

Cultural Daily

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A Baby Boomer's Belated Blog to George Will

Eric · Wednesday, July 30th, 2014

Dear Mr. Will,



Hello. How are you? I am sorry that it has taken me so long to write to you. Almost 25 years, I suppose.

I see that you are a very popular man to attack on the internet these days, what with your recent “controversial” article about sexual assault on college campuses, where in the interest of full disclosure, I have worked for the last 28 years, albeit only as a “crazy theater professor” at the University of Southern California, which I’m not sure qualifies for true condemnation or contempt in your morally superior world of intellectual and conservative journalism. Then again, you have more than enough enemies on the web to worry about little ol’ me, your having stirred up hornet nests of anger with your insightful and constant attacks on the governance of President Obama, whether they be about his economics of sequestration or the failure of his Obamacare. Therefore, let me refrain from commenting any further on your current popularity in this bastion of cyber liberalism, suspecting only too well, your lack of respect for us Johnny-come-lately, so-called online “journalists”!

No, what I am writing you about goes much further back... I believe, to the mid 1980s. Perhaps to one of your *Newsweek* columns during which time you smugly and self-righteously condemned my entire generation of Baby Boomers to the dust bin of 20th century history by soundly calling us all “failures.” This was extremely painful for me to read, Mr. Will, and I have carried this pain around with me until today, when I can finally... reply... with my own retort and my own ideas. You know, also in the interest of full disclosure, I have spent the last several days using the mighty internet’s various search engines to find this specific article that I’m referring to, trying not only to prove to myself that it wasn’t a figment of my late 30s muddled imagination, but also to just have it here in front of me, so I could respond to it in a logical, well-argued, and appropriately George Willian manner.

Unfortunately, your presence and output is so rich and plentiful in the annals of 20th century journalism, that I could not find the exact article. So I apologize in advance for not getting the facts, or your ideas, exactly and absolutely correct in this piece. But as I say, it has become a personal and emotional issue for me, not just intellectual. So please, feel free to “set me straight,” should you be so kind to reply.



“Failed”? That’s the word that has irked me all this time, George. I mean, okay, I can accept words like “entitled” and “morally superior.” They have the ring of truth about them. I have even referred to your own brand of journalism of reeking of the latter, and isn’t it funny, but now we Baby Boomers are guilty of calling the Millennial generation, our children and grandchildren, the latter. But “failed”? An entire generation? I think that’s a little over the top, George. A little bone-headed and wrong.

I mean, didn’t we get some things right? Didn’t we contribute to ending the Vietnam War? To advancing civil rights, gay rights, and the rights of women? Weren’t some of our protests against conformity, materialism, and our country’s hegemonic pursuit of the almighty dollar to some lasting effect? Wasn’t our sex, drugs, and rock ‘n roll part of a generational change in culture? In politics? In values and morality? In society? And if indeed they were, how could you so disdainfully dismiss them all as “failures”?

Now I know that you were born in May, 1941. That you’re now 73 years old. That you technically missed being born in the Baby Boom generation by just five years (the Baby Boomers officially claiming the years 1946-1964). But isn’t it ironic that Bob Dylan, the unwanted “spokesman of our generation,” was born only 20 days later than you, also in May, 1941. I mean, your condemnation of my generation can’t be entirely based on your seniority or your having “missed the boat” by just those five years. Certainly Mr. Zimmerman (Dylan’s given name for the uninitiated) somehow managed to make the cut.

But could it be... that you were just a tad jealous of our long hair, our sexual freedom, and our torn Levi Strauss blue jeans before they became fashionable and were sold for \$200 a pair? I mean, with your perfectly manicured coif (I always wondered if it was real), your buttoned down Eisenhower era attire, and your always sharpened axe to grind against us hippies, rebels, artists, and outlaws, I just had to wonder... where exactly did that venom and condemnation come from.



Now sure, George, you’re a very smart man. An atheist, in fact. And for sure, an excellent writer... although I often don’t understand about 10 percent of the convoluted gobbledy-gook they let you publish. You have recently come out n favor of gay marriage, in favor of ending the wars in the Middle East, for many sound and principled ideas. I respect you for that. And indeed, much of what you say about my generation hits home in a uncomfortably truthful way.

Notwithstanding San Francisco’s 1967 “Summer of Love,” 1968’s glorious group grope at Woodstock, or John and Yoko’s 1969 naked “Give Peace a Chance,” I actually believe that the “sexual revolution” of the 1960s may have been a failed one... in that serial monogamy and outright promiscuity seem to have led to far more divorce and far less stable parenthood than we Baby Boomers ever anticipated. Personally, I never believed in the institution of marriage, yet after 54 years of casual, ever-changing sexual partners, even I conformed to the convention. And I must say, also in the interest of full disclosure, that being married for the last thirteen years, as challenging as it has been, has been the best decision of my life. Perhaps “freedom” has the necessity of defining itself within the constraints of discipline, commitment, and dare I say, loyalty and love.

“Entitlement”? Sure. Our Depression Era parents wanted to give us the best they could. Perhaps

they “spoiled” us. But what generation of parents don’t want to give their children greater opportunity for success than they had themselves? And sure, we were the “Me” generation. We still are. We think everything is about us. That all our ideas are “right.” And that right up to the ever-living end, we will toot our own horns and expect the rest of the world to perk up their ears and listen.

But c’mon, George. An entirely “failed” generation? Give us a break. What about our championing of individual rights? In the tradition of Jefferson and Whitman? “Song of Myself”? “Song of the Open Road”? From beatniks to hippies, from poets to procrastinators... our artist and outlaws have not all lived in vain, have they? Kerouac and Ginsberg, from just beyond your generation? Dylan and Jagger from mine? These heroes of the young, the dispossessed, these role models for legions of Boomer “fans” around the world, spoke truth to power, questioned authority, created new art forms, accused the “masters of war” of crimes too heinous for news journalists to report. And look at Muhammad Ali, born Cassius Clay in Louisville, Kentucky, who transcended his heavyweight boxing title to stand up to the US draft board by refusing to fight in the Vietnam War on moral grounds. Ali became the most famous and popular man in the world, not only for his electrifying and powerful boxing skills, but even more so as a moral compass for the entire planet.



The Baby Boomers transcended their generation; they effected and “changed the world,” as Ali liked to spout. Sure, there were casualties of too many drugs and over-indulgences in the ’60s: Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison, along with far too many unreported ones. These are the tragic and sad losses of some of our generation’s most prominent singers and musicians... just as similar high profile losses continue into today’s headlines. But then, look at the rash of violent murders during the Baby Boomers’ coming of age era: JFK, RFK, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King... such an outrage... such a burden, that we all had to bear.

But what price freedom, George? It was an explosive, revolutionary, and transformative time. Or at least that’s what we Boomers still like to believe.

We tried to change the very fabric of society. And we thought we did. We threw off the shackles of parental and governmental authority. We rejected the all-powerful influence of the mighty dollar. We stood up for those in society who didn’t have equal rights. We stood against convention and conformity. We ended a war. After that, you say we got too complacent. Too full of ourselves. What was left to protest against? Well, most of us, sadly, seemed to agree with you. We “grew up.” Got married. Had children... who we had to raise. We bent, some of us folded. We took practical jobs, made compromises, became “yuppies.” The magic and commitment of our youthful idealism took heavy body blows from a relentless political and practical reality.



And now... we’re 60-something. Or getting there. And we’re nearing, or at least considering... retirement. But America’s social contract with us has been broken. Ronald Reagan’s much-lauded trickle-down economics allowed the rich to get richer, while simultaneously condemning the poor and middle class to atrophy economically. Then George Dubya, who Mr. Will, you thanked for “bringing adults” back into government after the childish Boomerism of the Clintons... Dubya’s history-changing miscalculations and blunders into Iraq and Afghanistan... have cumulatively left most of us 99 percenters... disillusioned and untaken care of... at the end of the American Empire. We have lost the respect of our neighbors around the world, and we can’t afford or depend on a

reasonable and secure retirement for ourselves. Social security isn't enough and it soon may no longer even be guaranteed. We're being forced to gamble in the stock market with our 401(k)s, with our entire life savings, with our entire futures. It's not right, Mr. Will. We're "mad as hell" and we don't want to take it anymore.



But life goes on, eh, George? "It's not dark yet, but it's gettin' there", as haggard-looking Mr. Dylan recently sang to us, we still fiercely holding on to his poetic chronicles of our generation. We "will" not go out as "failures"? We "will" hold our heads high and we'll be proud of what we accomplished, of what we believed in, of what we are still trying to accomplish. We don't need a public apologist for our generation.



And lo and behold! Look at the recent 2014 AFI Lifetime Achievement Award... going to... of all people... Jane Fonda. You remember her, right, George? "Hanoi Jane"?

You probably trashed her moral and political "will" on more than one occasion, right? Well, she's even three years older than you... and look what she's accomplished in life. From the great expectations of growing up in a family of high-pressured Hollywood royalty, to becoming an international laughing stock as a celluloid Barbie Doll, Barbarella, to carving out an Oscar-decorated career as an actress, she then became a highly respected producer who gave women in Hollywood more credible and substantive parts in a mostly male-dominated industry. Next, she was practically driven out of "the business" for her left wing, "Commie-loving" politics, when having listened to "Born on the Fourth of July" paraplegic Vietnam War vet, Ron Kovic, she was convinced that the war was wrong, and she had the guts and the visibility to speak out against it. She then turned herself into the first international fitness guru, married Tom Hayden, then Ted Turner, and through it all, had the courage and conviction to keep on discovering... to keep on reinventing... to keep on being entirely... herself. Watch the AFI show. George. It's inspiring.

If anything, Mr. Will, I think that's the lesson of the '60s, from my generation of "failed" Baby Boomers. And that is... to follow our own truthful path, no matter how much pressure there might be to conform, to do things the conventional, ephemeral, straight-laced way. That's what Jane Fonda's life exemplifies, although she's not technically a Baby Boomer. She carved out her own path. And that's too, what our hero, our "spokesman", Mr. Dylan did, when his artistic needs no longer coincided with the 1960s folk and protest movement of the esteemed Pete Seeger and his beloved Joan Baez. He went his own way. He wrote his own songs. He took the blows of the press and carried on alone.

Who's to judge from history's far-sighted point of view on which generation is a "success," which a "failure", George? Each generation gets some things right, other things wrong. Life is complicated. Contradictory. You've chosen to pronounce us Baby Boomers "failures"; I've always wanted to sing our successes. We all have our opinions. And you know what they say about opinions and assholes? We all have them.

And finally, there is always the great Mr. Frost and his famous "road less traveled." Because for those of us still on that road, whether intellectually, philosophically, morally, and/or spiritually, it truly has "made all the difference."



Thanks for reading this, George. I look forward to your considered and truthful reply.

Yours, in journalistic camaraderie,

Eric Trules



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www.ericrules.com/blog

And his "e-travels with e. trules" blog at: *www.etravelswitherules.com/blog*

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