



By [Wayne Baker](#)  
Community Contributor

OUR VALUES

## COLUMN: Generation Wars: Are 'Boomers' fleecing 'the kids'?

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*Editor's note: This post is part of a series by Dr. Baker on [Our Values](#) about core American values. This week Dr. Baker takes a look about Social Security, Medicare and relations among the generations.*

### **Are Baby Boomers poised to fleece younger generations?**

Sailing is my family's favorite summer pastime, but we never go as often as we would like. Sometimes I envy the retirees who spend the entire summer sailing the Great Lakes. Whenever I say that to a retiree-sailor, I always get the same response: "Keep working! We need you to



Greedy geezers? Lazy Millenials? As we face a budget crisis, is there a generational war going on?

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keep paying our Social Security!" We all laugh, but there's a certain irony in this response.

How true is it? Are Social Security and Medicare aiding older Americans at the expense of the young?

Or, to put it bluntly as [Thomas A. Firey of the conservative think tank Cato Institute did a decade ago](#): Are the baby boomers fleecing the younger generations? "They've paid less of their earnings into Social Security than we Gen-X/Yers, yet they'll receive more in benefits than we will and we'll pick up the tab. And when we retire, there will be no money saved in Social Security to pay for our retirement, unless we pull the same scam on our children that the Boomers are pulling on us."

Social Security and Medicare are on the chopping block in the Washington budget battles. Actual or even possible changes to these programs can only exacerbate the tensions between the generations. But are these tensions well founded? Is it correct to think of competition among the generations, each pursuing its self-interest at the expense of the other?

In a national poll taken last year by Harris Interactive and commissioned by [Generations United](#), eight of ten American agreed that politicians sometimes pit generations against one another "to limit public support for government funding child care, healthcare, Social Security or other programs."

IF YOU'RE A BOOMER, DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE ENTITLED TO THESE PROGRAMS? IF YOU ARE YOUNGER, DO YOU FEEL TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF? IS ONE GENERATION AGAINST ANOTHER?

### **Generation Wars: Is it every generation for itself?**

There are two theories about intergenerational relations. One says it's every generation for itself. The other says that generations are interdependent and should help one another.

**Consider these theories—**

#### **THEORY 1: Younger Americans vs. Greedy Geezers ...**

The every-generation-for-itself theory says that one generation's gain is another generation's loss. The stereotypical bad guys are Greedy Geezers. These elderly Americans don't need entitlements like Social Security and Medicare but take them anyway, using discretionary income to have a second home in a warm climate, go on expensive vacations, neglect the grandchildren and squander their children's inheritances. This theory holds that—even when older Americans really need Social Security and Medicare—their numbers are going to swamp the system, placing a greater and greater burden on younger, working Americans.

#### **THEORY 2: Generations are interdependent ...**

This argument says, [in the words of Generations United](#), that there's a "two-way flow of social, emotional, and financial resources between generations." This theory recognizes that generations are not isolated, but parts of families. Here's one of many examples that is a contrast to the image of Greedy Geezers: More than 6.5 million American children are being raised in households headed by grandparents and other relatives, according to research cited by Generations United. Social Security helps to keep many of these families out of poverty. Seniors volunteer in huge numbers, often focusing on the young. And, many communities of seniors have voted to raise taxes to support public education.

WHAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCE? DO THESE THEORIES MAKE SENSE TO YOU?

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