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## Grads face -- and shape -- a new world

### For class of 2011, optimism is tempered by apprehension

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WASHINGTON -- This spring, more than 3 million American teenagers will graduate from high school in one of the largest, most diverse and most challenged classes in U.S. history.

"They're the mosaic of a new America," said author and demographic expert Morley Winograd.

The Class of 2011 is the midpoint of a millennial generation -- born 1982 to 2003 -- that is bigger than the Baby Boomers. They're the first to live half their lives after 9/11, and their views of security and authority have been heavily shaped by it.



They've been slower to grow up than their parents' generation and faster to integrate their lives with the Internet than even their older brothers and sisters. They're entering adulthood in the worst economy since the 1930s, and social scientists say they are forming attitudes similar to the generation that grew up in the Great Depression.

Winograd and Mike Hais, co-authors of the upcoming "Millennial Momentum: How a New Generation is Remaking America," say the economic challenges they face and the attributes they are forming -- a "civic"

generation with a preference for solving problems together -- make the Class of 2011 comparable to the Class of 1931, which fought in World War II and helped build the great American middle class.

Who are these high school graduates and how are they different? And what does that mean for the future? Social scientists and pollsters point out these key traits:

1. They are diverse.

New age, race and ethnic data from the 2010 census are due out later this year, but data from 2009 indicate that about 40 percent of the nation's 18-year-olds are racial or ethnic minorities. By contrast,

about 27 percent of 56-year-olds are. A Pew Hispanic Center analysis of 2009 Census data says that nearly one in four youth under 18 have at least one immigrant parent.

"They are more racially and ethnically diverse, no question about that," said William Frey, a Brookings Institution demographic expert. "Their experience is much more global in the way they think about things."

Surveys show millennials in general, and this age group in particular, are more open than their parents to having friends of another race.

"I don't think people are defined by their ethnicity, whether you're black or Asian or anything else. They're more defined by who they are inside," said Kaitlyn Murphy, 17, of Rye Neck, N.Y.

And the Class of 2011 is a vanguard of even bigger changes. Frey says that between 2000 and 2010, the population of whites under age 18 declined by 4.3 million, while the population of Hispanic and Asian children grew by 5.5 million. Ten states and 35 large metro areas now have minority white child populations, Frey said.

Hais predicts this diversity will have a profound impact on all aspects of American society.

"In society, and in the American family and home, we expect to see a continuation of the recent trends toward greater inter-racial, inter-ethnic, and inter-religious dating and subsequent marriage," he said. "In the media, we expect to see those real-life trends reflected in increased diversity in scripted and unscripted TV programming. In government policy, we would expect that the nation will, at some point in the next decade, deal with the matter of immigration in a manner that both brings stability to the borders but also recognizes and regularizes the status of undocumented immigrants now in the country."

2. They've been protected.

The Class of 2011 is in the middle of a "baby on board" generation raised in a more child-centric and protected culture than the "latchkey kids" of Generation X ahead of them. Child-protection laws passed over the last decade range from state and national Amber Alerts, to anti-bullying laws, to tougher toy safety standards.

Last year's health care bill allowing children to stay on parents' insurance until they are 26 is an example of altered expectations of when children should leave the parental nest.

"College deans tell me that 26 is the new 18," said Tim Elmore, author of the parenting book, "Generation Y: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future."

"The adult world we are beckoning them into has never been more complex," Elmore said. "The adolescent world that they are leaving has never been more pleasurable. They say, 'I have these parents protecting me. I have my iPhone. Most high schoolers don't have to work. Why would I ever want to leave it?'"

The Class of 2011 had just entered third grade on 9/11; Osama bin Laden was killed weeks before their graduation. Their adolescence took place entirely during overseas wars and heightened security measures at home. Social scientists wonder whether that atmosphere has given them different expectations of leaders and institutions.

"In Vietnam, it was thought necessary to question authority," said demographer Neil Howe, author of seven books on generational trends. But the post-9/11 world "is teaching people to avoid risk."

An MTV survey of 18- to 24-year-olds taken last fall found that 79 percent believed they had grown up in a scarier world than their parents did.

Much of the fear is economic. Many of this year's graduates have seen parents or friends' parents struggle with lost jobs, homes, or retirement nest eggs.

"While we are optimistic about what's going to happen and we do think we can do great things, a lot of us are very scared about the future, and I think maybe more scared than a lot of students before us," said Catherine Garmon, 18, a senior in Beaumont, Texas, whose father lost his job and had to take work in another state to support the family.

Social scientists and pollsters say the result is that the Class of 2011 and its fellow millennials may be less likely to object to invasions of privacy in the name of protection, and more likely to choose a profession that will provide a good job rather than change the world.

### 3. They are social and constantly online.

People under 30 consider the use of technology the single-largest factor distinguishing them from their parents, Elmore said. But the integration of technology into every aspect of life divides the Class of 2011 even from older millennials. A Harvard University Institute of Politics poll released in March said that 18- and 19-year-olds were nearly twice as likely to believe they could influence someone online rather than face-to-face. Surveys have also shown younger millennials are more likely than those in their 20s to keep in touch with friends by texting, rather than a phone call or email.

Asked how she keeps in touch with friends, Nikki Brown, 18, of Atlanta, said: "Texting, texting, texting."

The heavy use of social networking has changed the definition of friendship (you can have thousands of them) and changed learning.

Before the Internet, Elmore said, students "needed a teacher or a coach or parent or employer to give them information."

"Today, they are getting it on YouTube, and the information could be inaccurate," Elmore said. "But they are drinking it in." Elmore advises college professors: "They don't need you for information, but they do need you to help them think critically."

Nick Shore, MTV's senior vice president of strategic consumer insights and research, said being more connected to the world has made the Class of 2011 and its fellow millennials more aware of challenges all around them. "For this generation, nothing is stable," he said. "Business is falling apart, the economy, the family structure ... the church. It is like a post-modern nightmare they are having to pioneer into the future and, of course, all of that is multiplied by technology and social networking."

### 4. They believe in teamwork, but not in their parents' politics.

In the Harvard survey of 18- and 19-year-olds, seven in 10 said community service is honorable while only four in 10 said running for political office is. Only about one in seven said they were "politically

engaged," a figure likely to rise during their college years. But they have grown up seeing politics and community action as separate things.

"The attachment to teamwork, to doing things in groups and teams, you certainly see that in how they use technology with social software, with everything designed how the peers can police and monitor each other," Howe said.

In a finding that will baffle their parents but is in keeping with their collaborative impulses, 18- and 19-year-olds in the Harvard survey expressed more faith in the United Nations than in the U.S. Congress.

Hais said it reflects a generation that believes that "life is not one individual overcoming the world; it is the group overcoming things together."

"Nothing ever happens because of one person or even 100 people," said Justin Sticht, 17, a graduating senior at Blaine High School in Minnesota.

Millennial expert Winograd expects the Class of 2011 and members of surrounding graduating classes will fuel bottom-up change in American institutions, and that millennials have already made their mark by forcing change in how music is delivered and how media are organized.

"I don't think we are going to see the kind of top-down change we saw in previous civic generations," he said, "but their ability to self-organize as a group, at an individual level and at the grassroots level, and to upend completely the institutional power at the top, will be their mark. ... They are going to change the way Congress functions, they are going to change the way schools operate, and they are going to change the way people entertain themselves."

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