



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on July 12, 2025

Is It Fair Calling Gen Z the “Useful Idiot Generation”?

“What embitters the world is not excess of criticism,” noted philosopher G.K. Chesterton, “but an absence of self-criticism.” This could come to mind with a recent *Wall Street Journal* piece titled “Gen Z, the Useful Idiot Generation.” Oh, it’s not that the authors are wrong about how “leftism” greatly infects this relatively young cohort. It’s this: Who are the more useful useful idiots?

Is it the more indoctrinated young people?
Or the less indoctrinated older people who allowed them to become more indoctrinated?



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The *Journal* article was written by pollster and ex-Clinton advisor Mark Penn and ex-NYC politician Andrew Stein. The piece itself is behind a paywall, but ZeroHedge relates its thesis, [writing](#):

A sizable proportion of young Americans lean heavily to the left, often with limited understanding of history, moral grounding, or the foundations of Western civilization. Whether it’s the result of leftist indoctrination on college campuses or the intellectual decay sparked by endless hours on social media, the effect is apparent: radicalism is here to stay.

Rights and Lefts Mixed Up?

Before proceeding, a seeming contradiction must be addressed. Much [has been said](#) in recent years about how Gen Z “has taken a turn toward conservatism.” This appears to contradict the useful (leftist) idiot thesis. The answer, however, is that the picture is nuanced.

First, there’s a huge [sex divide apparent](#), with young women turning hard left and young men [tacking somewhat right](#). The latter is especially true among young white men, the most conservative Gen Z segment.

Yet there’s also a misunderstanding about “conservatism” itself. Its only consistent definition relates to a desire to “conserve” the status quo. And today’s cultural/political status quo is decidedly more left-wing than that of a generation ago. Thus, while some young people are on the political spectrum’s right side, that spectrum itself *has shifted left of where it once was*.

What’s most relevant are the actual views the given people embrace: How close are they to Truth? The reality is that Gen Z men have been assaulted by wokism and anti-male feminism growing up. They therefore recoil at these ideologies’ most obvious and recent manifestations. But most of their basic suppositions are nonetheless what we call “liberal.” For example, many Gen Z fellows did vote for President Donald Trump. Yet they also generally accept most of the sexual devolutionary (“LGBTQ+”) agenda. And conservatism is destructive when you’re conserving mistakes.



Warning Signs

Returning to the useful-idiot thesis, ZeroHedge writes that Penn's and Stein's

concerns about youngsters stem from the Democratic mayoral nomination of Marxist Zohran Mamdani, who has proudly and explicitly stated he wants to seize "the means of production." It seems some New Yorkers have forgotten the history of communism — an economic system that has never worked and, in fact, has led to the deaths of tens of millions.

Apropos here, [studies have shown](#) that young Americans do view socialism positively but look askance at economic freedom (aka "capitalism"). Penn and Stein then mention reasons why Gen Z not only embraces leftism but may not be outgrowing it, writing:

- 53% of 18- to 24-year-olds have attended at least some college, where left-wing ideology dominates.
- Colleges often portray socialism as "free stuff" and teach students to blame capitalism for racism, inequality, and climate change.
- Gen Z lacks historical memory of Cold War-era socialist atrocities (e.g., Soviet Union, Maoist China).
- Adulthood is delayed: median age of first marriage is now 30, nearly five years later than in 1985.
- Nearly half of Gen Z adults are not in committed relationships and often live communally or work from home.
- They spend over four hours daily on their phones, mostly consuming content from TikTok and Facebook, which reinforce existing beliefs.
- Religion has declined: over one-third report no affiliation, and 60% didn't grow up attending services — contributing to moral disconnection.

The last point is significant. Church attendance/Christian religiosity is [one of the best predictors](#) of [voting patterns](#). That is, regular service attendees break largely Republican while secularists heavily support Democrats. This is evident throughout the West, too, with a strong positive correlation existing between a country's irreligiosity and its leftism.

The Enemy Is Us

In fairness, Penn and Stein do recognize older generations' complicity in the issue at hand. "We created the environment that produced this unmoored generation," they write. Socialism "will continue to fester and grow if we don't stand up and reform our universities, reinforce our basic values, and balance our social media."

Yet what they don't mention is that all the cited factors, from upbringing to culture, shape what's most important.

Sense of virtue.

When it's said that most people vote on emotional bases, which is true, unsaid is that it's sense of virtue that determines what "feels right." I often cite ancient Greek philosopher Plato on this matter, too. He emphasized the importance of raising children in a pure moral atmosphere. For this will, he explained, inculcate them with an *emotional* attachment to virtue. Once established, upon reaching the age of



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reason the youngster will be more likely to accept the dictates of reason. Our toxic culture, however, develops in kids an emotional attachment to vice. This yields *unreasonable*, destructive adults.

Degeneration

As for the “generations,” all “have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,” as the Bible states. Nevertheless, we can rightly say that there has been a steady degeneration of the generations. A certain analogy is apropos and interesting here, too.

Repeatedly making copies of a paper containing text results in the copies having an increasing number of errors over time. This phenomenon is known as “generation loss.” This, do note, occurs as part of the human body’s aging process as well. That is, DNA replication errors accumulate over time during cell division, resulting in progressive cell degradation.

Now, conceptualize our Republic’s founding generation as the young body and members of future generations as replicated cells. Just as with the paper copies or actual cells, they have degraded over time. *Our cultural “genetic material” has gradually broken down with each bequeathal.*

Put simply, the generation before mine stank, mine stinks worse, and the succeeding one stinks more still. And so it is with the aging process of civilizations.

But is there a civilizational Fountain of Youth? Resurrecting past glories won’t be accomplished with policy and institutional tweaks, but only via moral and spiritual renewal.

The bottom line, however, is that we all are useful idiots to some degree — that has been our lot ever since we lost Eden.



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