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## **M. W. A. (Millennials With Attitude)**

Charlie Lyons

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# M.W.A. (Millennials With Attitude)



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Not many representatives of my generation have showed up yet. It's not a Russian plot that's keeping them away.

The woman in line ahead of me complains to her husband. "I'm not ready for this," she says, looking past me to the end of the line. She yells at her toddler and two preschoolers. "Samantha, hold your brothers hand!"

The three little rascals ignore their mother as they start climbing a brick wall, literally. Mom and Dad are staring down the barrel of a midlife crisis. They stand before me distressed and apparently paralyzed, not able to move closer to the check-in table.

"I'll be back," mom murmurs before running off to catch the little one before he falls off the brick wall.

There's little excitement and no idle talk in this line.

The mom and her kids return their spot in line.

“Mommy, what happens inside?”

“We go in, we vote, we leave,” she says.

This is the scene on a cool, sunny morning in the Pacific Palisades on November 8, Election Day. Dozens of men and women line up in front of Marquez Charter Elementary School to vote. Four people enter, one leaves. It’s a slow process. It seems antiquated. Everyone is impatient.

I look around thinking how much this sucks. Not many representatives of my generation have showed up yet. It’s not a Russian plot that’s keeping them away. Makes me wonder what they will show for. I admit I don’t want to be here. This is my first year as an eligible voter. I feel like I’m entering a polo match mid game, without a horse. I don’t know if life has prepared me for this grown-up decision.

Later that evening, sitting on the couch with my mother, brother, and father, our chins hit the floor as the Electoral College map turns red. The results are stunning America. Reality TV wins the day, if not the popular vote. Noise, 1 — Journalism, Zero.

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**G**lobal warming, mass shootings, police brutality, corporate greed — the tip of the iceberg of issues the world faced yesterday. Not today, though. Today, the Saturday following the election, the issue is Donald Trump. America’s youth, suddenly awake, has joined tens of thousands expressing opposition to the president-elect in marches and demonstrations across the country.

Kids from colleges such as UCLA didn’t wait until the weekend’s organized rallies. They stormed the streets of Westwood the night after the election chanting, “F\*ck Donald Trump!” “Not my president!”



Anti\_Trump protest Photographed by Kimberly B. Johnson



In Oakland, peaceful protests fueled mostly by young people devolved into bonfires, graffiti and vandalism. The five straight days of protest in Los Angeles will peak on Saturday, November 12 with almost 10,000 marching from Macarthur Park to downtown.

The Electoral College, set up to avoid mob rule, seems to have done the opposite. The popular vote differential was 2.86 million. The winner lost. The Russians and Chinese roll their eyes. Brexit implausibly becomes the media's second-worst miscalculation.

It's winners versus losers in a war of words. Not always words, though. The *Los Angeles Weekly* reports that actor and comedian T. J. Miller, the large guy from HBO's *Silicon Valley*, was arrested in the Hollywood Hills for allegedly slapping his Uber driver during a heated argument over Trump. Hate crimes spike in the days after the election as emboldened xenophobes and bigots unleash their pent up energies on "immigrants." No surprise, most of the targets turn out to be citizens.

According to "The Coddling of the American Mind" a recent essay by Derek Thompson in *The Atlantic*, Millennials were uniquely punished by the Great Recession, suffering higher unemployment and lower wages than any other group in its aftermath, not to mention a job market that demands more training and higher skill levels than it did of previous generations. For many of my generational cohorts, higher education is the price of entry and huge debt loads are the cost of higher education. Paul Taylor, in *The Next America*, which uses the Pew Research Center's public surveys and demographic research to draw its conclusions, writes that even with all that, "Millennials are America's most stubborn optimists."

Let's hope so. We're going to need it.

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There's something wrong with the system we

needed Bernie.

Henri Mendoza, a student at Santa Monica College, joined the large demonstration in downtown Los Angeles on November 12. He speaks about the elections and its aftermath while preparing for a psychology final. “I attended, but I know it won’t change anything,” Mendoza says, adding that he doesn’t think voting is very effective either. “The Electoral College has all the power. There’s something wrong with the system... we needed Bernie.”

Ah, Bernie Sanders, the Millennial candidate of hope and change. For a generation bombarded with reality television, dummy politicians, social media memes and Snapchat filters, Sanders felt authentic. “Now there’s just chaos and division,” says Mendoza. And our generation is somehow supposed to fix it.

Then, there’s Trump. It can look like a discouraging future to step into, but Mendoza, for one, cautions his generation not to believe that there’s no coming back from this. “There is,” he says, though he doesn’t say how.

But first, comes acceptance. Trump is here. The mostly red electoral college map of America indicates there’s probably more where that came from. But, as Stephen Colbert told reporter Joel Lovell in a *GQ* magazine profile, “Acceptance is not defeat. Acceptance is just awareness.”

Whittier College sophomore, Meghan Pistolessi, an active member of the school’s senate, also voted for the first time this election. She said that prior to college, she hadn’t yet developed her own political views. “It was very different coming from a town where the views were very conservative and traditional,” she tells me.

Once she got to Whittier, she realized she related more to liberal views. However, that hasn’t made her think any less of her conservative roots. “Nowadays, when people think of Republicans, it’s a bad thing,” she says. “They think *racist* or *homophobic*, but that’s not always true.” She noted that her dad is a Republican, “And my dad is a great person.”

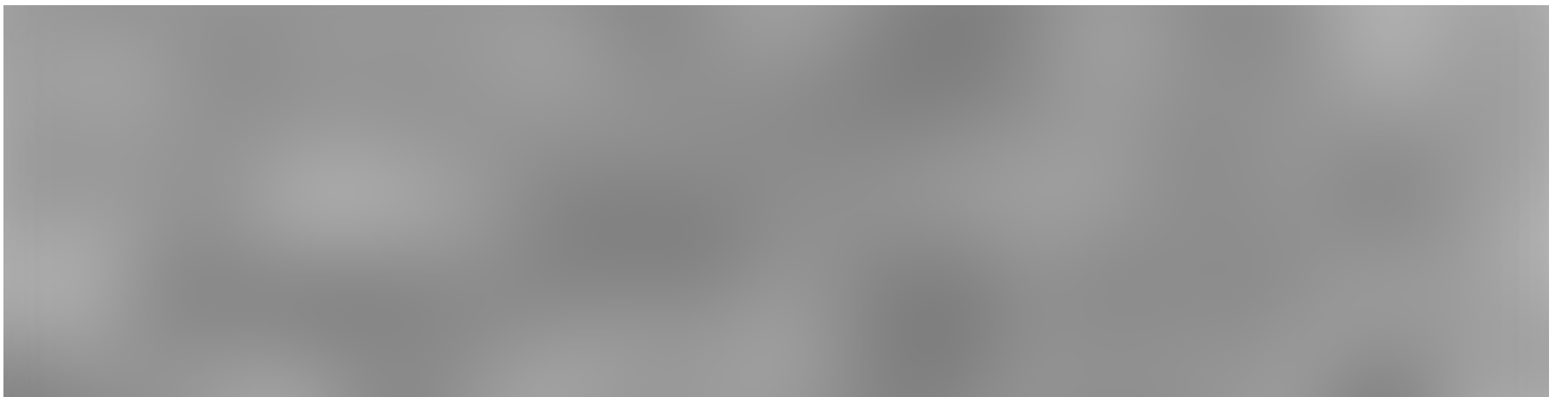
Pistolessi's dad grew up in tough circumstances and never finished high school. "My parents wanted to ensure that my life upbringing would be better than theirs, so they made my education very important," she said. "It didn't seem like I had a choice, it was just, 'Go to college!'" Pistolessi interpreted that to mean, "If I don't go to college, then I won't be successful."

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There are twenty somethings today who appreciate the Beatles' *White Album* or join protests for peace and equality. Hippies still exist, but today they're called hipsters. The original flower children tripped on acid to escape the turbulence of the 60s. Young adults saw leaders like John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., Robert Kennedy and Malcolm X assassinated. Then came Charles Manson, like the monster from under the bed. America was at war with Vietnam and immersed in racial unrest.

One of the answers kids came up with to deal with it all was to run away, get high, and forget their responsibility to repair a broken nation. Joan Didion, in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, writes of when the baby boomers were our age. Didion visited San Francisco's Haight-Asbury District where the "social hemorrhaging" was well under way in the spring of 1967. They were what today we'd call slackers, calling themselves rebels.





Hippies, 1969, by Baron Wolman



Whittier Professor with a passion for literature and technology, Andrew Wallis, says, “Baby Boomers were the first group of teenagers who set the standard for the developmental period,” and there was this idea that, “teenagers came up with rock n roll and freedom.” Most of the hippy kids of the 60s are now well into their seventies. They are the people in power now. “They embody the best and the worst of what America can offer,” says Wallis.

He cautions that while “they’re generally portrayed as selfish,” it would be wrong to paint with too broad a brush. “Many of the core values in the protest movements of the 60s, the social justice, the social rights would not have been possible without the Baby Boomers,” he says.





Flower child, by Baron Wolman, 1969

Not to mention many of the core technologies of today. No Boomers, no iPhone. Steve Jobs was an acid-dropping Baby Boomer. He even gave the drug credit for some of his success when he said, “Taking LSD was a profound experience, one of the most important things in my life.” Before Apple made him a billionaire, Jobs said LSD, “reinforced my sense of what was important — creating great things instead of making money, putting things back into the stream of history and of human consciousness as

much as I could.”

What a trip. Boomers may have mapped the digital world, but today’s young adults have been raised in it.

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I spoke with celebrated journalist, author and dynamic Baby Boomer Joanne Lipman after the election. She is the former managing editor of *The Wall Street Journal* and is currently Chief Content Officer of Gannett. In her book *Strings Attached*, she tracked a murder investigation through her education in classical music and weaved the narrative against her exploding career as a journalist. She understands the parallels and distinctions between the Boomers and the Millennials. “In the 60s, there was the ecology movement, which today has transformed into the environmentalist,” she explains. “In the 60s people would join the Peace Corps and today they go into areas like public health.”

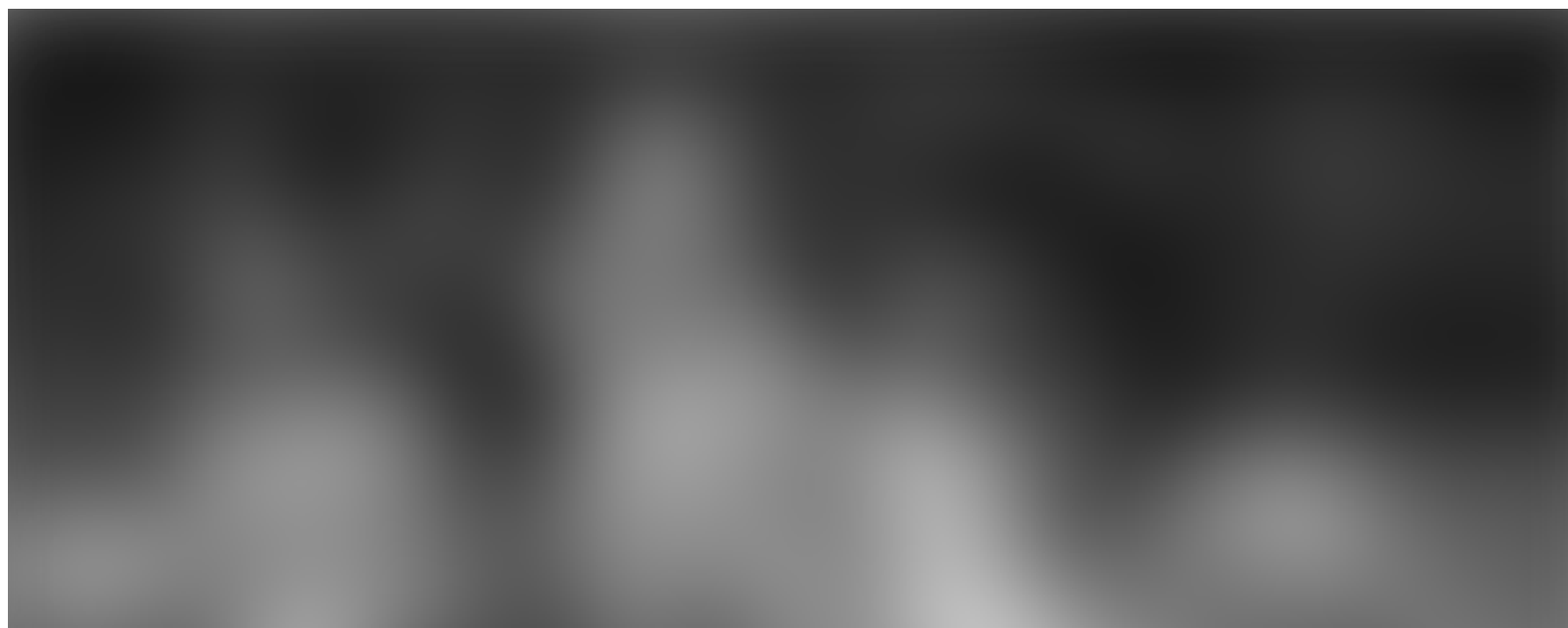




Photo by Baron Wolman, 1969

Movements back then had a stronger pelt. The hippy generation, “grew out of a rebellion against the war in Vietnam,” says Lipman.

More than two million people lost their lives in that war. Today we see the devastation in Aleppo, more fallout from the eternal war that’s been going on since 9/11. Kids today, though, aren’t rebelling; they’re retweeting.

“In the 60s there was this saying, ‘Don’t trust anyone over 30,’” says Lipman. “The idea being that you can’t trust the previous generation... Parents and their kids just couldn’t speak the same language.”

## Don’t trust anyone over 30.

Kids today still have the Grateful Dead on their playlists, but they aren’t like the runaways Didion met. In this age, there’s no hiding. Forty years ago, *Associated Press* photographer Nick Ut’s photos of children fleeing napalm bombing stunned the world. Now, thanks to smart phones and WiFi, graphic images of conflict around the world come daily. The volume of devastating imagery creates a certain numbing effect. The assassination of Russia’s ambassador to Turkey, Andrey Karlov, practically streamed live on our Facebook feeds. Videos of bloody children being removed from the gravel of collapsed buildings in Aleppo circulate relentlessly. Like horror memes.

How can Millennials deal with the sheer volume of this information? It’s tempting to give up hope. We’re not lazy, though; we’re engaged, even if noise seems to have won the day, or at least the election. But if anyone can master technology and use it for the

greater good, it's we Millennials. As Paul Taylor wrote, "Adapting to new technology is hardwired into their generational DNA, and while it's impossible to forecast where the digital and social media revolutions will take humankind, it seems safe to predict that Millennials will get there first."

Technology is the one gain we have over the bald guys, and our ability to use it is powerful. We are the ones left trying to make sense of it all and survive in an age where all is possible. Now is when we take charge. All of this gives me reason for hope, not despair. People are extraordinary, for all their quirks. It is easy to get lost. But that doesn't mean you stay lost. The Baby Boomers, many of them, went on to make great contributions to science, art, literature, music and human rights. Lucky for us, I predict my generation will do the same.

Lucky us. Lucky you.

Politics

2016 Election

Millennials

Baby Boomers