

America's Young 'Globals' See U.S. Role Differently, Author Says

Written by Ginny Grimsley
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He Notes Benefits of Millennials' Itch to Travel, Work Abroad

Just a couple decades ago, only the young adult children of the very rich, the very religious or the very adventurous ventured abroad to live and work in other cultures.

"It was a life-changing experience for those of us fortunate enough to be offered it," says Ross Palfreyman a lawyer who recounts his two years as a young missionary during the 1970s in Two Years in God's Mormon Army (www.mormonarmy.net).

"If you had wealthy parents, joined the Peace Corps or belonged to a faith with a belief in mission work, you were able to develop empathy and a broader world view at a younger age," he says.

"In my church, young men typically go abroad for their mission trip at 19 years old and stay for two years. For Baptists, it may be a group of high school students spending their spring break building a church in Haiti. Whatever the reason, the lessons learned were the same: Less ethnocentricity, the gratification that comes from service to your fellow man, self-discipline, self-sacrifice."

Travel abroad for work and study is no longer the experience of a select few and that has helped shape America's young adults for the better, Palfreyman says. Surveys show they have a global world view fostered by the internet and social networks that cross boundaries.

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Having online "friends" in other countries and being immediately connected to events in faraway lands through social networks such as Twitter makes them curious about and respectful of other cultures, he says.

"America's young adults are the 'First Globals,' a term coined by the pollster John Zogby," Palfreyman says. "The group of people born from 1979 to 1990 travel; they embrace and feel connected to other cultures; they want to make a difference."

That's exactly what his two years as a missionary did for him, Palfreyman says.

He notes these characteristics of 22- to 33-year-olds:

- Two-thirds have passports. By comparison, according to officials from the U.S. Travel Association, less than one-third of all Americans – 30 percent – have passports. Two of five Globals say they expect to live and work in a foreign capital at some time in their lives.
- 270,000 young people studied abroad in 2009-10. In 1989-90, only about 30,000 did so, according to the International Institute of Education. While Western European countries are still their top destinations, students are increasingly choosing more far-flung locales, especially China and other Asian nations.
- They want to "make the world a better place to live." A study of 10,000 adults by Campbell & Co. fundraising consultants found this group is more likely than any other generation to cite world improvement as the key reason for their philanthropy. (They also give just as much as other generations.)
- They want to make a global impact. The Campbell study found they are most likely of all age groups to respond positively to messages that focus on the global impact of an organization's work.

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The problems we face today, such as global warming and regional conflicts, will require nations and cultures to work together toward solutions, Palfreyman says.

“This generation just might be able to achieve that.”

About Ross H. Palfreyman

Ross H. Palfreyman is a Laguna Beach, Calif., lawyer who began his mission work in 1973 in Thailand, during the Vietnam War and the Thai Revolution of '73. Two years of trying to convince devout Buddhists that they'd be better off as Mormons was trying enough, he also was threatened at gunpoint and fended off parasites and rabid dogs during his “indentured servitude.” He initially wrote about his experiences for his six children. Palfreyman's youngest son returns from his mission in Mexico in August.