

...ature to launch: **The permanent adolescents**

Growing up has never been easy, said **Robin Henig** in *The New York Times*, but it's taking longer than it used to. In 1960, fully 77 percent of women and 65 percent of men had, by age 30, completed what sociologists call the "five milestones" of adulthood: finishing school, leaving home, getting a job, marrying, and having a child. In 2000, less than half of women and one-third of men had completed those steps, and the current generation seems to be maturing slower still, with legions of 20-somethings still living with Mommy and Daddy. Sociologists have even coined a new term—"emerging adulthood"—to denote this new transitional life stage. To baby boomers like me, said **Nelle Engoron** in *Salon.com*, it's incomprehensible. We saw our parents as flawed and backward, and "most of us fled our families as quickly as we could." Why don't today's 20-somethings feel that same hunger for independence?

We do, said **Derek Thompson** in *The Atlantic.com*, but the world has changed. Our parents could step straight out of college into a steady job, and 40 years later "clock out with a good-looking pension," but that's not how it works anymore. In the modern job market, shaped

by globalization and recession, salaries are low, and young people have to change jobs every few years, augmenting their incomes with freelance work. It takes far longer to achieve the financial stability that one needs to settle down. This is purely about economics, said **Anya Kamenetz** in *HuffingtonPost.com*. College costs have gone up 1,000 percent over 30 years, and most young Americans graduate with "unprecedented amounts of student loan and credit card debt that persist into their 30s." Housing costs are way up, too. So stop accusing us of immaturity.

Besides, permanent immaturity is an intergenerational phenomenon, said **Jessica Pressler** in *NYmag.com*. Ours is now a society that values personal fulfillment at any cost, and at any age. People currently in their 50s and 60s may have married and had children young, but "can they really be said to have ever 'settled down'?" Once middle age arrived, I seem to recall that "a fairly gigantic number of them" dumped their spouses, changed careers, and began a desperate midlife quest to "find themselves." The pressures on the current crop of youngsters are certainly worthy of examination. But the "more profound" question, surely, is, "Does anyone *ever* grow up anymore?"