

# SIX GENERATIONS: ONE FREEMASONRY

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## ABSTRACT

2018 brought with it many unforgettable events including the historic summit in Singapore between President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, the #MeToo movement went global, Sears filed for bankruptcy and for the first time since 1866 a rare “super blue blood moon” appeared.<sup>1</sup> The year 2018 was also the first occurrence of six different generational cohorts or groups into our fraternity, of whom its members come from all different age groups, backgrounds, life experiences, and Masonic journeys. With this, we can witness relationships between each group. Do we truly understand who makes up each generation? Understanding the “who” behind each generation of Freemasons will allow our lodges to not only grow in knowledge but also to push forward into the future.

Using the definitions that will follow herein, for the first time in Freemasonry we are now able to sit in lodge with men from six different generational cohorts or groups. A common interest in fellowship, ritual, and education is now uniting brothers as young as 18 years old (in some jurisdictions) and over 100 years old. Access to decades of knowledge, understanding, experience, and skills are now available to our Brothers, as long as we are willing to listen, learn and teach.

Let us begin by first discussing, at a high level, the rollercoaster ride that our membership numbers have been on since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even the youngest Entered Apprentice Mason may discover that our membership has been on a steady and constant decline since the early 1960s.<sup>2</sup> To consider the “why” behind this decline, we must also consider the men who make up our fraternity – the “numbers,” per se. After a review of some data and statistics, we will review the characteristic traits of each generation while also looking at the current populations of each. Ultimately, looking through a different lens and at each generation, we can

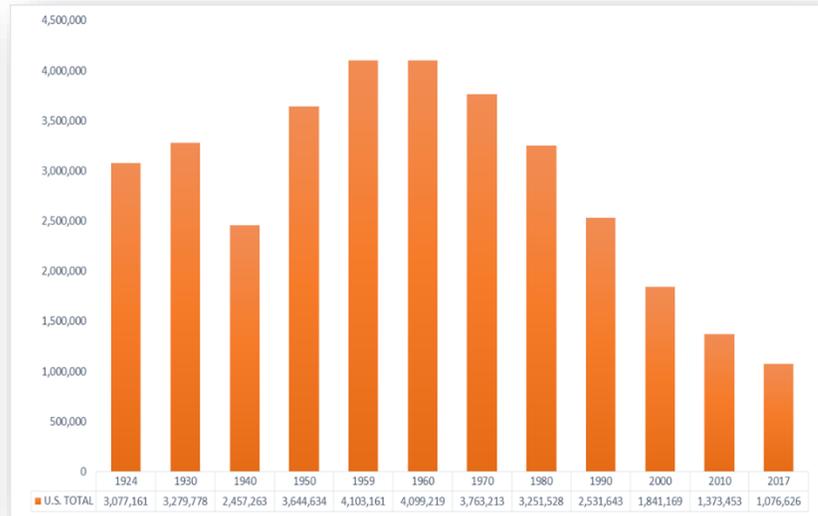
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<sup>1</sup> History.com Editors. (2018, December 6). 2018 Events. Retrieved April 2020, from <https://www.history.com/topics/21st-century/2018-events>

<sup>2</sup> Masonic Service Association of North America. (n.d.). Masonic Membership Statistics 2016-2017. Retrieved April 2020, from <https://www.msana.com/msastats.asp#totals>

better understand how and why we should work together as Freemasons. We will not find the answer today, but we will better understand our fraternity and Brothers.

The Masonic Service Association of North America began tracking membership totals of American Freemasonry in 1924.<sup>3</sup> Most reading this paper are probably already aware of these numbers and have seen a version of this graph before. What you may not have seen before, or perhaps have not thought of, is how different generations of men have played pivotal roles in the history of our fraternity. Different ages, backgrounds, and experiences have not only been the key to the increase of our membership but are also a crucial part of the steady decline of American freemasonry today.



*Membership Totals from 1924-2017,  
Masonic Service Association of North America*

The hard truth, Brothers, is that the Masonic fraternity has continued to decline in membership since 1959 and we show absolutely no signs of stopping anytime soon. While many would argue this is a good thing, even a “reformation,” countless discussions either start or end with “what does our future look like?” We saw the peak of Freemasonry in the United States in 1959 with 4,103,161 reported Freemasons and since then our membership has declined by over 3 million members at a rate of roughly 9-10% per year.<sup>4</sup> Some believe that 2020 will show, for the first time since the Masonic Service Association of North America began its tracking, that American Freemasonry will have less than 1 million members.<sup>5</sup>

## **SIX GENERATIONAL COHORTS**

To first understand the six generational cohorts, we must understand their definitions by age and years. For this paper and its purpose, the birth years and cohort names defined below will be what we reference throughout. Every person, researcher or historian who discusses the generations typically has a different start and stop year or title for the cohort. It is also crucial to understand that if you feel or believe that you fall into a different generational cohort than what is outlined in this paper, that is perfectly acceptable. I am certainly not here to tell you how you

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>5</sup> Drew, S. B. (2020, April 2). COVID-19: The Change Freemasonry Needed. Retrieved April 2020, from [https://thecraftsman.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/BRAD-DREW-April-2020-COVID19-The-Change-Freemasonry-Needed\\_Cited.pdf](https://thecraftsman.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/BRAD-DREW-April-2020-COVID19-The-Change-Freemasonry-Needed_Cited.pdf)

should identify. As a final disclaimer, the thoughts and opinions regarding each generational cohort are mine and mine alone as there are always exceptions to every generation.

The six generational cohorts are shown below.<sup>6</sup>

Greatest Generation	Born 1916-1928	Age: 92-100
Silent Generation	Born 1929-1946	Age: 74-91
Baby Boomers	Born 1947-1965	Age: 55-73
Generation X	Born 1966-1981	Age: 39-54
Generation Y “Millennials”	Born 1982-1999	Age: 21-38
Generation Z	Born 2000-2020	Age: 0-20



The first generational cohort to discuss is the Greatest Generation or called by some, the “GI Generation.” They are children of the World War I era and lived through the Great Depression. Many of them then went on to become soldiers in World War II. They are characterized as being community-minded, having a strong sense of personal morality and loyal to jobs, schools, and their church. Marriage was for life and they did everything they could to avoid debt, their motto was to “save and pay with cash” if they could.

Masonically speaking, this generation is extremely loyal, money-conscious, full of stories, humble and they were (and are) extremely involved in Freemasonry.

The Silent Generation, many of whom fought in the Korean War, were very similar to their parents of the prior generation. Marriage was for life and they were extremely loyal to their jobs, schools, and churches. They were avid readers, especially of the daily newspaper. Culturally they enjoyed big band and swing music, and this was the first generation to focus on civil rights. These men and women were disciplined, cautious and self-sacrificing. As Freemasons,



<sup>6</sup> **NOTE:** It is also interesting to note that according to Sarah Stankorb in an article published in GOOD magazine in 2014, there is a “microgeneration” of people called “Xennials” who were born between 1977-1985. This group was born on the cusp of the Generation X and Generation Y “Millennial” generational cohorts. They are described as having an analog childhood and a digital adulthood.

this generation has a strong work ethic, high values, appreciation for the smaller things, extremely community-oriented and were generally willing and able to do the work.

Baby Boomers are the men and women of the post-World War II baby boom, hence the name of the generational cohort. Many went on to fight in Vietnam and this is the first generation that we see identified as the “me” generation. Culturally they enjoyed rock and roll music, free love, protests, and the hippie movement. Their motto was to “buy it now and use credit instead of paying with cash” as their grandparents did. The Baby Boomers were the first to grow up where it was common to have televisions in their homes. In addition, they are extremely optimistic and driven individuals. When we think about the Baby Boomers, this is the first group that used the term “retirement” as we know it today. Masonic Baby Boomers, while loyal to the institution, are not well-grounded in Masonic education beyond ritual. They are traditionally community-focused, participative in lodge functions and reliable men.



Generation X is the first generation to truly be entrepreneurial producing successful leaders such as Elon Musk (Tesla, SpaceX), Jack Dorsey (Twitter), Michael Dell (Dell), and Larry Page (Google). These men and women are very individualistic, meaning government and big business mean little to them, generally. This generation has transitioned between seeking knowledge from digital sources as opposed to traditional, written sources. According to a 2018 study

conducted by LiveCareer, they change jobs every 5.4 years, compared to their Baby Boomer parents who changed jobs every 8 years.<sup>7</sup> MTV, consumer credit cards and big hair are what we see culturally, and they are late to marry and quick to divorce. Their traits include being extremely cautious, skeptical, unimpressed with authority and self-reliant. As Freemasons, this generation enjoys relationships and change, they are self-sufficient in their Masonic work and

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<sup>7</sup> Contributor, G. (2018, June 13). New Report Reveals Insights About Job Hopping Across Generations. Retrieved April 2020, from <https://www.thejobnetwork.com/generational-job-hopping-live-career/>

labors and generally curious about new things. Many of the *true* leaders our fraternity today come from this generation, whereas we typically see those elected coming from earlier generations. These true leaders are those men who are focused on improving the quality of the Masonic experience instead of increasing the membership totals of their Grand Lodge. Their agenda includes an increase of Masonic education, an increase in the expectations of their subordinate lodges, a stricter focus on guarding the west gate as well as reducing Freemasonry's image as a social and charitable organization.



Now let us discuss Generation Y, or more commonly known as the “Millennials.” Now before you huff and puff and complain about millennials (unless you fall into this category), it is best to understand the generational cohort. This generation was the first to grow up with the Internet, which means they get most of their communication and socialization from the Internet and social media. They are highly organized, very scheduled and tend to respect authority and the previous

generations. Due to their parents and grandparents, they typically have large amounts of academic pressure placed upon them. This may be due to them perhaps being the first in their family to attend college or university or being the first in their family to have opportunities others simply did not.

Millennials have great expectations of themselves and prefer to work in teams in a relaxed work environment allowing creativity and fun. Masonic millennials are focused on technology and education while enjoying fellowship and being open-minded with their Brothers. Ambition is also key to their Masonic success. We start to see a true focus on Masonic education and “outside of the box” thinking or rejecting “that’s not how we’ve always done it” thinking from this generation.

We have now reached our youngest generation, Generation Z. This generation has never known a world without the Internet, cell phones or social media. They leave behind toys and outdoor activities for video games, Facebook, and TikTok. They are extremely savvy consumers, meaning they know what they want and how to get it. They are growing up in a world completely

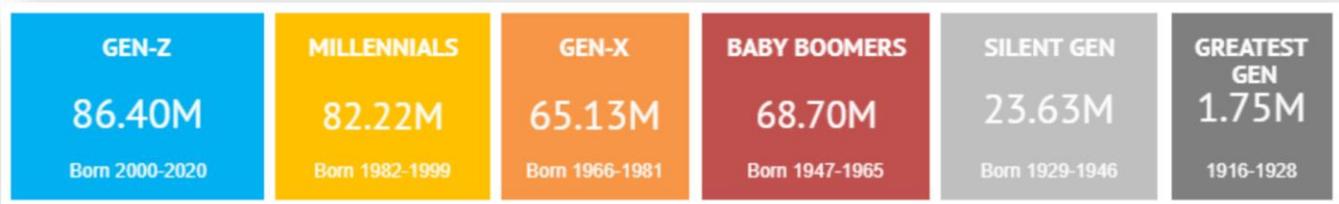


different from that with which their grandparents and great-grandparents were familiar.

As the membership of Generation Z Freemasons is still relatively small, we see these brothers being extremely confident and independent as well as being aware of their surroundings. They are effective communicators and are certainly brothers your lodge would want to have involved in social media and general lodge communication.

## UNDERSTANDING THE NUMBERS

Now that we have established a definition of each generation and the traditional type of Freemason they are, let us look at the overall numbers. To understand the impact, and opportunities for our fraternity, we need to know the population of each generation within the United States. According to Knoema, a source of global decision-making data, Generation Z has overtaken millennials by nearly 4 million to become the largest generational group in the United States.<sup>8</sup> Baby Boomers are the third-largest generation with a population of 69 million people.



*Knoema, US Populations by Age and Generation in 2020*

With a current population of around 86 million, Generation Z is expected to grow to over 88 million over the next 20 years.

According to the 2010 Age and Sex Composition Census Brief, the total population of men in 2010 was roughly 157 million, an increase of almost 14 million from the 2000 census, or a 9.5% increase.<sup>9</sup> If we take that same percentage and apply it to the projected 2020 population of men, we will see around 172 million men in the United States this year.<sup>10</sup> Considering that roughly 26% of men fall into the Generation Z bracket (20 years old or younger), let us just assume that 127.3 million men in the United States this year are of the proper age (by most Jurisdictions) to become a Freemason.

Taking those numbers into account, and our current membership being less than one million Masons, I believe that we do not necessarily have a numbers problem, but more so an understanding problem.<sup>11</sup> With less than 1% of all men in the United States being Freemasons, it is concerning that as a fraternity we continue to focus on increasing our membership totals more so than increasing our membership experience. Taking our time now and focusing on the quality

<sup>8</sup> US Population by Age and Generation in 2020. (2020, April 13). Retrieved April 2020, from <https://knoema.com/egydzc/us-population-by-age-and-generation-in-2020>

<sup>9</sup> Howden, L. M., & Meyer, J. A. (2011, May). Age and Sex Composition: 2010. Retrieved April 2020, from <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-03.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> **NOTE:** Using the 2010 United States Census data of 157 million men, this number was multiplied by 9.5% to create an estimated total of 172 million men for 2020

of our men, ensuring that we are providing a quality experience, and that the men of our lodges are receiving what we promised them originally should be our primary focus as we move forward. If they are not receiving what they were promised originally, then why would they ever stay? Sound familiar?

What can the generations do to work together? First, we need to understand that no matter the generation, all Freemasons traditionally believe in and have the same values. In addition to truth, morality, and brotherly love, Freemasons also value loyalty, discipline, and teamwork. Highly engaged and active Freemasons from all generations prove to be organized and have extremely high expectations of themselves and those men around them. So, what are some examples of the things that we can do to work together? How about ritual work; or being involved in community service together? Can we organize and hold study and educational groups, either in person or virtually? How about simple fellowship, such as dinners, festive boards, or table lodges?



*Lexington Lodge No. 1, Lexington, Kentucky,  
2018 Annual Festive Board*

## **GENERATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS**

Now to share just two examples of generational partnerships, let us start with the Baby Boomers and Millennials. The Baby Boomers are starting to retire, or already have retired. They are seeking new things to which to apply their time and are extremely interested in sharing the knowledge and understanding they have acquired over the years. Millennials, on the other hand, are wanting to be included. They are seeking mentorship and value in their lives. They are interested in learning and expanding their minds. Simply put, why are the Baby Boomers and Millennials not working together more in lodge? Clearly this is a logical relationship to build and deepen.

The next example of generational partnerships or relationships would be that of Generation X and Millennials. Members of Generation X want to be involved in something and with somebody. They understand flexibility, and they change and thrive on teams and working with others. Millennials are eager to take on responsibility and excited about change and the future of Freemasonry. They prefer to work in a relaxed setting and on teams. Again, a natural relationship! By working together, success is one of many potential outcomes.

*“To put it bluntly, we need to be open to change and embrace it.”*

While I could share example after example, specific after specific, we must simply remember that all generations can and should simply practice Freemasonry. Now, what about our future? What does it look like and why do we need to understand the relationships between the generations of men in our fraternity? To put it bluntly, we need to be open to change and embrace it. Every generation can learn something from another, ultimately creating positive change. Just because a pattern of behavior is new or old, does not mean it is the best or most productive method. At times “the way we've always done it” *is* the best way, and often enough the “new and different” way is a better way. We need to work together.



We also need to understand and incorporate technology. Having social media presence and teaching members from all generations what that means and how it works is crucial. Utilizing lodge apps or communication platforms so that all members can stay involved and updated on lodge activities is a must. Holding virtual education or discussion groups, as we have seen over the last few months with the impact of the COVID-19 virus is something that is not as scary as many brothers expected. Technology can be overwhelming for some, so we need to remember that everyone learns differently and at a different pace. Take your time and introduce technology if your lodge is not already comfortable with it.

Brothers, when we consider our future - and yes as I stated earlier, even with the significant decline since 1959 we WILL have a future - we need to remember and practice a few things. We need to respect one another. We need to encourage involvement, cooperation, and open communication with our brothers. We need to understand that all ideas are worthy of consideration, and we can trust one another no matter the thoughts or opinions of another brother. We need to set clear expectations and practice them, which will lead to following the same rules. As Freemasons, we need to listen, learn, share, and most importantly work together.

## **CONCLUSION**

American Freemasonry today is in a very unique place. Membership numbers continue to decline; however, hope, motivation and the general quality of men are starting to rise. Men joining our fraternity are seeking more than just pancake breakfasts and spaghetti dinners. Those men joining, however, are not just young men. We are seeing an influx of men of all ages, proving there will always be interest. Surveying our membership and understanding what truly brings value to our members will do nothing but strengthen our fraternity and deepen our relationships with one another. Brother to brother, friend to friend; Freemasonry is here to stay.