

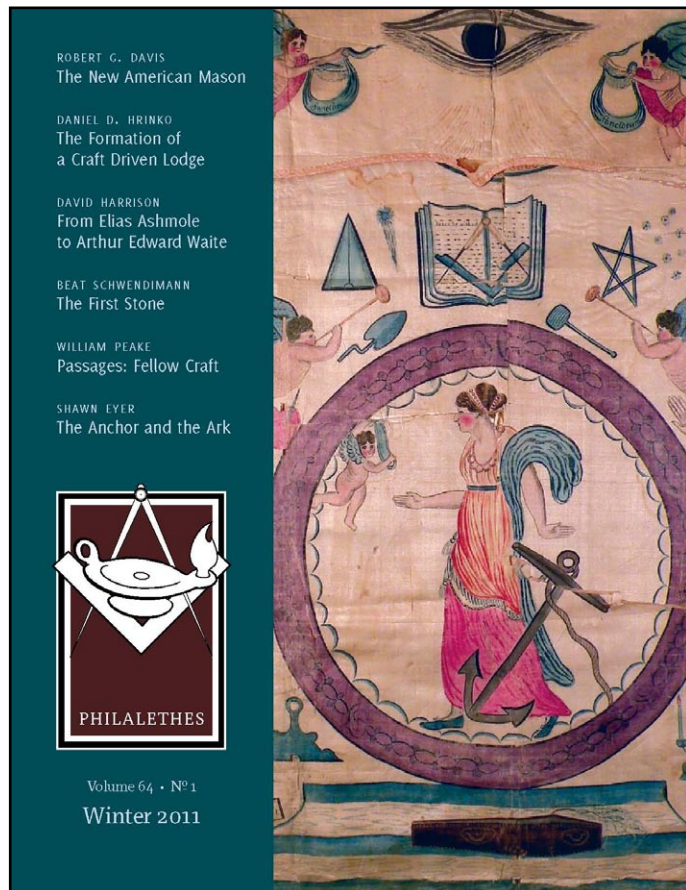


Sample Article from Volume 64 • Nº 1

ROBERT G. DAVIS

## The New American Mason: Generations Together in Private Conclaves of Manhood

Explaining the truth about the generation gaps in  
Freemasonry, and showing how to overcome obstacles  
and address the real needs of today's new brethren.



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# The New American Mason

## GENERATIONS TOGETHER IN PRIVATE CONCLAVES OF MANHOOD

IN HIS ADDRESS FROM LAST YEAR'S ANNUAL MEETING, ROBERT G. DAVIS ENCOURAGES THE CRAFT TO EMBRACE ALL GENERATIONS IN FRATERNITY

In 2005, biologists created mice with small amounts of human brain cells in order to make realistic models of neurological disorders. In the world of astrophysics, the Huygens probe landed on Titan, the largest moon of Saturn. In mathematics, the first 13<sup>th</sup> root of a two hundred digit number was mentally computed by a Frenchman in less than 9 minutes. And the world hardly noticed.

And another little statistic which slipped by us just as unnoticed was the fact that 2005 marked the year when the scale tipped in the American work place once and for all. In 2005, Generation X-ers and Generation Y-ers together became the majority of the work force in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

It's a pretty sobering thought for those of us who are Baby-Boomers to realize that you fellows who were born after 1965 now make up over 50 percent of the workforce in our country. We are on our way out. In fact, 330 of us turn 60 every hour.<sup>2</sup> And if you think we've got it bad, consider the poor generation before us—those are the old men you mostly know

from church and lodge. In two more years, those guys will virtually disappear from the workplace. And their traditional skills, knowledge, wisdom, and institutional memory will disappear with them.

All of this has implications for the future of Freemasonry because, of course, all of us are now participating in the activities of lodge. Even though this was not true of the last century, today our more active lodges comprise all generations. For the first time, we old fellows are fully engaged in lodges made up of three to four generations of men.

This means that if we, as Masonic leaders, are going to make wise decisions regarding how the Masonic experience is going to play out in this multi-generational and multicultural world of our present century, the first thing we need to know is if there are indeed significant generational differences among men, and do these matter in the lodge?

Let's briefly discuss the four generations that we encounter in lodge these days, and then learn a bit about what will happen next.

First, there are the WWII-era traditionals—born before 1928. This is Tom Brokaw's purported Greatest Generation. One to two occupation, career-oriented fellows, most of whom have already been retired for many years. This group is not very fond of communication in general, and when they are forced

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to write, they tend to do it with pen in hand. The traditionals communicate mainly by telling stories to each other, knowing full well they've told the same stories many times before; yet enjoying the outcome just as much each time. As a group, it's safe to say they aren't hanging out much of any place anymore except home, senior centers, veteran halls, assisted living centers, and Masonic lodges.

The second group is the Schwarzkopfers—born between 1928 and 1946. These guys were the in-betweeners; born too late to participate in WWII and too early to be a flower child. They were stuck between the veterans of the Great War and the Me-generation Boomers. They were young adults when it was hip to be teenagers and in their thirties when you couldn't trust anyone over thirty. By the time the flower children were making free love, not war, these guys were in their forties and already knew love was not free.<sup>3</sup> Not knowing quite where to fit in, most just tuned into TV, fell in love with classic cars, enjoyed holding hands when they danced, and institutionalized the consumption of domestic full-calorie, un-neutered beer. Now leaving the workplace in huge numbers, they will essentially all be retired in three more years. They hang out at golf courses, retirement communities, coffee shops, and yes, Masonic halls.

Next, there are the Baby Boomers—there are actually two brands of Boomer—old and not so old. The old guys are called the Woodstockers, born between 1946 and 1954. The not-so-old are called Young Boomers, born between 1954 and 1964. Mind you, this dual distinction is a thing that Baby Boomers have mainly created among themselves—primarily because the younger group doesn't like to be called rock and rollers and the old group is not willing to give the younger guys credit for being social revolutionists. The main difference in Baby Boomers is that the Woodstockers were always in the right historical place at the right time. They were kids when

it was cool to be kids, teens when it was cool to be teens, and were in their twenties when you couldn't trust anybody over thirty. The Young Boomers, on the other hand, learned early on that you couldn't trust politicians, and idealism won't turn into action without hard work. They were the first generation in our time to discover that real change unfolds from the inside, not the outside.<sup>4</sup> You will sometimes find Baby Boomers spending time with their grandkids because they still feel guilty about how little time they gave to their own kids while out slaying the dragons of their own self-absorbed, uh, selves. You will find them hanging out with long time friends, non-profit community volunteer groups, community boards and committees, Lions and Rotary clubs, and, yes, even Masonic lodges. They are the second-largest group joining Freemasonry today.

Next come the GenXers—born between 1965 and 1977. If any generation got off to a bad start at no fault of their own, it would have to be the GenXers. They were born during one of the most blatantly anti-child eras in U.S. history. Their Schwarzkopf and Baby Boomer parents had the highest divorce and abortion rates, the highest number of dual income families, and the most permissive parenting habits in history.

The GenXers were the first generation to be told they would not be as well off as their parents. They never developed connections with the old institutions that their parents rebelled against, such as churches, schools, corporations and political parties. They became the most unsupervised generation of our time.<sup>5</sup> Is it any wonder that they grew into independent, goal-oriented entrepreneurial thinkers whose ease with technology and information forever changed how we look at the world? Oh, you can find them hanging out with their kids. Since they were abandoned as children, they are intensely dedicated to being parents. They define their success

GenXers and Millennials are currently the most interested in us. They want to be on the journey of self-development and improvement. They seek truth. They desire authenticity. They want a tribe. They need the influence of elders. They covet brotherhood.

by their ability to create the life that they want. Flex hours, contract work, and telecommunications are their world. You will find them hanging out with family, friends, hobbies, vacations, think tanks and career development centers. But their drive for lasting relationships, long-term bonds of loyalty, and wise mentors who can teach them things they never took the time to learn, leads them also to . . . you got it . . . Masonic lodges.

After the Xers come the Millennials (GenYers)—born after 1977. If there was ever a generation erected and honed for Freemasonry, it is the Millennials. Children of Baby Boomers and younger siblings of the GenXers, this group is coming of age in the most expansive economy of our time. They will be the global citizens. Told by their parents and teachers that they would make a difference in the world, they truly believe they will. They are the most socially-conscious generation in the last fifty years, and we can expect to see them engaged in social, environmental, and health-related causes for the rest of their days.

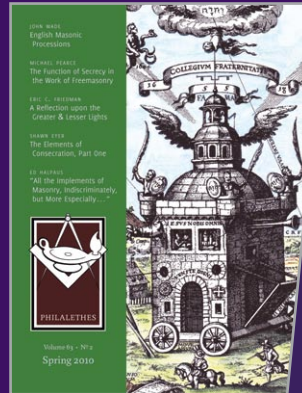
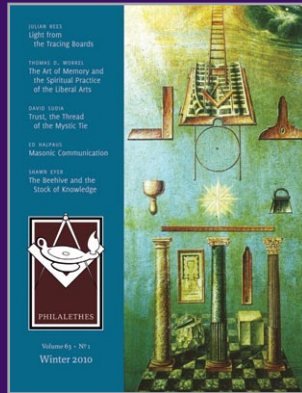
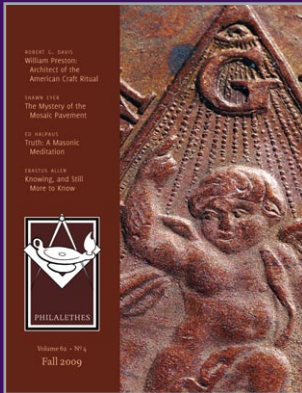
Yes, they may know all there is to know about designer drugs, violent video games, sexually charged advertising, and being bombarded by TV, music and movies, but they were influenced by education-minded Baby Boomer parents and they know that education is key to their success. They are poised to be lifelong learners. And fueled by their facility for technology and their digital adeptship, they will be ready to learn, anywhere, anytime.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, they have been sidetracked with some deep economic and

global realities over the past few years. But they are team players, and thrive on doing meaningful things with meaningful people in meaningful ways. You will find them hanging out with socially-conscious individuals and organizations. You will find them at sports gyms, golf courses, lecture halls, marathons for social causes, internet cafés, social networking sites, cigar bars, and, yes—Masonic lodges.

But move over, Millennials because the eldest among you are fast approaching thirty, and there is another generation behind you just begging for attention. This new group has just been named the iGeneration. The iGeneration, born after 1993, are still kids, but there's a lot we need to know about them because they will be joining our lodges in the next five years.

First, the oldest of these guys, who are just now graduating from high school, don't remember a time without the constant connectivity to the world that digital technology has brought them. They're growing up with expectations of always being socially present—ever available to peers, wherever they are. It's hard to believe, but the tech-dominated life experience of those born since the early 90's is so different from the Millennials that they warrant the distinction of their own generation. Because for them, it's not only about technology; it's about mindset. The little "i" in the iGeneration stands for "individualized." Everything has been customized and individualized for each person in this group. Their distinctive characteristics are their adeptness

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at multitasking, their desire for immediacy, and their ability to use technology to create a vast array of content.<sup>7</sup> It is nothing for teens and pre-teens to post videos on each others' Facebook walls using webcams. This group has high expectations that whatever they want or can use will be tailored to their own needs and wishes and desires—because everything, in fact, is. To them, portability is the key. They are inseparable from their wireless devices. Because they're not yet out on their own, you will find them connected to each other on their mobile devices twenty-four hours a day. Text messaging is so pervasive in this group that they have to tell each other to stop so they can go to sleep.

So there you have it. We are an organization that will, in the very near future, have as many as five generations of males in lodge at the same time. In fact, it has been in only the last seventy years that we have had just two generations in lodge. This explains why we have paid so little attention to the young generations in lodge in our time. It was such a rarity that it didn't seem to count for much.

But this is all rapidly changing. In the lodges that are now growing in member numbers across the American landscape, the Traditionals and Schwartzkopfers are no longer in the majority. And this means that, very soon, our lodges will cease being ruled with a 1950's set of eyes.

In today's changing Masonic culture, there are exciting new things to be aware of, grave implications to consider, and sober opportunities that will either be reaped or passed over in our multi-generational lodges. Tomorrow's Freemasonry will have to be consciously reflective about how it handles these different generations in lodge.

## **SO WHERE DO WE START?**

To me, the obvious point of beginning is to make some important changes while holding to the foundational

basis of an initiatic society. Regardless of what we do, we must always recognize that, through a man's initiation, passing and raising, he is participating in one of the oldest traditions of manhood. In every culture the world has ever known, men have yearned to be initiated into manhood. It is fundamental to a man's understanding of his own process of growth. We facilitate this important need through our ritual ceremonies and through our interconnectedness as men—that is, through the meaningful conversations we have together as men. Our fraternal goal is to become fulfilled as men. This is the pathway to mature masculinity. Our corporate task is to make sure that every generation in lodge is on it.

So what does such a path entail? Well, we know at a minimum that it has to prescribe the virtues of manliness; it needs to enhance and extend the male tradition; and it should raise the awareness of what it means to be a man. You may see the Masonic ritual as nothing more than a pleasant tour through morals and ethics, but I can assure you we are dealing here with a much deeper voyage. It is nothing less than the journey to accountable and responsible manhood. And, for men, that means it is an expedition into oneself. It is a passage that can only occur in the sacred space of the lodge and in the social space surrounding the lodge experience. And its effectiveness wholly depends on the path that each lodge chooses to adopt for the journey of its own members.

This is where we now need to pay a lot of attention to our younger Brothers. It is the GenXers and the Millennials who are currently the most interested in us. These are the most studied generations in history. We know, for instance, that they seek a common identity with other men. They want to be on the journey of self-development and improvement. They want patriarchy and role-modeling to guide them to mature and manly judgment. They seek truth. They desire authenticity. They want a

tribe. They need the influence of elders. They covet brotherhood. They seek meaning in their lives. They have values and want confirmation that these values are prevalent across all generations of men. And they want to follow through on these values with personal action. They are interested in how men are connected, how relationships can have meaning across generations. They want to know why they are here, what will bring them fulfillment, and what fraternity can offer them.<sup>8</sup>

If we are not facilitating all these needs through meaningful conversations both in and out of lodge, then we are not likely to be a match for the new generations entering into our experience.

Further, studies engaged in researching the needs of men in today's society are indicating that an organization that is centered on education, spiritual development and fraternal bonding may be the most powerfully compelling organization to join for men who fall within the 19 to 40 age range.<sup>9</sup> We need to pay attention, because this is the population that will most likely determine if we will thrive and grow as an American institution over the next few decades.

And there are a couple of things we need to know about the Millennials. Their expectations of Masonry are so high that they intuitively assume the men they will meet in lodge will know a lot about Masonry. Sadly, we are finding that their largest disappointment is in the first impression they receive when they encounter lodge for the first time. Too often, the men there are not paying any attention to the sacred space they are in; nor do they seem to know much at all about Freemasonry. What our young brothers

are finding is that what happens in lodge is *not* like what they have read or perceived about us.

And this is a key thing for the rest of us to understand. These young men have generally already done a lot of reading and have formulated a strong intellectual opinion about us. They often come into the Craft knowing far more about it (or aspects of it) than we do. They have sifted through the good and the bad, heard the very best men discuss Freemasonry, and have arrived at their own conclusions that Freemasonry is a venue for truth-seeking, a vehicle for self-development, a quest for the spiritual. There are secret associations to be discovered there, and these associations are not doctrinal, they have not been filtered by political and religious bias.

Many young men are coming into our Order with these kinds of expectations of discovery and personal improvement. What they too often find is an organization where old men with old ideas rule, where little happens of substance, where 90 percent of the members are unseen and inactive, and where behaviors practiced in lodge are remarkable only in their mediocrity and collective lack of understanding in both its organizational purpose and its relevance to the individual.

For our young seeker who experiences this kind of lodge, it will require an extraordinary amount of work and understanding on the part of the lodge to expect to keep him as a member. The difference between his perception and their perspective of the lodge experience is just too extreme. I am becoming increasingly fearful that if we do not change our vision and behaviors of what we are supposed to do in lodge,

I am becoming increasingly fearful that if we do not change our vision and behaviors of what we are supposed to do in lodge, we may lose the last generation of men who can save us from our own demise.

we may lose the last generation of men who can save us from our own demise. If that should happen, men will no longer have the opportunity to connect with each other in the old way, where the torch of manhood is continuously passed from one generation to the next in the respectful conclaves of fraternity.

### SET THE CRAFT AT WORK

So how do we address this challenging and perplexing disconnect between the old men and the new boys? As older men, I believe we start by asking our younger men to bring education to our lodge. It is wrong for us to feel threatened because we don't know much about Masonry. After all, we were not taught anything about it in our own time. And precious few of us decided to find out on our own.

We old birds should begin by admitting the effects the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War eras had on our collective generations;<sup>10</sup> explain this to our young members, put all that behind us and start living for today and tomorrow. Let us find out what expectations the young men have of their fraternal experience and then let's ask them to help us create it. Let us also find out where they are getting their information about Freemasonry, what books they are reading, and who they are listening to. It wouldn't hurt us to play a little catch up by traveling the same path they are traveling in learning about us.

The point is that today's men coming into our lodges are connected like never before through the use of technology. The Internet can be accessed from anywhere, and from any digital or handheld device. He is an adept at using these technologies to inform his lodge brothers, collaborate on research, and communicate informally about every aspect of his life.

The more that technology drives the way we receive information and communicate, the more Freemasonry will become affected by what happens

online. For the most part, this is a good thing. From the perspective of the older generation men, they can learn a lot about what men are thinking about if they will join their younger brothers on the social network sites. They can learn a lot of Masonry by making note of useful websites and the many blogs of sanity available at their fingertips. The digital highway simply provides an inexhaustible supply of Masonic information. From essays of sentiment to research papers to forum discussions and schedules of events of Masonic note happening worldwide, this information is instantly available, and enables the curious to find answers to virtually every question. He can literally explore the many corners of the Masonic world on the web.

He will find information from the deepest philosophical musings to the most intricate research papers on Masonic symbolism, history, and legends. He will find the names of the most prestigious men who have been Masons and will discover that enough political power has, at one time or another, been vested in the Order to change the world.

He will chase the sometimes incomprehensible meanderings of Masonry's purported associations with the ancient initiatic orders, the kabbalah of the Jewish mystics, and the tarot of the Bohemians. There is hardly a subject that can be mentioned that cannot in some way be tied to Masonry's glorious and/or secret past.

But as good as the good information is, digital accessibility also provides us with the worst of the worst. It astonishes us with questions about regularity and recognition. It stuns us with the disenfranchised among us who live only to discredit the prestige of our Order. Our worst dirty laundry is instantly shot across the planet whenever a Grand Master or Grand Lodge does a stupid thing. It exposes the prejudices, the shallow-mindedness, the contentiousness and the most condescending among us. It confuses us



with conspiracy theories and even condemns us to hell for espousing our way of life.

All of this matters! Whatever journey has been taken, or lost secret revealed while on the information highway, the Internet will, in the end, inform a young man's perception of Freemasonry. This is what he expects to undertake and partake in when he finally encounters the brick and mortar world of lodge. He dreams it will make a huge difference to him when he joins. In reality, he may indeed find beautiful and compelling ritual, delivered with soul-shaking meaning, within dark and eccentric settings of fraternity. He may partake face to face in the intellectually stimulating conversations of Masonic philosophy and history.

Or he may encounter unimpressive, badly performed work, conversations of only the most trivial and mundane nature, and the ignorance and incompetence of men who never once in their lives contemplated what it might have meant to be real men. He may find that the Order which once excited him is, in reality, a mediocre club of uninspired men who no longer care about the fraternity or the heritage that erected it.

We simply cannot let this reality continue.

## **PREPARING THE WAY FORWARD**

In my view, the solution to Freemasonry in the twenty-first century is to become what the information highway informs us is the ideal reality of our fraternal society. We must come to understand the Masonry which men plead for, learn about, opine over, and discuss online is the Masonry they must come to find in lodge. We must prepare our lodge for this reality. We must affirm face to face in our brick and mortar world what our rituals tell us we are; we must embrace the ground our fraternal society once trod; become the kind of men who once influenced our teachings, and reinforce in our private conclaves

of men what we discuss when we are globally connected together in our fascinating and intellectual world of digital exchanges.

The very best model for us today is to get back to the meaningful fraternalism and education enjoyed by three or four generations of men sharing the mutual quest of discovering the mature masculine within themselves, which leads them to personal development, self improvement and clarity of understanding.

If we want to connect with the GenXers or the Millennials, our task as lodge brothers together is to guide the consciousness of our lodge, that spiritual path of collective man-work, which is the old essence of Freemasonry. In our tyled spaces and our untyled associations, we elevate the status of being men.

My Brothers, if we will simply allow these young men to be an integral and significant part of the right experience—an experience they have imagined for themselves through the magic of technology—they will move the craft to places it can only imagine. If we leave them out of the experience they have dreamed together, they may leave us so fast we won't have time to remember their names.

Our formula for success is not difficult. Rather, it is intuitive and natural. It is the old principle of reconciling the opposites within. As the older generation members in lodge, we must commit to freely give to our young brothers the stability and knowledge, the guidance and wisdom that can only come from life experience, while they re-create for us the Freemasonry they want and we once craved, but never knew.

The balance will be in the pure and joyful magic of brotherhood that can only be shared by genuinely honest and fraternal men.

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the primitive era of Masonic ritual and practice, a mindset drawn more from late medieval thinking than the coming enlightenment—a older perspective in which the legacies of the ancient Patriarchs were regarded as real and relevant. It teaches us that Freemasonry belongs to all good men who believe in the Supreme Being. It symbolizes the divine preservation of the Craft tradition against forces that would destroy it. And it represents our precious hope for peace after the relentless storms that life can bring our way.

## NOTES

1. The phrase can be ultimately traced to Preston's 1788 edition of *Illustrations* (89–90), and appears in Webb's 1797 *Monitor* (88). Although this series of emblems is often treated as though denoting only simplistic lessons, Preston says that "This section is indispensibly necessary to be understood by every Master of a Lodge." (90)
2. For a survey of the early symbolism of the Beehive, see Shawn Eyer, "The Beehive and the Stock of Knowledge," *Philalethes* 63 (2010): 35–37, 42.
3. James Anderson, *Constitutions of the Free-Masons* (London: W. Hunter, 1723), 1–48.
4. Colin Dyer, *William Preston and His Work* (Shepperton, UK: Lewis Masonic, 1987), 278.
5. See Lewis Edwards, "Anderson's Book of Constitutions of 1738," *AQC* 41(1928): 357–417. Edwards states that Anderson "misused" his opportunity to write history and instead produced "fairy-tales." (417)
6. Anderson, *Constitutions* (1723), 3.
7. William Smith, *A Pocket Companion for Free-Masons* (London: E. Rider, 1734), 2.
8. Neville Barker Cryer, *Delving Further Beyond the Craft* (Hersham, UK: Lewis Masonic, 2009), 13–17.
9. See the full reprint in D. Knoop, D. P. Jones & D. Hamer (Eds.), *The Early Masonic Catechisms* (Manchester University Press, 1943), 89–96, as well as the important discussion in David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 144–47.
10. Anderson, *Constitutions* (1738), 4.
11. Laurence Dermott, *Ahiman Rezon* (1756), 25.
12. Anderson, *Constitutions* (1738), 143–44.
13. Thomas Smith Webb, *A Freemason's Monitor* (1802), 79.

## THE NEW AMERICAN MASON

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## NOTES

1. C. A. Martin & Bruce Tulgan, *Managing the Generation Mix: From Urgency to Opportunity* (Amherst, Mass.: HRD Press, 2006), xxi. The descriptions of generations given in this paper were paraphrased from information contained in this book; although the emphasis of the work was on managing the generation mix in the workplace.
2. Martin & Tulgan, *Managing the Generation Mix*, xxiii.
3. Martin & Tulgan, *Managing the Generation Mix*, 4.
4. Martin & Tulgan, *Managing the Generation Mix*, 22–24.
5. Martin & Tulgan, *Managing the Generation Mix*, 39–40.
6. Martin & Tulgan, *Managing the Generation Mix*, 55–56.
7. Sharon Jayson, "iGeneration Has No Off Switch," *USA Today*, Life Section D, February 10, 2010, D-1,2.
8. Robert G. Davis, *Understanding Manhood in America* (Lancaster, Va.: Anchor Communications, 2005), 148–49.
9. For a good discussion of the interests, strengths and cultural values of the Millennials, see W. Strauss & N. Howe, *The Fourth Turning* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998) and M. Winograd & M.D. Hais, *Millennial Makeover: MySpace, YouTube & the Future of American Politics*. Knowledge growth, social consciousness, and spiritual integrity appear to be qualities fundamental to the psychology of Gen Y.
10. See Davis, *Understanding Manhood in America*, chapters 6 & 7. The migration of men seeking jobs during the Depression era brought an end to employment stability at home, along with the demise of the three generation male household and a regular and close communication between family males. The WWII era brought thousands of men into Freemasonry, giving lodges little time to incorporate anything into the Masonic experience other than performing the ritual ceremonies of initiation, passing, and raising. This created a new generation of men in lodge who were taught nothing about Masonry beyond its rituals. The Cold War era created a kind of provincial protectionism among American institutions and isolated fraternal men even further from the outside culture.

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