

Viva the Vital
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A Look Back at the Twenty Tens: The Boomer Decade

By Matt Thornhill

How fast those ten years went by. Just yesterday it was December 31, 2009. Now, in the blink of an eye it is December 31, 2019. Those Twenty Tens went by in a (artificially-enhanced) heartbeat.

Let's look back at what happened and why the Twenty Tens will be forever known as the Boomer Decade. Some of the highlights:

No doubt the watershed event of the last ten years was the day Congress moved the full-benefits retirement age to 75. No other action, political or otherwise, has had as much impact on the events of the last ten years than unforgettable day in April 2014. From that day forward, everything changed. The stock markets finally sprang back to life, after six long years of an endless plateau caused by the Great Recession which started in 2008. From 2014 until now the market has grown 150%, making the retirement accounts of everyone at any age robust again. Of course, the growth of the biotechnology industry fed much of that rebound.

The passage of the Retirement Age Correction Act in 2014 created a new social contract between the young and old in America, as well as the haves and the have-nots. The key driver of the landmark legislation was recognition that the much higher levels of obesity among Boomers at age 60 and beyond means the life span for that TV generation was not lengthening, like that of the previous generations. The median lifespan of an overweight Boomer at 75 was only 4.7 years, compared to 9.8 years for someone in the normal weight range from the Silent generation, who by age 75 had already collected ten years or more of payments. It does pay to exercise, for sure.

The change will enable the federal government to provide for those Boomers who don't make it to 75, starting in 2021, to earn enough from Social Security to live a comfortable, if modest, retirement. Since one out of three Boomers did not save for retirement, this is a godsend from the U.S. government.

An offshoot of this new legislation is that those older Boomers who left the workforce earlier in the decade at age 65 returned to earn more money to qualify for more benefits. Their encore careers were not as greeters in one of the nation's 80,000 Walmart stores. Instead, older Boomers sought jobs where they could tap into their vast experience and education to help solve other problems facing society.

Case in point: The influx of experienced teachers into the school system has transformed public education in this country. Boomers with life experiences are teaching young Americans valuable skills to enable them to compete against India and China, the two global superpowers.

Even Boomers who stayed retired found time to give back to society, mentoring young adults in business. In fact, it was two Boomers who provided the direction and mentoring to this decade's greatest entrepreneurs, the Smith Brothers, inventors of the hydrogen car. Without the guidance and insight from their Boomer mentors, the Smith Brothers claim, they never would have given up solving the hydrogen fuel issue and instead would have pursued canned cheese. Boomers, as a generation, can

take pride in getting the Millennial Generation to finally stop multitasking, focus on the job at hand, and actually accomplish something *worthy* of a Facebook entry.

Boomers didn't stop there, of course. They helped swing the morality pendulum back towards decency and responsibility. While Boomers in their youth created a culture that seemingly celebrated criminal, abnormal and divisive behavior (remember the old TV shows "Law & Order" and "CSI?"), as older adults, they have used their power of the wallet and the ballot to force both Hollywood and Washington to act more responsibly. Individuals, once more, are being held accountable for their actions. The new Age of Responsibility is upon us. The world in which the grandchildren of Boomers live is a much better place than that of their children.

Boomers also ended forever the idea of segregating older adults from the rest of society in places called "Shady Oaks" and the like. They live with their children and grandchildren, or with their peers, looking after each other.

No doubt, we still have a host of problems to solve. The War on Terror rages on. Airport strip searches are the norm. But we also find ourselves living in an America with a renewed sense of purpose. One where we can make changes for the good. Where we can work together to solve problems. And we can all get along.

Even the Boomers.

We wonder what the next ten years will bring.