

Becoming a Young Adult During Unprecedented Times

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I first knew I was living in unprecedented times in 2008 when I was 5 years old, sitting in my living room watching the first Black man be elected president. I do not remember the moment very well, but my family was thrilled, and I knew that something monumental had just taken place. I didn't think I would spend another 14 years living through unprecedented times, none of which were positive.

Racial injustice, climate change, gun violence, the Covid-19 pandemic, recessions, gender inequality, a failing education system, inequitable healthcare, and immigration are just a few of the unprecedented times that have shaped my life. Navigating young adulthood during these times has been more challenging than I would like to admit. I always envisioned my young adult years being full of self-discovery and exploration—and they have been. Still, I must admit that I heavily think about our world as it stands now and how I can navigate it to live the best life possible. It does not feel good existing in a system designed for me to fail or being unsure when the following infectious disease will force daily life to come to a screeching halt. I do not want to turn on the television and see another community reeling from the effects of gun violence. Furthermore, graduating from college during a recession is not ideal. And experiencing the effects of climate change in real-time and watching world leaders refuse to commit to saving the planet is something I will never understand. These have been the conditions that have shaped my perspectives and my decision-making. I smile and

nod when older generations say that my generation "will change the world" or that they have "faith in my generation." It is a career goal of mine, and many that I know, to change and improve systems like education, healthcare, gun control, and the criminal justice system. We were taught to leave things better than we found them, and that is what we intend to do; however, we cannot change the world on our own. It requires a collective effort from older and future generations. It requires those with old ways of thinking to open their minds or step aside.

My generation has been granted the invaluable power of knowing better, and we plan to do better. Still, we cannot push against the brick wall that is backward thinking by people who refuse to turn over positions of power to the next generation. We have been asked to adapt and evolve throughout our lives. We adjusted to the pandemic and went to school under the threat of gun violence. We have adjusted to floods and fires destroying our communities. We have inherited a world full of flaws, and I do not want to spend my life fixing problems I did not create. I want to notice and feel the positive changes in our society. This does not mean the world will be rid of all its problems, but we can stop fighting for fundamental human rights like education, healthcare, and safety. It means that everyone has a fair opportunity to live a life they can be proud of and turn that opportunity into a reality.

An essential characteristic of my generation is that we are not hopeless. These are issues that will not be fixed overnight, maybe not even in our lifetimes, but that doesn't mean we will not work to create a better world. One of the biggest lessons I was taught growing up, which I still carry with me, is that life will continue with or without you. Why waste time idly standing by when we could grab on and steer the world in the direction we want it to go in?

