What the graduates of ten schools think about the crazy world they just inherited.

Photographs by Spencer Heyfron

Gabrielle Jones, 18
James Roberts, 18
Phoebe Stone, 27
Noorulain Masood, 26
Ammy Batista, 19
Amanda Mayer
Lindsey Davis Stover, 30
Chris Trimble, 28
Darleen Underwood, 18
Joseph Cruz, 27
Paula Suárez, 32
Betwa Sharma, 25
Simon Akam, 23
Paul Isaachsen, 27
Jennifer Kunz, 25
Kevin Chik
Akaira Young, 17
Gregory Louis, 24
M. Gözde Alpaslan, 30
Jake Sherman, 23
Elvis Marte, 17
George A. Kottas, 26
Roy Chan, 26
Daarel Burnette II, 25
Phellix Rodriguez, 18
Anu Sawkar, 30
David Shlachter, 27
Khalil Jetha, 28
Franchesca Santos, 17
Eric Mouchette, 24
Sam Sanders, 24
Meghan Berry, 28
Nazia Kamruzzaman, 17
Sarah Braasch, 34
Shireen Santosham, 30
Gregory M. White, 23
Jonathan Bach, 17
Noah Liben, 26
Dan Rakove, 26
Kelly Senyei, 23

COLUMBIA SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM
HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT
FAF HHS COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL
EAST SIDE COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL
FAF HARLEM COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL
FAF EAST SIDE COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL
The Closing of the American Mind,

Ten schools, 200-plus grads, more than 100 questions. What follows is a sampling of snapshots of the students we surveyed, and a compilation of their answers.

**OUTLOOK ON THE FUTURE**

_Welcome to the recession_  
_Who's most to blame for the economic downturn?_  
_Do you blame the previous generation?_  

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**Are you an optimist or a pessimist?**

- **Optimist**: 91%
- **Pessimist**: 7%
- **Other**: 3%

**How long do you think the recession will last?**

- Less than one year: 11%
- One to two years: 36%
- Two to three years: 23%
- More than three years: 26%

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**Will your life be better or worse in five years?**

- Better: 95%
- Worse: 2%
- No change: 42%

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**Will the country be better off or worse off in five years?**

- Better: 91%
- Worse: 3%

---

**Do you have a job lined up?**

- Yes: 58%
- No: 42%

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**If you have a job, what will your salary be?**

- Less than $30,000: 20%
- $30,000–$39,000: 26%
- $40,000–$49,000: 11%
- $50,000–$59,000: 48%
- $60,000–$69,000: 6%
- $70,000–$79,000: 16%
- $80,000–$89,000: 8%
- $90,000–$99,000: 10%
- $100,000–$109,000: 3%
- $110,000–$119,000: 11%
- $120,000–$129,000: 23%
- $130,000–$139,000: 6%
- $140,000–$149,000: 6%
- $150,000–$159,000: 0%
- $160,000–$169,000: 6%
- Less than $20,000: 0%

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**Do you blame the previous generation?**

- Yes: 17%
- No: 83%

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**“Both of my parents were well educated, but creative thought wasn’t cultivated. They do a much better job of delayed gratification, and they have longer attention spans. But our generation has redefined what it means to be a good worker.”**

—SAM SANDERS, 24, KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

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“Looking back, I think business schools deserve some blame for the economic downturn. Selling trash dressed up as gold is unethical, and they should be held accountable for stressing that we make money at the costs of others.”

—DAN GROVAN, 29, WHARTON

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“The Closing of the American Mind,” by Allan Bloom, is a compilation of their answers.

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**“I’m excited about the future— I’ve got even less to lose in this economy.”**

—ALEKSANDRA BOOKMAN, 21, NYU

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**“This crisis is forcing people to make difficult decisions about what they really want to do with their lives. But in ten years, my classmates will be doing incredible things.”**

—ANN KIM, 27, WHARTON

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**“I interned with over the summer no longer exists. ”**

—BRENDA TAYLOR, 30, BROOKLYN COLLEGE

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“Why didn’t we actually raise a better generation?”

—TOMMY EAGLE, 18, FRIENDS SEMINARY

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**“A generation that feels entitled but is willing to be photographed and quoted. And as with any attempt to analyze across generational lines, the risk of misinterpretation is high. (I remember laughing out loud at Allan Bloom’s 1987 best seller, The Closing of the American Mind, which warned against my generation’s enslavement to the dread Sony Walkman.)”**

—JUNNAE PARK, 25, COLLEGE OF STATE CONSERVATION

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**“Unemployment is high because it’s not the end of the world. ”**

—FORREST PETTERSON, A GRADUATING SENIOR AT FRIENDS SEMINARY

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“Who’s most to blame for the economic downturn?”

- Politicians: 17%
- Businessmen bankers: 36%
- Unpaid interns: 11%
- Politicians: 88%
- Others: 38%

---

**“No, they were just pursuing a false sense of well-being through possessions they didn’t actually need. It’s pathetic, but that’s how they were raised.”**

—JUNNAE PARK, 25, COLLEGE OF STATE CONSERVATION

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Ten schools, 200-plus grads, more than 100 questions. What follows is a sampling of snapshots of the students we surveyed, and a compilation of their answers. 
WHAT PARENTS GET ... AND WHAT THEY DON'T

How is your parents' generation different from yours?

ALL ABOUT SPEND—SPEND—SPEND
LESS SCATTER—RAISED
LESS CONNECTED

WILLFULLY INSULATED
HIPPIES WHO GOT MORE CONSERVATIVE
SLOWER / SIMpler

PATRIOTIC
SUBURBAN
SCARED

What do your parents not understand about you?

THAT I LIKE TO GET DRUNK SOMETIMES.

— I'M GAY.

WHAT I DO ON FACEBOOK.

THAT GETTING A JOB IS NOT SO SIMPLE.

Do you discuss politics with your parents?

More—usually about government, religion or current events.

Less—area bills, political candidates or local issues.

Are you more or less religious than your parents?

55%

Same

34%

Less

Are you more or less religious than your parents?

55% MORE

34% LESS

31% SAME

Do you discuss money with your parents?

6%

Less

Never

37%

Occasionally

57%

Never

Do you discuss money with your parents?

Less—they are immigrants.

Less with their money, more with my own.

Less: Enjoy your life!

As long as I'm staying above zero, I'm not going to worry too much.

86% LESS

Share their spending vision.

What does hooking up mean?

More than making out, less than sex.

From making out to a BJ.

It used to mean just a kiss, now the whole deal.

When the clothes come off.

Genitals need to be touched.

The stage before a relationship.

Alcohol-induced one-night stand.

The stage before a relationship.

Genitalia need to be touched.

Now the whole deal.

It used to mean just a kiss,

From making out to a BJ.

What does hooking up mean?

52% MORE

42% LESS

6% Never

Do you discuss politics with your parents?

48% MORE

46% LESS

6% Never

Do you discuss politics with your parents?

Less—they are immigrants.

Less with their money, more with my own.

Less: Enjoy your life!

As long as I'm staying above zero, I'm not going to worry too much.

“Growing up, we were told ‘You can be an astronaut, president—anything you want.’ And that’s just turning out to not be the case. Some friends are still in denial, and maybe it would have been better if their parents had been a little less idealistic.” — Emily Hughes

“Companies are looking for inexpensive talent. If you work hard and think less about compensation, there’s no telling the possibilities.” — Kerisha Clarke

“You can be an astronaut, president—anything you want.” — Emily Hughes

“Most kids my age are very judgmental, even if they don’t consider themselves to be. People are constantly putting up pictures of you on Facebook: what you’re wearing, what you’re doing, who you’re hanging out with.”

“Growing up, we were told ‘You can be an astronaut, president—anything you want.’ And that’s just turning out to not be the case. Some friends are still in denial, and maybe it would have been better if their parents had been a little less idealistic.” — Emily Hughes

“Most kids my age are very judgmental, even if they don’t consider themselves to be. People are constantly putting up pictures of you on Facebook: what you’re wearing, what you’re doing, who you’re hanging out with.”

Are you more or less frugal than your parents?

Less—they are immigrants.

Less with their money, more with my own.

Less: Enjoy your life!

As long as I'm staying above zero, I'm not going to worry too much.

“My mom is one of my best friends and knows everything about me and my life.” — Kerisha Clarke

“Growing up, we were told ‘You can be an astronaut, president—anything you want.’ And that’s just turning out to not be the case. Some friends are still in denial, and maybe it would have been better if their parents had been a little less idealistic.” — Emily Hughes

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## Political Persuasions

What is the single most important political issue to you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institute cap-and-trade energy policies.</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legalize gay marriage.</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defend Roe v. Wade.</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute universal health care.</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deport illegal immigrants.</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are we safer now or before 9/11?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Now</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is the single most important political issue to you?

*Do you believe in God?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I believe in something: 6%

*How important on a scale of 1 to 5 is religion in choosing your life partner?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Everyone used to talk about what lavish things they wanted to buy with their future bonuses. Now some friends with jobs paying more than $100,000 have mentioned living with parents and commuting to work.*

Cody Davis, 26

Shu Chang, 29

Iben Falconer, 25

Rebecca Beyer, 25

Parsa Khalili, 25

Miriam Peterson, 26

Travis Eby, 25

Mwangi Gathinji, 28

Jason Kim, 32

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Dexter Ciprian, 24

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Bethany Ippolito, 26

Melissa Gorman, 18

Iphar Tehrani, 28

Shine Sim, 22

Vahid Khadivi, 25

*Do we live in a postracial society?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*How many people have had an interracial relationship?*

66%

*How often do you worry about a terrorist attack?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Malick Diop, 30
Stephen Chu, 29

“I’d definitely be more excited to work for Obama than I would have been for Bush, but working in the White House is such the ‘in’ thing right now, and I like to think of myself as a nonconformist.”

—Sam Sanders, 24, Kennedy School of Government

## Religion

Do you believe in God?

*I believe in God sometimes, but I’m definitely less religious than my parents. The Bible never mentions dinosaurs, and it contradicts itself so much.*

—Phelix Rodriguez, 18, East Side Community High School

How important (on a scale of 1 to 5) is religion in your racial identity to you?

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
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</table>

*“We all thought we had a ticket to New York, but now we worry we won’t be able to practice at all.”*

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KEEPCONTACT

How often do you check e-mail?

4% Once a day or less
8% A few times a day
46% Frequently (on phone)
52% Frequently (on friends)

“I can tell when I get an e-mail from an older person: They refer to the date when we had the conversation and identify what they’re following up about. Younger people never give context.”
—Noam Rubinstein, 30, Brooklyn College

89% have a Facebook profile
24% have a Twitter profile

“Facebook is a crutch. People post ‘Hey, I’m engaged.’ If you really want people to know about it, then be a decent person and at least text them.”
—Shoshana Schwartz, 21, Brooklyn College

THE NEXT GENERATION

(For fun, we visited a class of fifth-graders too.)

Do you ever use Twitter?
“Sometimes.”
—Samir Nikocevic, 10

Do you know what Twitter is?
“Yes, it means that you sometimes shake when you’re nervous.”
—Samir Nikocevic, 10

What do your parents not understand about you?
How cool I am.
I’m sensitive.
I can’t always be perfect.
I’m more independent than they think.
That I need to grow up sometimes.
That they are embarrassing when they talk to my friends.

What do you want to be when you grow up?
A baker in Paris.
CEO.
Biologist.
Probably an FBI agent or designing clothes.
Basketball player.
Singer-dancer.
President of a stocks company.
Famous actress, writer, architect.

“But I don’t remember my number!”
—Antoine Esguerra, 12

“I think Obama is a really good influence on little kids like me. He’s probably the best president.”
—Nicole Amaral, 10

“Two classes ago, officers were getting $25,100 a year. Now we’re getting $40,561. If we pass our exams, we’re getting paid for the rest of our lives.”

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Richard Kowalczyk, 23
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Alex Ramos, 24
Fady Azmy, 27
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Gabriela Kowalski, 11
Omar Muqbil, 11
Kelly Bamfo, 11
Ian Goldstein, 11
Nicole Amaral, 10
Madison Dodds, 10
Amina Durakovic, 11
Jessie Mastandrea, 11
Samir Nikocevic, 10

“Where do you watch TV?”

39% On the computer
35% Live TV
26% DVR

How often do you read the newspaper?
Daily .......................... 50%
A few times a week .................. 13%
Once a week .......................... 14%
Occasionally .................. 17%
Never .......................... 2%

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