

CHAPTER 1

THE MODERN INVENTION OF THE TEENAGER

Several years ago I read a book written by two high schoolers that was a catalyst to how I would engage with teens forever. The book was called *Do Hard Things* by Alex and Brett Harris. It was the first time I ever thought to look into the history of how the term “teenager” came about. I’ll recap a few things I learned that I hope will be just as eye opening to you as they were to me.

The Invention of the Teen

Let’s consider that the concept of a “teen” is still less than 100 years old. The term “teenager” did not even pop into our vocabulary until the 1940s! A brief look at the world of young people from before the time of Jesus to until the early 1900s reveals that two types of human phases existed for almost all of history: children and adults.

In this period of history, you will find no such thing as mandatory public school, career guidance counselors, Little Leagues, or limitations on how old you had to be to hold a job, earn money, or even carry a weapon. Your car was likely a horse and you didn’t need a permit, just the ability to not get yourself killed while riding one. By the age of seven,

you already knew how to cook, farm, fire a weapon, repair stuff around the house, remedy illnesses or wounds, and take care of infants. By the age of twelve, the world treated you more as an adult than a child and began to talk to you about things like marriage, taking over the family business, and how to defend your home in times of war.

By sixteen or seventeen you were married, or were soon to be married. Drugs and alcohol were legally at your disposal and by the time you reached the now magical age of twenty one, you had the maturity and composure of a modern day forty-year-old. Your youth had well prepared you to be a productive member and leader in society and you were using your skills to produce great stuff for your family and the community around you.

Now let's fast forward to the early 2000s.

By age seven, you were being diagnosed with ADHD for not being able to sit in a chair at school seven hours a day, getting yelled at for not having your helmet on while riding your tricycle around the cul-de-sac, and receiving trophies for coming in dead last in sports. By age twelve, you felt your parents were complete idiots. They couldn't even figure out how to change the ringtone on their phones much less have any wisdom to provide you. You had no choice but to go to school, were too young to get a job, were still seen as a child to the adult world, and had no expectations over you aside from staying out of trouble and getting decent grades.

By sixteen or seventeen, with graduation looming, you were faced with your first adult decision: how to live life on your own. Your parents were not rushing you out of the house so you figured you have another

decade before you REALLY need to do the whole 'adulting' thing. Now, you reason, is the time to have some fun, travel, try out college, spend a ton of time with friends and meeting new ones. There's not really a plan, just a confidence that things will all work out and you'll find your path eventually. The world expects little from you and you are happy to live up to the embarrassingly low expectation.

So what happened?

In short, society forgot what young people were capable of. A series of labor and education reform laws in the early 1900s raised the age in which "children" could work and mandated kids stay in school until they were older. The invention of the automobile also meant a teen could travel further to hang out with people, date, and embrace a new kind of independence without carrying as much of the burden to be a productive member in society. Teens became consumers instead of producers. The world adjusted its expectations and wrote you off.

And you loved it.

Action: This will take five minutes, tops. I want you to Google the phrase, "Invention of Teenager" and explore the history on your own. Read at least one article from a legit source on the topic and then share what you learned with someone.

I'm serious, do it.

Your age bracket is enslaved by low expectations and it's going to take young leaders like you who are willing to awaken others to the truth and emancipate them from this tyranny of mediocrity.