



How imperceptible swelling of youthful and retired categories over three centuries has led to the exclusion today of 75 million Americans from productive labors and the loss of \$560 billion per year.

Ralph D. Winter



Dear Reader,

In a minute I am going off on a tangent. First, a few words on all the rich content in this issue.

Iran is four times as large as California and has twice the population. It is well over twice the size of Texas with over three times the population.

Meanwhile it is ten times the size of Bangladesh yet has less than half of the population of Bangladesh.

It is unique among Muslim nations in having a still-strong background of the remarkable Zoroastrian tradition. C. S. Lewis said he would be a Zoroastrian if he were not a Christian. This explains why Cyrus was friendly to the Jewish captives.

And, it is a good bit of the reason why Iranians are Shiites and not Sunnis.

Now, the Tangent

A little book fell into my hands this past week and I read it cover to cover, while going to and from a conference of nearly 4,000 Koreans who take over the Wheaton campus every four years. (If you send me an email—rdw112233@aol.com—I will send you a copy of my plenary paper there, “The Biggest Trend in Missions Today.”)

Okay, this remarkable little book, *Do Hard Things*, was written by twin 19-year-olds, Alex and Brett Harris, whose fame may have already reached you.

This exciting book lays out irrefutably the fact that today’s teenagers are what-they-are because society does not



Ralph D. Winter is editor of Mission Frontiers and the General Director of the Frontier Mission Fellowship.

expect (even allow) much from them.

This is not just a theory. An enormous response to their web site, www.TheRebelution.com, and their face-to-face conferences literally all over the world, reveal a huge, powerful, and deep-seated exasperation on the part of millions of bright young people who (especially in the Western world) are essentially deprived of opportunity to do their best—through “low expectations” of society.

On page 97, for example, “Being considered a good teen only requires that we don’t do bad stuff like taking drugs,

and conferences) of teenagers plunging into all kinds of creative projects.

Look, every teenager ought to have this book. There are about thirty million U. S. teenagers (and older people—see chart) whose minds and hearts and lives are being stunted by the limitations and low expectations that surround them, engulf them, roll over them, capture them, degrade them. We need to wake to that enormous tragedy.

Now So What?

Having said all that, this book does not go far enough (how could it?). After reading it, I stretched my mind and asked what it could well add. These thoughts are not criticisms so much as further examples of the enormous pit into which we have thrown our teenagers.

I speak in part as one who, as the book itself points out, is aware that teenager adolescence is pretty much a phenomenon of the developed world. I lived many years in an aboriginal society where children were creatively

U.S. Populations Suffering Low Expectations (and thus personal abuse) Along With Estimates of Their Potential Productivity (in \$Billions)									
Age Range	Hours/week	Hour Value	Value per week	Feasible Weeks/Year	Value per year, one person	Number People (millions)	Total Annual Value (Billions)	Billions	Billions
8-9	10	\$4	\$40	40	\$1,600	7.92	\$13		
10-14	15	\$5	\$75	40	\$3,000	20.7	\$62		
15-19	20	\$5	\$100	40	\$4,000	21.6	\$86		
8-19						50		\$161	
65-69	30	\$20	\$600	45	\$27,000	10.5	\$284		
70-74	20	\$15	\$300	40	\$12,000	8.7	\$104		
80-84	10	\$10	\$100	20	\$2,000	5.7	\$11		
						25		\$399	
[Only the shaded columns are guesses, otherwise U. S. Census Bureau or arithmetic]						75			\$560

drinking and partying. But is it enough to be known for the negative things we don’t do?”

And I like this (after all their exhortations to do, do, do): “Please understand that we are saved by faith alone, but that true saving faith doesn’t stay alone (p. 151).”

This little book is bursting with actual examples (gleaned from their web site

How to read the chart

Example #1:

For those aged 10 to 14, if able to work 15 hours a week (in addition to school or as part of school), if their work is worth \$5 per hour, then assuming they work only 40 weeks per year, and there are 20.7 million of them, this amounts to \$62 billion per year.

Example #2:

For those aged 80 to 84, working only 10 hours a week at \$15 per hour, and only 20 weeks a year, for 5.7 million of them, this amounts to \$11 billion per year.

and sensitively grown gradually into greater responsibility with no adolescent period involved.

I am reminded of this fact reading just today about the 250 high schools closed in the Nairobi, Kenya area due to the explosive exasperation of the students—who are being held back by the relatively new school process which effectively withdraws them from the real world, thrusting them into a new, artificial school world in which they are piled high with self-expanding work in a full-time environment of study.

Note the phrase “self-expanding.” In the real world you usually get paid for doing something of benefit to others, not for expanding yourself. In school, year after year, students are lauded for personal attainments of knowledge or skill. They are not solving someone else’s problems. Their main task is self-fulfillment. How perverting!

Most of what I have learned in my life I have learned on the way to solving someone else’s problems or serving others’ needs. Like right now. I have just learned something by putting

together the little table on the previous page. I did not do it to become educated. I did it to illuminate a problem. I discovered that our society is so poorly designed that we are throwing away annually \$560 billion in lost productivity, and far worse, are seriously damaging the lives of young and old alike.

There is a heartbreaking limitation for two 19-year-olds who write a book like *Do Hard Things*. They have gone through several years of “self-expanding” through personal activism. They were forced to create jobs for themselves from scratch—since our society is not effectively designed to help teenagers into the major activities of commerce and government, as would be the case in Germany. Thus, in writing this book they are unable to expect teenagers to be routinely accommodated into the existing adult world. The unusual exception that actually got them started was when Alex and Brett were invited and entrusted with running a state election campaign for a Supreme Court justice! But wait. Most of the many examples in this book (of what bright and determined teenagers can do) are jobs that

are teenager-invented. Good things, but projects, not careers. You don’t see much in this book about the nearly unavoidable reality of college in our society, much less, graduate studies, and Ph.D. studies. I am afraid that if the real, serious problems of the real world were available to them, even then those problems would more likely be seen as a means of teenagers expanding themselves. That is all to the good, of course, but is not the same as commitment to solving a real-world problem.

I wish a second book could be written that would scour this land for openings into the real world that are long-term, and where the activity involved would be seen as worth doing in itself, not only a means of a teenager growing and maturing.

Lastly, intergenerational collaboration, not just teen collaboration, does not appear. But I admit that is far more a criticism of the adult world—which tries not to bother with teens, who, bless their hearts, are finding things to do, HARD things to do with very little help from the too-busy broader society. f

WE NEED PEOPLE LIKE YOU!



Teach English, Reach a Generation



Finishers, Families, Singles, Couples



TEFL Certification



China, Mongolia, Cambodia, Vietnam & Laos



Language Study Options Available



Whatever your station in life, there's a place for you in Asia with ELIC.

Call 800-FON-ELIC or visit us at www.elic.org

