

# Chapter 1

## Who are the Lucky Few?

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### Faces of the Lucky Few

Twelve astronauts have walked on the surface of the Moon. Eleven of those twelve (including Neil Armstrong, the first man on the Moon) belonged to the Lucky Few, a special group of Americans who form the subject of this book. NASA's Apollo program actually launched fourteen astronauts for lunar landings, but the crew of Apollo 13 had to abort their mission when they barely survived a disaster in space. Apollo flights 11–17 each flew from the Earth with a crew of three. The command module pilot stayed in orbit while the other two astronauts landed on the Moon. In all, 19 of the 21 Apollo astronauts flying these seven lunar landing missions were members of the Lucky Few, with only Commanders Jim Lovell of Apollo 13 and Al Shepard of Apollo 14 as outsiders.

In addition to eleven of the twelve Moon-walkers, astronomers Carl Sagan (who spent his share of time looking at the Moon) and Joseph H. Taylor (winner of a Nobel Prize for discovery of the first pulsar)

also belong to this selective group. However, the Lucky Few is not a scientific association. Members come from all walks of life, including immigrants from other countries who have had a major impact on life in the United States. These opening pages attempt to convey a sense of both their diversity and their accomplishments.

## **The Lucky Few in Public Life**

As the Civil Rights movement swept across the United States in the second half of the twentieth century, the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. left his pulpit to lead the way toward his dream for America. Dr. King was a member of the Lucky Few. So was James Meredith, who after his tour of duty in the U.S. Air Force returned to Mississippi to enroll (over fierce local protests, and with the help of National Guard troops) in the University of Mississippi as its first black student. Gloria Steinem, feminist pioneer and founder of MS. magazine, belongs to the Lucky Few.

When the United States launched operation Desert Storm to wrest Kuwait from the forces of Saddam Hussein in the early 1990s, Lucky Few Generals Norman Schwarzkopf and Colin Powell led their forces to swift victory across the deserts of the Middle East while Lucky Few General Wesley Clark coordinated the domination of the skies above them.

The first Hispanic Surgeon General of the United States and also the first woman to hold the job, Antonia Novello, is a member of the Lucky Few. So is Jocelyn Elders, the first black woman appointed to the same position. Both of the first female Justices on the United States Supreme Court, Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsberg, belong to the Lucky Few. In fact, for a time they joined with Justices Stephen E. Breyer, Anthony M. Kennedy, Antonin Scalia and David H. Souter to yield a Lucky Few two-thirds majority on the High Court.

The Lucky Few also includes many high-level elected officials. Some notable examples include Arizona Senator John McCain, California Senator Dianne Feinstein, Colorado Senators Ben Nighthorse Campbell and Gary Hart, Connecticut Senator Joseph Lieberman, Georgia Senator Zell Miller, Illinois Senator Carol Mosley Braun and Congressman and Cabinet Officer Donald Rumsfeld,

Missouri Senator and Cabinet Officer John Ashcroft, New York Governor Mario Cuomo and Congressman Jack Kemp, Pennsylvania Senator Henry Heinz, Rhode Island Governor Pierre DuPont, Texas Governor Ann Richards and Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson, and Wyoming Congressman and Vice President Dick Cheney. Many other names could be added to this political list, but even at its most complete it would be as notable for the many famous missing names as for those included. In fact, at this writing no President of the United States has ever been a member of the Lucky Few.

## **The Lucky Few in Business**

Where the Lucky Few *really* shines, however, is in the world of business and finance. If, in the words of President Calvin Coolidge, “the business of America is business,” this has been doubly true for the Lucky Few. Although this theme furnishes one focus for later chapters of the book, even an introduction to the Lucky Few would be impossible without at least a little attention to this side of the picture. Some of the richest people in the world, including investment tycoon Warren Buffett and media mogul Ted Turner, all belong to the Lucky Few. Liz Claiborne created a cosmetics and fashion empire whose impact reaches throughout our society. Calvin Klein began his business empire with jeans and underwear, but has diversified in countless directions. Michael Eisner built a successful media career with the Walt Disney Company. Jack Welch became legendary as the ruthless CEO of the General Electric Corporation. All belong to the Lucky Few. On the other hand, Donald Trump, Lee Iacocca and Bill Gates just missed being members and will never be allowed to join.

Many members of the Lucky Few may not be household names, but the results of their business achievements are familiar to most Americans. John C. Bogle (born in Montclair, New Jersey in 1929) was hired by Wellington Management Company founder Walter Morgan immediately after graduating from Princeton in 1951. After working in the investment business for 23 years, in 1974 Bogle in his turn founded Vanguard, one of the largest and most successful investment firms in America. Self-educated Dee Ward Hock (born in Utah in 1929) became CEO of the newly formed National Bank-Americard Corporation in 1970, which he renamed Visa International in 1977.

Hock led the way into the modern era of electronic bank transfers, magnetic strips on credit cards, and the internationalization of financial services. Phillip H. Knight (born in 1938) excelled as a track star under legendary coach Bill Bowerman at the University of Oregon while studying accounting. His Nike sports shoe company has made him one of the 30 richest men in America. Thomas B. Monaghan (born in Michigan in 1937) bought a small pizza shop in Ypsilanti named Dominick's, renamed it Domino's Pizza, and over the next four decades built one of the largest restaurant conglomerates in the country. Whitney MacMillan, a direct descendant of founder William Cargill, made his fortune as the last family CEO of the family-owned Cargill Incorporated, the unquestioned king of America's agribusiness sector. John S. Reed, as the CEO of Citicorp, helped to pioneer the introduction of ATM machines in banks and other businesses.

Although many of these successful business leaders consciously avoid the public spotlight, others have found a place in that spotlight – sometimes by choice, and sometimes involuntarily. One-time IBM salesman, EDS founder and presidential candidate H. Ross Perot made the transition from business to public life by choice. On the other hand, Martha Stewart and Ivan Boesky both worked hard to become rich and successful. Both made mistakes and went to jail in the glare of media spotlights. Both are members of the Lucky Few. Kenneth Lay, the Enron CEO whose greed and arrogance inflicted incredible damage on the U.S. economy, belonged to the Lucky Few.

## **The Lucky Few in Sports**

In the first Super Bowl football game ever played in January 1967, both starting quarterback Bart Starr of the Green Bay Packers and starting quarterback Len Dawson of the Kansas City Chiefs were members of the Lucky Few, like other football stars including Jim Brown, Dick Butkus, Frank Gifford, Joe Namath, Gayle Sayers, Johnny Unitas, and many others.

Although some baseball greats such as Ted Williams, Reggie Jackson or Mark McGwire will never be admitted to the ranks of Lucky Few, the world of professional baseball is even better-represented than professional football. Lucky Few baseball legends include players like Hank Aaron, Howard "Mickey" Mantle and Willie

Mays, along with a long list of their contemporaries. Even Pete Rose, whose baseball claim to fame is somewhat different, can be counted among the Lucky Few.

Likewise, famed golfers such as Jack Niklaus, Arnold Palmer, Lee Trevino and Kathy Whitworth belong to the Lucky few. On the other hand, Nancy Lopez and Tiger Woods can never join. Boxing legends Joe Frazier and Mohammed Ali are part of the Lucky Few, but George Foreman and Mike Tyson are not. Virgil Runnels (better known to wrestling fans as Dusty Rhodes) belongs to the Lucky Few, but neither Hulk Hogan (who went on to star in movies) nor Jesse Ventura (who went on to be Governor of Minnesota) are members. One of the greatest jockeys of all time, Willie Shoemaker, was a member of the Lucky Few.

## **The Lucky Few in Music**

In the world of music, U.S.-born conductors James Levine and Leonard Slatkin join immigrants such as Zubin Mehta from India, Lorin Maazel from France, Seiji Ozawa from Japan or Andre Previn from Germany, who all qualify for Lucky Few membership.

In almost every branch of modern popular music, members of the Lucky Few appear as founding artists. The quintessential American pop music icon of the twentieth century, Elvis Presley, belonged to the Lucky Few. If they had become Americans, every one of the Beatles (plus Eric Clapton, Mick Jagger, Keith Richards and others) would count among the Lucky Few. As it is, rock music legends from Roberta Flack, Grace Slick and Janis Joplin to Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison and Van Morrison all come from the ranks of the Lucky Few. Their progress was charted for many years on American Bandstand by another Lucky Few member, the “eternal teenager,” Dick Clark.

Country music practically owes its foundations to the Lucky Few. Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson, Kenny Rogers, Tammy Wynette, and Charley Pride only begin to give an idea about how much the Lucky Few have shaped this musical tradition.

In every branch of music, though, a few of the most outstanding contributors will never have a chance to join the Lucky Few. Hank Williams fits that mold for country music. Bruce Springsteen is left out when it comes to rock and roll, as is James Brown when we

consider the blues or soul. On the other hand, the Lucky Few do count among their number people such as Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight, Curtis Mayfield, Little Richard, Diana Ross and Barry White.

The Lucky Few also created an entire new era for folk music in the United States through songs of members like Bob Dylan, Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel, and an impressive contingent of women including Joan Baez, Carole King, Joni Mitchell and Carly Simon. Other Lucky Few musicians include Burt Bacharach, Neil Diamond, Robert Goulet, Tom Jones, Bob Marley, Ricky Nelson, Barbra Streisand, and Neil Young.

## **The Lucky Few in Television and Movies**

The Lucky Few often appeared on television, including news anchors Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw or Jim Lehrer, investigative reporters from the ridiculous (Geraldo Rivera) to the sublime (Barbara Walters), sports commentator John Madden, journalists Bill Moyers and Tony Brown, comedienne Carol Burnett, comedian Bill Cosby, and commentator Regis Philbin. In keeping with the pattern already emerging, of course, some well-known television personalities such as Jay Leno, David Letterman and Oprah Winfrey (as well as the late and lamented Fred Rogers of Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood and Bob Keeshan, better known as Captain Kangaroo) have been excluded from the Lucky Few.

Putting images on the Silver Screen also has been an occupation for Lucky Few movie directors Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas and Martin Scorsese, but director Steven Spielberg will never gain admission to the selective group. Hollywood has conferred fame and fortune on Lucky Few actors Woody Allen, Julie Andrews, Robert DeNiro, Danny DeVito, Clint Eastwood, Barbara Eden, brother and sister Jane and Peter Fonda (but not their father Henry), Harrison Ford, Goldie Hawn, Dennis Hopper, Steve Martin, Bette Midler, Mary Tylor Moore, Jack Nicholson, Leonard Nimoy, Al Pacino, Richard Pryor, Robert Redford, Elizabeth Taylor (but not her former husband Richard Burton), Raquel Welch, and Gene Wilder. A full list could go on literally for pages. Again, though, in addition to a few names noted above, other equally famous stars find themselves excluded

from membership. Marlon Brando, James Garner, Mel Gibson, Tom Hanks, Jerry Lewis, Marilyn Monroe and Paul Newman can never aspire to be part of the Lucky Few.

## Membership in the Lucky Few

In case anyone might be interested in joining the mysterious Lucky Few, the bad news is that the membership list was closed long ago, at the end of 1945. No new members have been accepted since that time. There has never been any actual application process for membership. Virtually none of the members of the Lucky Few even have been aware that they belong to the group. This is so because membership in the Lucky Few is defined simply by the year you were born. Everyone in the United States born from 1929 to 1945 is automatically a member, and nobody else is allowed in the group. The Lucky Few, in other words, is what is familiarly known as a generation.

## Defining Generations

So what is a generation? The demographic definition of a generation is very precise: simply observe the age of a parent at a baby's birth. The years between births of parent and child give the length of the generation. In their classic study of generations in history, William Strauss and Neil Howe (1991) call this feature of kinship the family generation. We can find the length of a generation easily for any individual – my mother had reached age 38 when I was born, but family generations may be only half that long. Ryder (1965) reserved the term generation for such units of kinship structure rather than for groups of people within a broad age span (say, childhood and adolescence) during a particular epoch (say, the Great Depression of the 1930s).

A society reproduces itself continuously, though – babies are born every year, even every day, each with a unique personal length of generation (Ryder 1965:32). The demographic definition of a generation provides no boundaries for saying where one generation stops and the next starts (Kertzer 1983). Ryder preferred the term *cohort* for the alternate idea of people all born together or starting together

on some other process such as employment or marriage (a historical generation). Strauss and Howe called such groupings cohort generations: "... cohort generations are to societies what family generations are to families...the earlier generation is always older than the next and normally exercises authority over those that follow – the cohort type in a public setting, the family type in a private setting." (Strauss & Howe 1991:437)

We will refer to a group of people all sharing a common demographic trait (here age or year of birth) as a cohort, as Ryder suggested. However, these cohorts cover short, uniform time periods (single calendar years of birth or five-year ranges) without respect to historical events or conditions.<sup>1</sup> A *historical generation* (the same thing as Strauss and Howe's cohort generation) refers to a group of birth cohorts set off from other groups by strong historical boundaries. What sets apart the people born during a particular span of years (such as the Lucky Few) as a distinct historical generation?

To tell where one historical generation stops and the next begins in calendar time, we must add historical context and events. When biography and history intersect, major historical events and conditions affect people of different ages in different ways. This fact creates historical generations.<sup>2</sup> Ryder's classic study of cohorts and social change (1965) made the important point that the distinctiveness of each historical generation begins with the most elementary fact of size. A large birth cohort faces different options in life from a small one (Easterlin 1966), options that may be affected by historical events but that cannot be ignored or changed once a historical generation has come into existence.

Though we follow the convention of identifying generations in terms of the years when they were born, many of the events that shape the distinctive character of each generation only occur years later. Events taking place as we complete school, find a partner in life, or get a job affect us at young adult ages (Rindfuss, 1991), so Ryder paid attention to unique historical situations as influences on young adults in particular. Dramatic political and economic events such as the stock market crash in 1929, the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the oil shock in the mid 1970s, or the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks of 2001 changed the ideas and lives of each new generation just coming into adulthood. New safe, inexpensive, reliable



contraceptives in the mid 1960s changed the attitudes of people just entering sexual maturity and contemplating whether and when to start families. Sudden changes in immigration laws in the 1920s and again in the 1960s influenced immigrants themselves as well as the communities they left and those where they settled. Traumatic episodes such as war impact young adult ages most, since it is the young who usually fight the wars on the actual battlefields.

Historical epochs and events identify seven generations in the next chapter, quite similar (but not identical) to the generations suggested by Strauss and Howe. We give each generation a name reflecting their most distinctive demographic feature or historical experience, with the generation here called the Lucky Few (the book's namesake generation) just in the middle. Most information in following chapters comes from original calculations using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Samples (IPUMS), publicly-available computerized data files reconstructed from the manuscript decennial Censuses of Population and Housing, and from annual Current Population Surveys available since 1962. This massive effort at data recovery, conducted in recent decades with federal government support, amounts to the demographic equivalent of the Human Genome Project. Taken together, the IPUMS data files map out who we are as a country and how we got that way, allowing us to look at details and patterns that have not been accessible to earlier researchers.

The "stop-motion animation" provided by census data is far from perfect, but it does allow us to see the uniqueness of the Lucky Few in comparison to generations that came before and after them. While census samples let us look at the entire twentieth century, when we to the adult ages of the Lucky Few in the 1970s and later, additional sources of evidence allow us to flesh out the picture more fully. But before taking a closer look at the Lucky Few, the next chapter considers the larger context of successive American generations.

## Notes

1. In reserving the term "generation" for individual-level study of kinship Ryder was following the lead of Mannheim (1923, 1927). But philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset (1923, 1951, 1958) could not have been thinking

of demographic or “family” generations when he suggested that major changes in society occur every fifteen years as one generation replaces another. Other writers also use the term *generation* to describe groups of birth cohorts (Eisenstadt 1956, Carlsson & Karlsson 1970) or people all hired at the same time (Gusfield 1957).

2. Without a doubt, Strauss and Howe remain the reigning champions in drawing boundaries for historical generations, sketching an ambitious panorama of eighteen generations of Americans beginning in the late 1500s. They posit roughly century-long cycles of four repeating generational types, each conditioned by historical experiences during key stages of life. They identify secular crises of social organization and religious awakenings of moral values that alternate every 40–45 years. If we divide life into stages of youth, young adulthood, midlife and elderhood (Strauss & Howe 1991:60), each roughly 20–25 years long, and mark our generations based on such intervals, each religious crisis catches one group in each of the four stages. In the same way, following periods of calm, then secular crisis, then calm, then spiritual crisis again will catch successive other generations at equivalent ages and influence them differently.

“A social moment not only shapes personality according to current phase-of-life roles,” suggest Strauss and Howe (1991:444), “but also forges an enduring bond of identity between each cohort-group and its role – an acquired style that redefines both how each group will later regard itself and how it will later be regarded by others.” (444)

Strauss & Howe paid most attention to psychological outlooks as expressed in the writings of educated elites in each generation when they decided which historical events to count as “social moments” shaping generations. The present study follows more in the spirit of works like Peter Laslett’s Cambridge group, illustrated by his famous *Household and Family in Past Time* (1972), in that we focus on the reconstruction of details of everyday life for the great mass of people in each generation. Since we use different kinds of information for identifying historical periods, the exact dates chosen as generational boundaries in this book differ slightly from those of Strauss and Howe. Still it is interesting to note how similar many of their generational boundaries chosen nearly two decades earlier turn out to be, compared to those derived independently for this analysis.