passed on to them by past generations.

With extensive use of sidebar quotations, charts and cartoons, this is the perfect book to read, put down, digest and then pick up again. It is fascinating to read all the way through, yet reflection on what the authors assert and forecast is necessary for a deep understanding of its implications. *Millennial Rising* is packed with information that anticipates a significant change in the national character over the next few decades.

There are some weaknesses to the work that will need to be covered by others in the growing literature on this generation. Specific to this book is that much of its survey research is limited to the Virginia region. The authors glean material from various sources, however the information is geographically limited. The multicultural implications of this generation need to be understood as well. As the Latino and Asian populations in the United States increase, so will their impact on the nature of the Millennials. The authors discuss the diversity of this generation, however the impact of its multiculturalism needs to be examined more in depth.

This volume is important primarily because it provides a different view of the incoming generation of students. Conventional wisdom paints them with an unfavorable brush. It is encouraging to read a survey that articulates something of which many in higher education have been observing. While incoming college students do demonstrate some of the "prima donna" characteristics, a vast number also demonstrate a deep commitment to service, academics, relationships and character. These are not qualities that are acknowledged by those specialists who see this generation as an "echo boom."

Millennials Rising also anticipates some of the trends that we may encounter in the upcoming years and challenges those in higher education to begin evaluating the types of programming in which we are investing. For instance, what is the state of our service learning programs? Are they strong enough to respond to anticipated demands placed upon them in four or five years?

Contrasting the Millennials with the GI generation, Howe and Strauss believe the Millennials are the next "great" generation. The authors suggest that the Millennials will be far more responsive to the quality of leadership than those among the Silent, Boom or X generations. The character and principles of those leading this generation will be of great significance for the Millennials. Men such as FDR and

Harry Truman, who were perceived as men of depth who came from the previous generation, led the GI generation. In a similar manner, the authors anticipate that the Millennial generation will be responsive to Boomer and Gen X leaders who articulate a depth of character and have demonstrated that they can be "moral exemplars." This prediction is encouraging for any that are committed to the character, faith and whole life of the student.

In conclusion, I would suggest that the above observations alone make this volume a worthwhile study. This book has a vast amount of information for anyone interested in ways to invest in this generation. It is imperative that the Millennial generation is not seen as a shadow of Gen X or a reflection of the Baby Boomers. They have distinctive traits and will need a contextual response laced with wisdom and discernment. *Millennials Rising* is a strong place to start and a foundation from which to develop that response.