

The Millennials:

The Dumbest Generation or the Next Great Generation?

Frederick M. Hess

American Enterprise Institute

September 29, 2008

Related event materials are available online
at www.aei.org/event1766.

Who Are They?

- “This cohort is self-absorbed to the point of narcissism, consumed by fame and fortune, plagued by a sense of entitlement, and averse to concepts such as ‘paying your dues’ or ‘working your way to the top.’” – *San Diego Union-Tribune*, June 29, 2008
- “[Employers] are courting what may be the best-credentialed graduates ever produced by American colleges.... Today’s juniors and seniors are computer-literate, well-traveled, hyper-groomed and accustomed to competing for what they want.” – *The Washington Post*, June 8, 2008

Echoes of Generation X

- “In [Generation X’s] favor, it’s generally agreed, they can do five things at once: channel-surf, eat, talk on the phone, listen to music and type resumes for nonexistent jobs. But they can’t ... concentrate on any one activity for more than five minutes.” – *The New York Times*, February 14, 1993
- “Look out, yuppie scum. Here come the X'ers. Bitter. Bright. Unpredictable. Cocked to conquer the world. Uncertain if the world is worth the trouble.” – *The Washington Post*, July 8, 1991

What Do(n't) Millennials Know?

According to *Still at Risk*, a 2008 survey of 17-year-olds sponsored by Common Core, ...

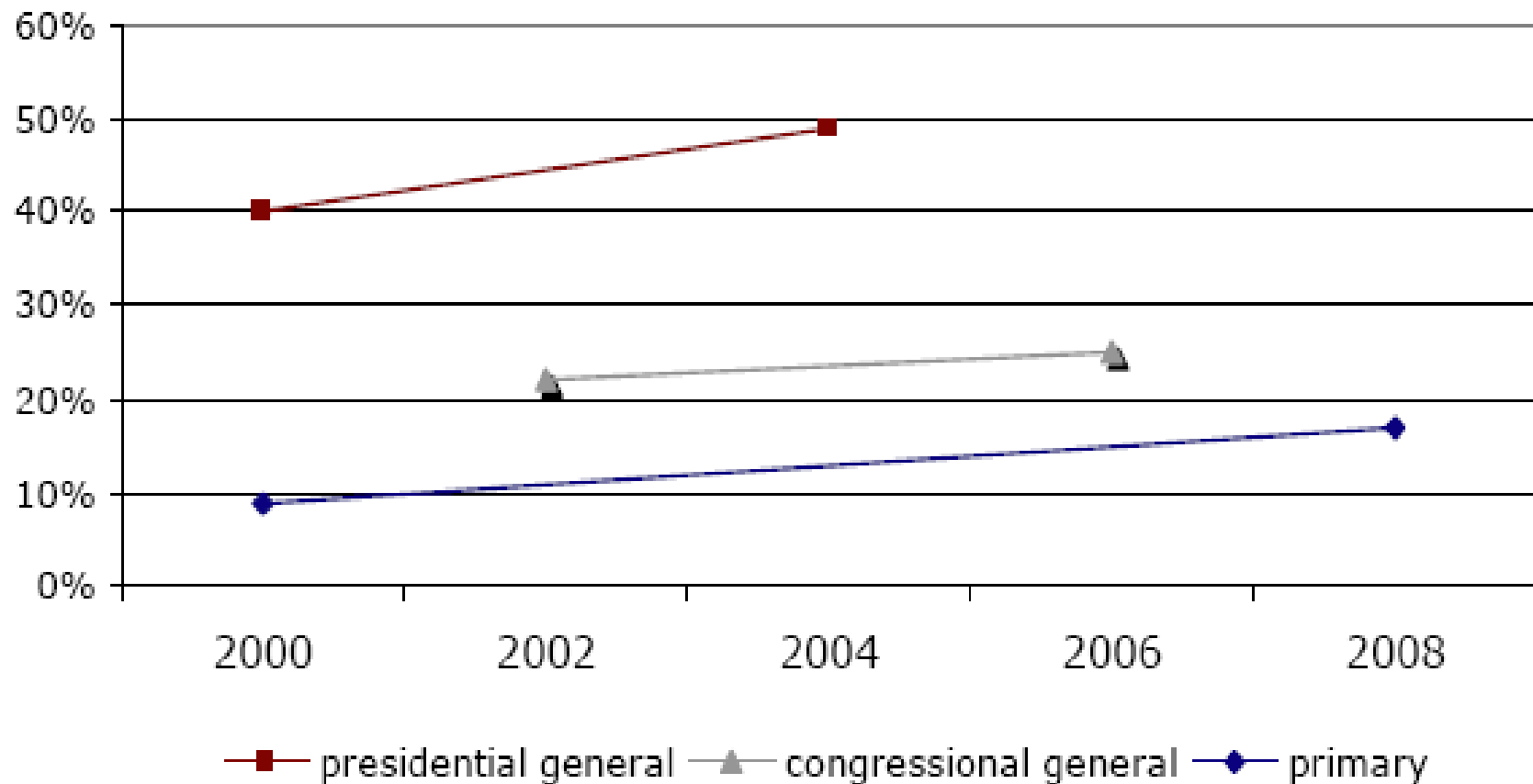
- More than 25% think that Columbus sailed for America after 1750.
- 30% could not identify “ask not what your country can do for you” as the words of JFK.
- 23% could not correctly identify Adolf Hitler.
- Just 52% correctly identified the plot of George Orwell’s *1984*.
- Just 50% knew that Job is known for his patience in the face of suffering.

International Competition

- “[The United States] is 16th out of 27 industrialized countries in the proportion who complete college.... This is particularly distressing news at a time when the baby boomers are aging and a growing proportion of the future work force comes from groups ... that have been ill served by our education system.” – *The New York Times*, April 25, 2008
- “The scores from the 2006 Program for International Student Assessment showed that U.S. 15-year-olds trailed their peers from many industrialized countries.... ‘How are our children going to be able to compete with the children of the world? The answer is not well,’ said former Colorado governor Roy Romer, chairman of Strong American Schools.” – *The Washington Post*, December 5, 2007

Political Participation

Graph 1: National Youth Voter Turnout, 2000-2008



Source: Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement

The Millennials:

The Dumbest Generation or the Next Great Generation?

Frederick M. Hess

American Enterprise Institute

September 29, 2008

Related event materials are available online
at www.aei.org/event1766.