

BY WILLIAM H. FREY

Just when they slipped your mind, Baby Boomers are about to make history again. This year, the first members of the generation that once never trusted anyone over 30 will begin celebrating their 70th birthdays – leading a train of more than 65 million others who will pass that threshold over the next two decades.

While eclipsed by the Millennials in media visibility, the Boomers will continue to make their mark, this time around by bringing a new demographic sensibility to what it means to be 70. In part, this is a matter of sheer numbers. But it's also true that Boomers have a striking propensity to generate socioeconomic change.

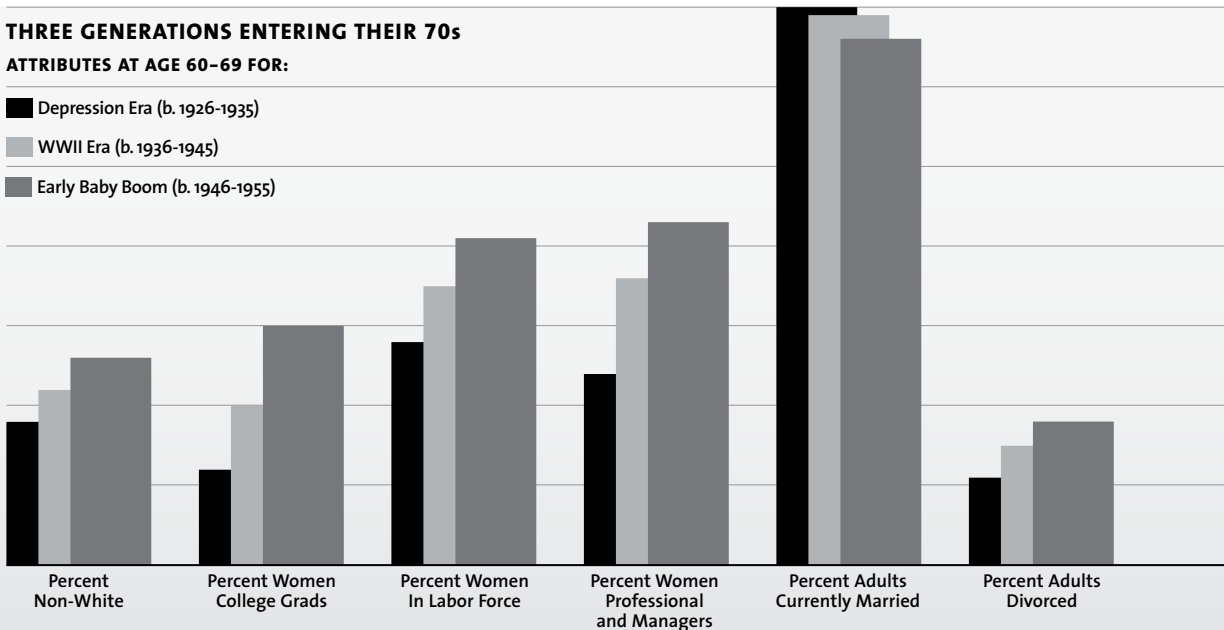
Early Boomers are not only more racially

diverse than previous generations at this age, but also more diverse than they themselves were in the younger years, thanks to immigration by Latinos and Asians. By the same token, the women's movement (along with frustration with stagnant wages) has narrowed gender inequity in the workplace to a far greater degree for Boomers than for prior seniors. Fully 30 percent of early Boomer women are

THREE GENERATIONS ENTERING THEIR 70s

ATTRIBUTES AT AGE 60–69 FOR:

- Depression Era (b. 1926-1935)
- WWII Era (b. 1936-1945)
- Early Baby Boom (b. 1946-1955)



SOURCE: William H. Frey analysis of Current Population Surveys, 1995, 2005, 2015

now college graduates, a far larger figure than for similarly aged women in the World War II-era and Depression-era generations. And even though they are past peak labor force participation age, they remain far ahead of women of the same age from previous generations.

As young adults, early Boomers were notorious for resisting the traditional family structure of the 1950s, delaying marriage, bearing fewer children and, for women especially, placing greater emphasis on careers. And they remain less likely to be married and more likely to be divorced than the two prior generations.

Finances are also brighter – though hardly coming up roses – for Boomers. Poverty rates are relatively low (at 10 percent) compared to the national poverty rate (15 percent in 2014). And a study by the Pew Charitable Trusts predicts that early Boomer retirees will be able to replace a solid 70 to 80 percent of their preretirement income.

Along with economic power, the large number of Boomers (and their inclination to

vote) promises growing political strength. If they turn out at 2012 rates in 2016 (a pretty big if), the Boomers will generate 35 percent of all votes cast, compared with 24 percent from lower turnout Millennials.

Republican candidates may see Boomers as their best hope for success because they are whiter and more conservative than younger Americans. But Pew Research Center polls in 2014 in fact show that 49 percent of early Boomers identify or lean Democratic, while only 41 percent identify or lean Republican.

Indeed, while their lifestyles may differ sharply from those of today's youth, the generation gap is likely narrower than in the past. And (I hope) this presages an opportunity for building a majority with common political goals and an inclination to compromise.



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