



# OF GENERATIONS





# AND GREATNESS

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In his bestselling book of 1998, television newsman Tom Brokaw coined the term “greatest generation” to describe the men and women who came of age during the depression and World War II. Since then, the phrase has gained widespread currency in publishing, television, movies, memorials, and commemorative celebrations. On August 14, 2005—the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of V-J Day, the end of World War II—the Minnesota Historical Society officially launched its Minnesota’s Greatest Generation project, the most ambitious undertaking in the Society’s history, encompassing publications, a collections initiative, an oral history project, statewide conservation workshops, a website, public programs, and an exhibit slated to open at the History Center in 2008, which will later become part of a new interpretive center at Fort Snelling.

As part of the team of researchers and curators working on this project, I have been interested in understanding its central focus: the group of people, once enormous in size, now rapidly diminishing, on whom this mantle of “greatness” has recently settled. What are the rhetorical and political dimensions of this celebratory anointing? Who, exactly, belongs to this greatest generation? For that matter, what *is* a generation? What happens when millions of individuals—diverse in gender, age, ethnicity, race, and a thousand other less obvious quirks—are enclosed, like one vast group photograph, within a broad commemorative frame?

*Send-off to war: Members of the Semper Fidelis Club, St. Paul, bid farewell to young Marines, 1942.*

For a word that is used as frequently and knowingly as “generation,” there is little agreement on what it actually means, how long one is (30 years? 18?), or when one stops and another begins. Scholars generally distinguish between generations, defined as stages within a family’s lineage, and generations, defined as groups of people of roughly the same age (birth cohorts) that move together through time and historical experience. But what gives a birth cohort a distinctive or unifying character? Developmental psychology—as well as common sense and tradition—points to the experiences of late adolescence or young adulthood.<sup>1</sup>

In his pioneering study, “The Problem of Generations” (1927), sociologist Karl Mannheim declared, simply: “Youth experiencing the same concrete historical problems may be said to be part of the same actual generation.” He argued that youthful experiences leave a permanent imprint on behavior, values, and beliefs.

In youth, where life is new, formative forces are just coming into being, and basic attitudes in the process of development can take advantage of the moulding power of new situations. . . . The possibility of really questioning and reflecting on things only emerges at a point where personal experimentation with life begins—round about the age of 17, sometimes a little earlier and some-

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*Enlisting at Humboldt High School, St. Paul, 1940*

times a little later. . . . It is only then that life's problems begin to be located in a "present" and are experienced as such. . . . For the first time, one lives "in the present."<sup>2</sup>

In other words, when a birth cohort collides in its youth with a set of significant historical and cultural events, it undergoes a transformation and a generation is christened. "Historical generations are not born; they are made," historian Robert Wohl observed. "They are a device by which people conceptualize society and seek to transform it."<sup>3</sup>

It's striking how often the term "generation" has come to be associated with tragedy and loss. Consider the discussions of the contemporary AIDS crisis in sub-Saharan Africa, when commentators predict the disappearance of an entire generation of young men and women. Or how British observers awoke the morning after the cataclysm of the First World War—the Great War, as it was widely known—to discover that they had lost "the flower of an entire generation," the best and the brightest of their society. The British still remember the men and women who came of age during the Great War as their "lost generation."<sup>4</sup>

Sixteen million Americans served in the Second World War, four times the number that served in the First, and they were on average even younger than their earlier counterparts. So it was perhaps inevitable that this vast group of men and women would, in spite of their individual differences, come to be characterized as a generation, "uniform and anonymous, undifferentiated in essentials," as historian Paul Fussell has said.<sup>5</sup>

Although the alliterative phrase coined by Tom Brokaw in 1998 caught on almost immediately with the American public (more on that below), there seemed to be little consensus on who was in and who was out. The greatest generation, according to Brokaw, "came of age during the Depression and the Second World War and went on to build modern America." In the first line of his book, however, Brokaw substitutes "World War II generation" for his title phrase, and the centrality of the war experience, either in the military or on the home front, persists throughout the term's proliferating usage in popular culture.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, a close association with the war effort, at home or abroad, was a prerequisite for membership in the greatest generation. But the second requirement is that members "come of age" during the depression and the war. People in both older and younger age groups were affected by the war, but they were not as decisively molded by it as men and women of 18 to 30 years of age. Or, as historian Alan Spitzer pithily put it: "Generations at different phases of the life cycle experience the same events in different ways. Young soldiers fight and die while older cohorts mourn and rule."<sup>7</sup>

When we turned to the task of defining Minnesota's greatest generation, then, we homed in on a birth-year range roughly between 1910 and 1929. Someone born in 1910 would be near the upper end of America's first peacetime draft, conducted in 1940; on the other end, some people born as late as 1928 or 1929 served during the war or the occupation. Nevertheless, for the sake of simplicity, we think of the typical member of this generation as someone born between 1918 and 1925. During the nearly four-year span of American involvement in the war, he or she comes of age, that is, experiences young adulthood. As Samuel Hynes reveals in the initial words of his evocative wartime memoir, "Every generation is a secret society. The secret that my generation—the one that came of age during the Second World War—shared was simply the war itself."<sup>8</sup>

What sets our Minnesota project apart from similar World War II or home front studies is that we are documenting the entire life arc of a generation, from birth through old age. Our Minnesotans were children in the 1920s, adolescents in the 1930s, and young adults during the war and immediate postwar years. They became the nation's leaders and decision-makers from the 1960s on, and, by the end of the century came to be known as the first "active seniors." Today the survivors are in their 80s and 90s and have lived long enough to hear themselves

hailed as “the greatest.” Our project thus encompasses a broad span of events and experiences of the last century and into the current, unsettled decade, but the focus always remains on the people themselves. Our interest is not in documenting the Great Depression, but rather on the lived experience of children and young adults during those hard times; not on wartime battles and crises in general, but on the particular ways that our cohort experienced those events.

**YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE 1920s AND 1930s DANCED THE SAME DANCES, LAUGHED AT THE SAME LAME JOKES, AND GABBED IN THE SAME SLANG.**

The generation born between the Great War and the Great Depression attained a cohesiveness during World War II not solely because of its shared experience of cataclysmic events but also because of the extent to which its members had been participating in a national culture since the moment they were born. Radio, national

magazines, movies and newsreels—young people in the 1920s and 1930s experienced these intensely formative influences together and simultaneously. They emulated the same movie stars and baseball heroes, hummed along to the same popular tunes, danced the same dances, laughed at the same lame jokes, and gabbed in the same slang. As they came of age during the 1930s, they personified what historian Warren Susman defined as “a basic truth about the decade: the need to feel oneself part of a larger body, some larger sense of purpose.”<sup>9</sup>

In addition, historical boundaries of region, class, ethnicity, and even race—while constantly present throughout the depression and wartime, as indeed they still are today—were nonetheless weakening, becoming less distinct than they had been just 30 or so years earlier. Although African Americans were prevented from serving in “white” units and men of Japanese and Chinese descent were similarly segregated, in most parts of the military during the war ethnic mixing was the rule. The familiar wartime movie plot played up the personality differences of G.I.’s thrown together in a platoon—the wisecracking Jew from Brooklyn, the naive farm kid from Minnesota, the solemn Navaho from the reservation, the



*Dance at the Servicemen's Center, Minneapolis, about 1942*

snooty, rich-boy WASP. In both the movies and in real life, these disparate types recognized their commonalities and gradually forged a seamless fighting machine.

The success enjoyed by Tom Brokaw's books and television appearances—as well as numerous subsequent publications that have echoed his terminology—has permanently fixed the term “greatest generation” in the popular mind.<sup>10</sup> The immediacy with which the phenomenon took hold was unprecedented, but it sprang up on a terrain of popular memory, especially about the war, that had been amply prepared since at least the mid-1980s or even earlier.

In 1984 talk-radio host Studs Terkel published the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The “Good War”: An Oral History of World War II*, a collection of concisely edited interviews with more than 120 individuals. In spite of the now-famous quotation marks in the title, Terkel's informants told their stories with little irony. One veteran ends his narrative with “World War II? It's still a war I would go to.” Terkel's interest in recording the stories of ordinary people, interspersed with those of leaders and decision-makers, had emerged in 1970 with the publication of *Hard Times*, an oral history of the Great Depression. The success of his books provided evidence that the interests of popular historians and their readers were merging with those of professional social historians of the 1970s and 1980s, all motivated by a shared passion for investigating the past “from the ground up,” for elevating and validating memory as history.<sup>11</sup>

Spurred by various 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations—Pearl Harbor in 1991, D-Day in 1994, the end of the war in 1995—American popular culture at the turn of the new millennium could at times seem all but fixated on World War II. Hollywood weighed in with such blockbusters as *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *The Thin Red Line* (1998), and *Pearl Harbor* (2001). Cable TV launched the History Channel in 1994, its round-the-clock schedule stocked with innumerable World War II documentaries. In 2001 Home Box Office brought out its 10-part series *Band of Brothers*, based on the book by best-selling World War II historian Stephen Ambrose, about a storied regiment of parachute infantry.

By the mid-1990s there was another powerful force to be reckoned with on the memory front: the Internet. World War II websites proliferated rapidly in early cyberspace; “web rings” or gateway-type sites were erected as early as 1996 to collect efforts from around the world. An



*“Ordinary” people, extraordinary times: Woman factory worker among the men, Minneapolis, 1944*

Open Directory Project (updated in August 2006) had links to 1,050 English-language World War II websites.<sup>12</sup>

Closely related to the proliferating efforts to preserve the memories of World War II was an extraordinary surge in commemorations of the Holocaust. Impelled by a similar sense of urgency as the generation with living memory aged, oral historians set out to record survivors' stories, such as those gathered in Minnesota and published in 1990 as *Witnesses to the Holocaust*. The most ambitious American effort, sponsored by the Shoah Foundation established in 1994 by film director Steven Spielberg, eventually gathered more than 50,000 videotaped interviews. During this same period, memorials and museums opened in New York, Houston, Los Angeles, Boston, St. Petersburg, Florida, and, most impressively, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.<sup>13</sup>

Since the 1990s, World War II memories have been literally set in stone at a number of sites. The Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial on the National Mall in Washington was dedicated in 1997; the National D-Day Museum opened in New Orleans on June 6, 2000 (its name was changed to the National World War II Museum in 2006); and the U.S. World War II Memorial was dedicated on the Mall in Washington on May 29, 2004. A year later in Minnesota, ground was broken on the state's own World War II Veterans Memorial.<sup>14</sup>

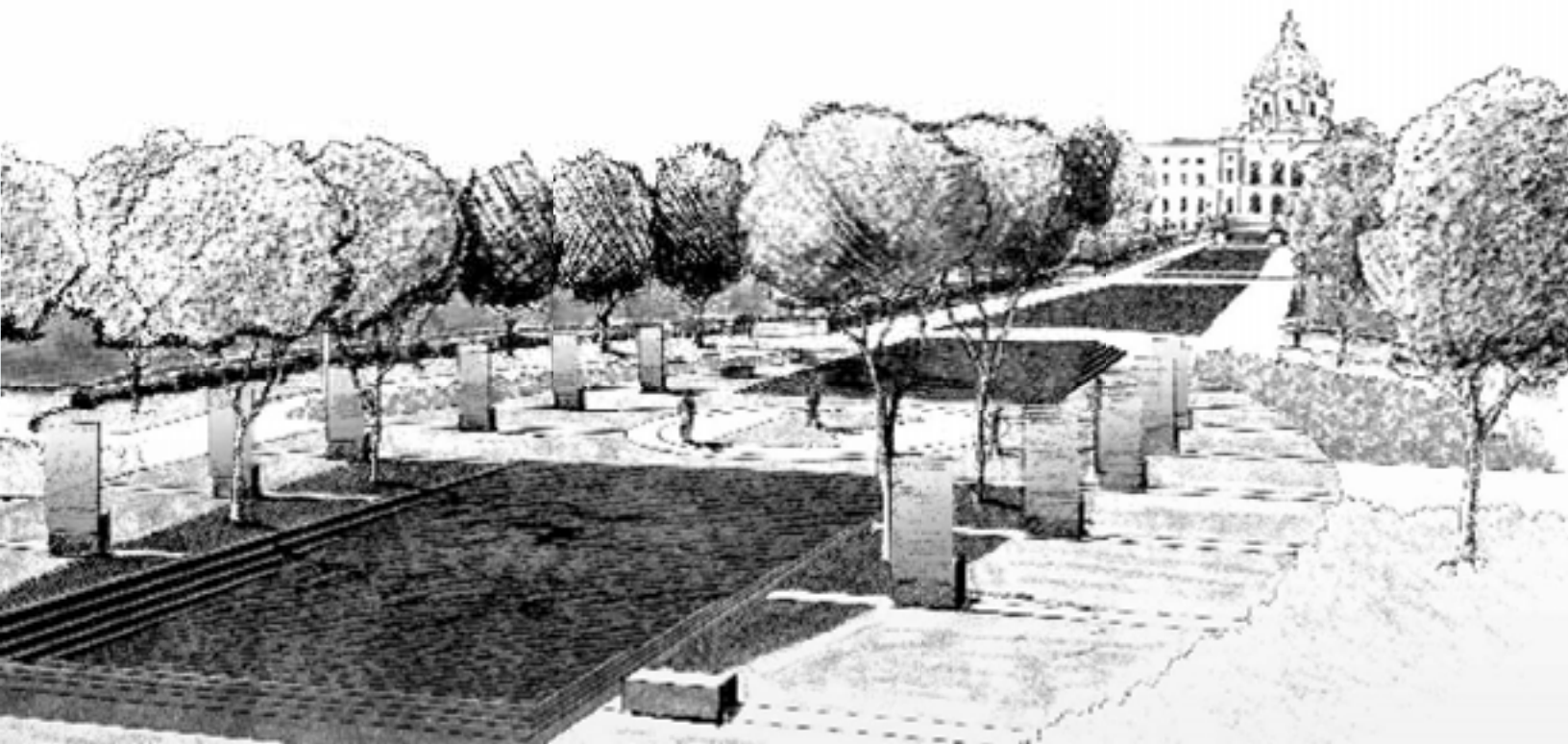
## AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE AT THE TURN OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM COULD AT TIMES SEEM ALL BUT FIXATED ON WORLD WAR II.

During this era of commemoration, the war—specifically its climactic moment, the bombing of Hiroshima—also provided the fuel for a conflagration of public memory that erupted into a full-blown national controversy. In 1994 Air Force and other veterans protested the Smithsonian’s National Air and Space Museum’s proposed *Enola Gay* exhibit, “The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II,” as it was eventually called. The essential issue was one of balance. Veterans felt that the museum’s interpretation (as evidenced in the exhibit script made available for comment) emphasized Japanese suffering over the devastating American losses in the Pacific. The memories, stories, and perspectives of veterans, they felt, were given short shrift. Broad public support for this view, coupled with threatened cutoffs of funding by powerful members of Congress, led the Smithsonian to cancel the planned exhibit and open a much-reduced version in 1995. No other event better epitomized the enduring passion that surrounded the public memory of World War II.<sup>15</sup>

That the memory of the war can and does become a political hand-grenade should have surprised no one. Some critics and observers have, in fact, suggested that the origins of the term “greatest generation” must be sought in the realm of politics. In a brief, penetrating analysis of President Ronald Reagan’s Normandy speeches in 1984, historian Douglas Brinkley argues that the elaborately staged 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations of D-Day, attended by as many as 15,000 U.S. veterans, constituted “a generational reckoning”; with his words, Reagan “triggered the so-called Greatest Generation phenomenon.” While crediting Brokaw with the choice of superlatives, Brinkley reminds us that Reagan was “a charter member” of the generation, someone who “intuitively believed that Americans who died at Normandy and other such sacred battlefields truly were cut from a special cloth.”<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, Brokaw writes that it was in covering those anniversary commemorations for NBC News that he first began to appreciate what America owed the men and women of World War II. *The Greatest Generation* is above all a book of personal stories, not exactly oral histories as such, but based on extensive interviews, following the template fashioned by Studs Terkel. Brokaw tapped into a deep wellspring of public feeling, and the book quickly became something else entirely, morphing into a cultural phenomenon, spawning at least two additional

*Drawing of Minnesota’s World War II Veterans Memorial, now under construction on the State Capitol Mall, St. Paul*



books from the author (including audio versions) and a television documentary.<sup>17</sup>

But disputes about the book's central claim—that superlative in the title—emerged immediately. One of the handful of famous folks interviewed for the book was *60 Minutes* commentator Andy Rooney, a veteran of the Normandy invasion. Brokaw writes that Rooney challenged the premise that “his was the greatest generation any society could hope to produce, believing that the character of the current generation is just as strong; it’s just that his generation had a Depression, World War II, and a Cold War against which to test their character.” Essayist Joe Queenan thought that Brokaw, by naming the World War II generation of Americans as “the greatest generation any society has ever produced,” had “willfully insulted a lot of dead people,” including not only America’s wartime allies but also the generation of patriots who led America into revolution, the “five hundred thousand young men born in 1840 or thereabouts” who had given their lives in the Civil War, and “the doughboys gassed at Ypres and Beaulieu Woods.” Distinguished historian Howard Zinn reluctantly identified himself as a member of the generation, but noted that “the degree of heroism attributed to soldiers varies according to the moral reputation of the war,” and that the fighters of World War II have been deemed superior because “that war has always

been considered a ‘good war,’ more easily justified . . . than the wars our nation has waged against Vietnam or Korea or Iraq or Panama or Grenada.”<sup>18</sup>

Some commentators have even suggested stripping the generation of its “greatest” laurels and handing them over to the next in the line of succession. In *The Greater Generation: In Defense of the Baby Boom Legacy*, Leonard Steinhorn, a professor of communications (and a boomer), states, “The Greatest Generation deserves every bit of credit for protecting democracy when it was threatened; but Baby Boomers deserve even more credit for enriching democracy and fulfilling its promise when neither war nor catastrophe nor crisis compelled them to do it.”<sup>19</sup>

## AS THEIR BABIES GREW INTO REBELLIOUS TEENAGERS, A GREAT SOCIETAL CHASM OPENED UP: THE GENERATION GAP.

**W**ith marriages and childbearing delayed by depression, war, and separation, returning G.I.’s and women married at astounding rates and immediately set to producing the next generation of Americans—the baby boom. This enormous birth cohort is not,

*Soldier saluting the fallen of earlier generations at the burial plot of the Unknown Soldiers, Fort Snelling National Cemetery, 1938*



however, primarily associated with war or social upheaval but with a statistic, probably the twentieth century's most consequential demographic fact. The long-depressed birth rate spiked in 1945–46 and reached a peak in 1957, when 4 million babies were born in the United States, twice as many as 20 years earlier. The boom ended just as dramatically in 1964, when the total number of births fell below 4 million and the average family size also dropped steeply.<sup>20</sup>

During these, their child-rearing years, our cohort may have been known as the G.I. Generation, but the most recognizable role they played at the time was not as war heroes. By the 1950s, the men and women who had been shaped by economic depression and war were being painted with a broad brush as suburban conformists—in sociologist William H. Whyte's influential dissection of *The Organization Man*, for example, or Sloan Wilson's novel, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*—or as the “other-directed” members of David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*. Baby boomers' parents, wrote social critic Kenneth Keniston in 1968, had been raised to follow rules that “emphasized respect . . . obedience to authority, and traditional values of hard work, deferred gratification, and self-restraint.”<sup>21</sup> As their babies grew into rebellious teenagers, a great societal chasm opened up: the generation gap.

Coming of age in a different era, these children, of course, grappled with different historical problems. Not surprisingly, then, a number of memoirs in the last ten years have been written by boomers attempting to untangle their complicated relations with greatest generation parents. Recently, journalist Tom Mathews confronted the memories of his embattled relationship with his father, a World War II combat veteran, in *Our Fathers' War: Growing Up in the Shadow of the Greatest Generation*, which includes nine other real-life father-son stories that parallel his own.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, some commentators have seen in the greatest generation phenomenon a kind of mass-cultural expiation of guilt felt by once-defiant baby boomers for their heroic, hard-working, silent fathers. “Dog-tag nostalgia,” as cultural critic James Wolcott dismisses it, or “hedgerow envy,” as *Doonesbury* comic-strip character Mark Slackmeyer's gruff, uncommunicative father ridicules his boomer son's new-found interest in war stories. It's not just filial piety that's in play here, these critics would say, but a kind of hoped-for transference, an almost paradoxical example of inflated self-regard on the part of baby boomers, who, in Wolcott's phrase, “have remade World War II in their own image.”<sup>23</sup>

In the Minnesota's Greatest Generation project, the two generations that were at one time on opposite sides of the most notorious gap in American history are now uniting in a common goal to remember and record the past before it fades forever. Boomers—myself and my colleagues, for example (though our intrepid band includes a few Gen-X'ers and Millennials)—are



*New college graduates, probably thanks to the G.I. Bill, with their baby boom children, University Village, St. Paul, 1951*

helping members of the generation that survived depression and war create a kind of collective autobiography. Some of our Minnesota sources are already in print; many others are in the form of reminiscences, memoirs, and letters in the Minnesota Historical Society, which has nearly 60 collections of personal papers from the World War II period, many of them documenting Minnesotans who lost their lives during the war. More than 100 oral histories are being conducted as part of the project, and we are also collecting stories through an unprecedented “Share Your Story” feature online.<sup>24</sup>

In Minnesota, it's a generation that counts as its members such well-known political figures as Elmer Andersen and Eugene McCarthy; activists Harry Davis and Nelson Peery; American Communist Party leader Gus Hall; actors James Arness and his brother, Peter Graves; pin-up girl Jane Russell (born in Bemidji in 1921); WAC veteran Betty Olson of Duluth; Joe Gomer, one of the fabled Tuskegee Airmen; theater director and educator Charles Nolte; journalist Eric Sevareid (Minneapolis,



1912); Carl Pohlad (a decorated infantryman in the war); pizza queen Rose Totino; artists George Morrison and Leroy Neiman; Minnesota's first woman Supreme Court justice, Rosalie Wahl; golf champion Patty Berg; cartoonist Charles Schulz; Nobelist Norman Borlaug; business leaders Earl Bakken, Curt Carlson, and Ken Dahlberg; former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John Vessey; poet Robert Bly; veteran TV weatherman Bud Kraehling; wrestling champ Vern Gagne; and, of course, the Andrews Sisters—Patty, LaVerne, and Maxene.



Women from Walker and Cass Lake en route to southern Minnesota to help detassel corn while local men served overseas, 1943

This generation also includes thousands of “ordinary” Minnesotans, many of them now gone. About 300,000 Minnesotans served in the military during World War II, and about 9,000 died. Thousands more joined the war effort on the home front—in expanded mining operations, in manufacturing plants converted to defense efforts, or on farms and in agricultural industries.<sup>25</sup> As we research this generation and interview surviving members, we are discovering their diversity. We are gathering the stories of Ojibwe and Dakota men and women; of Mexican immigrants from St. Paul’s West Side; of Communist Party members and peace activists; of conscientious objectors who volunteered for the University of Minnesota’s wartime starvation study. We are listening to the stories of gays and lesbians; of Japanese Americans whose families were interned during the war; of Holocaust survivors; of men who were prisoners of war on both sides of the world. Many of our subjects are surprised to discover that we are interested in hearing not only about their wartime experiences but also their childhoods during the depression and the different paths their lives took in the boom years after the war and the decades that followed. Many are skeptical about the “greatest” label, but almost all will express a sense of identification with not only a larger group—their generation—but also with a larger and greater purpose. “I was a part of my generation, immersed . . . I was right in the center of it,” as retired history professor and World War II veteran Clarke Chambers said in an oral interview. “It was an enormously important thing . . . [an] experience of sharing with a generation. . . . So many men and women, sixteen million of my generation went through this experience. And it’s nothing since then like that.”<sup>26</sup> □

## Notes

1. Alan Spitzer, “The Historical Problem of Generations,” *American Historical Review* 78 (1973): 1353–85; Mary Elizabeth Hughes and Angela O’Rand, “The Lives and Times of the Baby Boomers,” in *The American People: Census 2000* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 1–31. Spitzer called attention to an impressive spate of historical studies focusing on generational behavior and generation gaps, apparently spurred by the worldwide student unrest of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

2. Karl Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” reprinted in Paul Kecskemeti, ed., *Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), 296, 300, 304.

3. Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 240.

4. Aaron Sachs, “AIDS Orphans: Africa’s Lost Generation,” *World Watch* 6 (Sept.–Oct. 1993): 1–10; “AIDS and Africa’s Lost Generation,” *Chicago Tribune* editorial, July 3, 2000. On Britain’s “lost generation,” see P. R. C. Groves, *Behind the Smoke Screen* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), 308; Robert Wohl, *Generation of 1914*. In American literary history, the epithet “lost generation” (attributed to Gertrude Stein) describes the American expatriate literary set in Paris in the 1920s: Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Pound, Eliot, and Gertrude Stein herself, among others.

5. Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*

(New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 52–78.

6. The only place this succinct definition of the generation appears, however, is on the dust jacket to the original edition of *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998).

7. Spitzer, “Historical Problem of Generations,” 1363.

8. Samuel Hynes, *Flights of Passage: Recollections of a World War II Aviator* (New York: Penguin, 2003), vii. In William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America’s Future, 1584 to 2069* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 261–78, the “G.I. Generation” has a birth-year bracket of 1901–25.

9. Warren I. Susman, “The Culture of

the Thirties,” in *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 172. For an analysis of the impact of popular culture on group identity in the 1930s, see Lawrence W. Levine, “The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences,” in *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 291–319.

10. See, for example, Kriste Lindemeyer, *The Greatest Generation Grows Up: American Childhood in the 1930s* (New York: Ivan Dee, 2005); Michael D. Gambone, *The Greatest Generation Comes Home: The Veteran in American Society* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 2005); Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Thomas Saylor, *Remembering the Good War: Minnesota’s Greatest Generation* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005).

11. Studs Terkel, *The “Good War”: An Oral History of World War II* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 572, and *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Depression* (New York: Pantheon, 1970), 3. Historian Emily Rosenberg, in a compelling examination of the memory and meanings of Pearl Harbor in American culture, connects the “new visibility of memories of World War II” as the millennium came to a close to the larger phenomenon of the “memory boom” pervading American life since the 1970s; see Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 113–25.

12. Open Directory Project: [http://dmoz.org/Society/History/By\\_Time\\_Period/Twentieth\\_Century/Wars\\_and\\_Conflicts/World\\_War\\_II/](http://dmoz.org/Society/History/By_Time_Period/Twentieth_Century/Wars_and_Conflicts/World_War_II/). For a somewhat outdated listing, see J. Douglas Smith and Richard Jensen, *World War II on the Web: A Guide to the Very Best Sites* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 2002).

13. Rhoda Lewin, ed., *Witnesses to the Holocaust: An Oral History* (Boston: Twayne, 1990); Edward Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (New York: Viking, 1995).

14. Nicolaus Mills, *Their Last Battle: The Fight for the National World War II Memorial* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 219.

15. The revised *Enola Gay* exhibit closed in May 1998. The plane was installed, with minimal interpretive material, at the Smithsonian’s Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center, which opened in December 2003. The controversy is examined in several essays collected in *History Wars: The Enola Gay*



Members of Minnesota’s greatest generation at the project’s launch, Minnesota History Center, 2005

and Other Battles for the American Past, ed. Edward Linenthal and Thomas Engelhardt (New York: Henry Holt, 1996).

16. Douglas Brinkley, *The Boys of Pointe du Hoc: Ronald Reagan, D-Day, and the U.S. Army 2nd Ranger Battalion* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 8–9, 13. Thanks to Randal Dietrich for bringing this work to my attention.

17. Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation Speaks: Letters and Reflections* (New York: Random House, 1999) and *An Album of Memories: Personal Histories from the Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 2001).

18. Brokaw, *Greatest Generation*, 293; Joe Queenan, “What A Fool Believes,” in *Balsamic Dreams: A Short But Self-Important History of the Baby Boom Generation* (New York: Henry Holt, 2001), 113; Howard Zinn, “The Greatest Generation?” *The Progressive*, Oct. 2001, p. 12.

19. Leonard Steinhorn, *The Greater Generation: In Defense of the Baby Boom Legacy* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2006), 13.

20. Hughes and O’Rand, “Lives and Times of Baby Boomers,” 3; Stuart Kallen, ed., *The Baby Boom*, from the series *Turning Points in World History* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2002); Steve Gillon, *Boomer Nation: The Largest and Richest Generation Ever and How It Changed America* (New York: Free Press, 2004).

21. William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1956); Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955); David Riesman with Reuel Denney and Nathan Glazer, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950); Kenneth Keniston, *Young Radicals: Notes on Committed Youth* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968), 235.

22. Tom Mathews, *Our Fathers’ War:*

*Growing Up in the Shadow of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Broadway Books, 2005). Other memoirs dealing with G.I. Generation parents include Tobias Wolff, *This Boy’s Life* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989); Mary Gordon, *Shadow Man: A Daughter’s Search for Her Father* (New York: Random House, 1996); Colin McEnroe, *My Father’s Footprints* (New York: Warner Books, 2003); and Sean Wilsey, *Oh, the Glory of It All* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005).

23. James Wolcott, “Color Me Khaki,” *Vanity Fair*, Sept. 2004, p. 228. The series of *Doonesbury* strips with boomer Mark Slackmeyer and his ailing father are available at [www.doonesbury.com](http://www.doonesbury.com).

24. Samuel Hynes, *The Growing Seasons: An American Boyhood Before the War* (New York: Viking, 2003) and *Flights of Passage*; Walter W. Benjamin, *The Magical Years: A Boyhood Revisited* (Edina, MN: Beaver’s Pond Press, 2002); Anne Bosanko Green, *One Woman’s War: Letters Home from the Women’s Army Corps, 1944–46* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1989); Al Zdon, *War Stories: Accounts of Minnesotans Who Defended Their Nation* (Mounds View, MN: Moonlit Eagle, 2002); Ronald G. Perrier, *A Sense of Honor: Remembrances of WWII Veterans* (Minneapolis: Archie Publications, 2005). The project’s oral history component is expanding on the work done by historian Thomas Saylor for his Oral History Project of the World War II Years, excerpts of which have been published as *Remembering the Good War*. “Share Your Story” can be found at [www.mnhs.org/people/mnngg/](http://www.mnhs.org/people/mnngg/).

25. Dave Kenney, *Minnesota Goes to War: The Home Front in World War II* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005).

26. Saylor, *Remembering the Good War*, 295.

*The Minnesota Veterans Memorial drawing is courtesy the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs; the photo above is by Tim Rummelhoff. All other images are in MHS collections.*



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