

Ask A Genius 51 – The American Election 2
Scott Douglas Jacobsen and Rick Rosner
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Scott: This recent election with President-elect Trump was different than previous ones.

Rick: Looking back at WWII, WWII was America coming together to fight. The generation that fought WWII made sacrifices. Everybody made sacrifices. The people at war and the people at home. Gathering newspapers and scrap metal and willingly putting up with food rationing, gas rationing, people who wouldn't normally go to work in factories going to work in factories. Americans fought WWII together. Americans did not fight 9/11 together.

Bush made it explicit. He said we tried to take action against the entities that committed 9/11 and told people to go shopping. There has been no draft for more than 30 years. Very small percentage of the population is involved with the military compared with past eras, and so most Americans were separate from the fight against people who attacked us on 9/11. We have a more individualistic way of being that is facilitated via social media and reality television shows. We always have had an individualistic streak.

Many guys in the 80s, including myself, walked around thinking of themselves a little bit as Rambo. Guys had it in the back of their mind that they could really take care of themselves in a fist fight or if we encountered a mugger or if we got involved in a road rage incident. We thought we could step out of the car and knock somebody's block off.

Scott: So, America had a unified vision of their direction and their group, Americans themselves. So, they had an idea of themselves as a society, and the direction and place they wanted the society to end up.

Rick: WWII was a definitely clear war with a definitely clear enemy or series of enemies. The Germans had evil intent and the Japanese were pretty terrible too. We thought of ourselves as the injured party being compelled to enter into war because of aggression committed against us. So, we were unified in fighting a big evil threat, but then you had a lot of stuff like unified Americanism. You had patriotism. You had the boy scouts. You had religion. You had high school. American high school was more or less a 20th century invention to give everybody an education in the general American society and principles of democracy to give everybody equal opportunity, whether it worked out that way or not. It was a comprehensive high school, meaning it encompassed everything.

Scott: Comprehensive high schools were to give Americans complete educations in the American way of life.

Rick: An American education, comprehensive high schools were, are, abridged versions of adult American life. They were little societies. My first high school had 2,000 students. My second high school had 3,000 students. The first high school worked better. It was more of a society. Everybody felt as though they could be a part of something, fitting in some place. The 3,000 student high school in Albuquerque - Highland High, Beavis and Butthead's high school by the

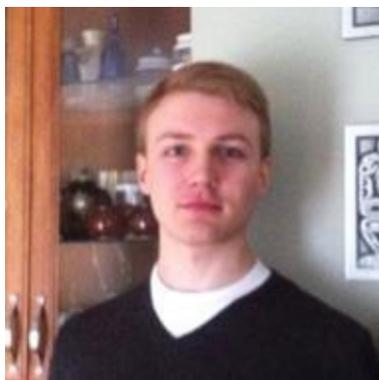
way, was dominated by like 50 super cool students who not only dominated sports and student council, but also overpopulated the AP classes.

So, you had a group of super cool kids and a bunch of kids putting in their time like "fuck this." There was less civic involvement in the affairs of high school, but in the stereotypic high school, like *Grease*, or every high school movie ever. You are looking at an abridged version of society, of adult society, that is more vicious because people are just learning to behave in society and haven't learned how to be over being assholes yet. But in real life versus movies, I'd say that people are probably nicer in high school than post-high school because most people in high school are still living in family units where they have things taken care of for them, which means there's less at stake and means people are slightly kinder.

I've been to a zillion high schools and feel that people are mostly nice in high school, or at least nicer in high school movies. Anyway, the things that drew us together in the 20th century as Americans. A lot or most of those things have eroded. The idea that being a boy scout or a girl scout. I don't know the percentage, but it's got to be pretty low compared to 80 years ago. Fewer people are participating in the military. You used to have everybody getting called up or at least had to be examined to see whether every male could be a suitable soldier. He, the generic guy, had to be drafted in the 70s, where every male was at risk of being forced to join the military.

Patriotism has eroded into various ones like conservative and liberal, which are very different flavors right now. Family life has been subject to, or at least aspirational family life with 2.3 kids with a dog and a house in addition to a mom and dad who are married, erosion. That has eroded. Monolithic culture has to some extent eroded. We went from 3 TV channels to an explosion of individualised entertainment. So, we're more individualistic.

So, collectivist slogans do not persuade us as much as they used to. The idea, which is probably more Republican right now, that people aren't good at stuff should, maybe, be left to fend for themselves and live lives that aren't as good if it is costing achievers. We can't support everybody in the style to which everybody would want to be supported. So, social media makes everybody feel special, or feel entitled. Drivers feel entitled. Not everybody, but a significant chunk of drivers feel entitled to drive dangerously while they absorb and interact with their social media, whether it is talking on a cell phone or more likely talking or playing games on a cell phone, or tablet, or whatever.



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