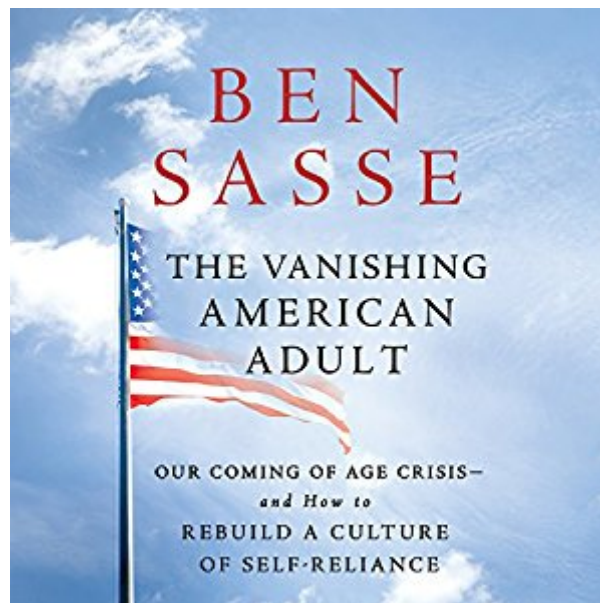




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# The Vanishing American Adult: Our Coming-of-Age Crisis - And How To Rebuild A Culture Of Self-Reliance



## Synopsis

An instant New York Times bestseller - read by the author. In an era of safe spaces, trigger warnings, and an unprecedented election, the country's youth are in crisis. Senator Ben Sasse warns the nation about the existential threat to America's future. Raised by well-meaning but overprotective parents and coddled by well-meaning but misbegotten government programs, America's youth are ill-equipped to survive in our highly-competitive global economy. Many of the coming-of-age rituals that have defined the American experience since the Founding: learning the value of working with your hands, leaving home to start a family, becoming economically self-reliant - are being delayed or skipped altogether. The statistics are daunting: 30% of college students drop out after the first year, and only 4 in 10 graduate. One in three 18-to-34 year-olds live with their parents. From these disparate phenomena: Nebraska Senator Ben Sasse who as president of a Midwestern college observed the trials of this generation up close, sees an existential threat to the American way of life. In *The Vanishing American Adult*, Sasse diagnoses the causes of a generation that can't grow up and offers a path for raising children to become active and engaged citizens. He identifies core formative experiences that all young people should pursue: hard work to appreciate the benefits of labor, travel to understand deprivation and want, the power of reading, the importance of nurturing your body - and explains how parents can encourage them. Our democracy depends on responsible, contributing adults to function properly - without them America falls prey to populist demagogues. A call to arms, *The Vanishing American Adult* will ignite a much-needed debate about the link between the way we're raising our children and the future of our country.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is a personal, family-oriented guide to the socio-political issues that a book like *Å Juggernaut: Why the System Crushes the Only People Who Can Save It* Å handles on the macro scale. It is a voice of reason and common sense in a time of alternative facts and fake news. It is a reminder of what it is to be human in an increasingly post-human world. The argument is simple: Various cultural forces have altered our institutions so that we no longer educate our young. The phase of adolescence which had been a transitional phase is now the permanent goal, and most do not escape. Most high school grads have not worked a job at all. The norm is for college grads to go back and live with their parents. Video games occupy the attention of most young adults. Marriage and family is put off until one's thirties if ever. Sasse doesn't spend much time discussing the origins of this epidemic. He jumps right into the solution, which amounts to character building. There are five main pillars to this character building, based on the Sasse's own parental program:

1. Overcome peer culture
2. Work hard
3. Resist consumption
4. Travel to experience the difference between need and want
5. Become truly literate

It's astonishing that these principles even have to be mentioned. But they do. Thankfully they do not read like tired cliches, but rather clarion calls to a more virtuous life and education. In addition to *Å Juggernaut*, I would recommend *Å Out of the Ashes: Rebuilding American Culture* Å as well as *Å The Road to Character* Å as complementary reads. Ben Sasse is one of a few new politicians who have offered a fresh perspective on our longstanding problems. We can only hope that the muck and mire of Washington doesn't defeat him the way it has so many other bright stars to arrive there of late.

Ben Sasse is not a typical politician, and he says explicitly that this is not a policy book. He is not telling you how he is going to take care of you. There is no plan to save the world. He describes the many, many ills of our education system with the knowledgeable perspective of the son and husband of teachers - and tells you he is home schooling his children. This book consists of his observations on how to raise successful children. He cites other authors who have given the issue some thought. These include Rousseau and John Dewey, with whom he often disagrees, and Diane Ravitch and John Gatto writing about public schools. He is an educated man who wants the best for his children. Sasse is a US Senator. He envisions that the problems he identifies must be resolved within the polity that is the United States. Hirschmann wrote in 1970 that there are three choices

when one is confronted with a difficult problem: Æ Exit, Voice, and Loyalty. Sasse addresses the second of them ÆfÆç Æ Æ Æ he assumes the problems are fixable. Unlike most politicians, he sees that the people must be an active part of the solution. It cannot be imposed from above. Sociologists identify many markers associated with becoming an adult. Eight big ones are: 1. Moving from parents ÆfÆç Æ Æ Æ home 2. Leaving school for the final time 3. Getting a full-time job 4. Reaching economic self-sufficiency 5. Loss of virginity 6. Getting married 7. Having children 8. Establishing an independent household These passages provide structure to life. They used to happen systematically, and in a somewhat predictable order. For millennials (1980-95, per Sasse) and Gen Z this is no longer the case. As President of Midland University Sasse noted an unwillingness to engage in and to finish jobs, an unwillingness to think things through, and an unwillingness to grapple with things as an adult. Unless we can turn these trends around, there is nothing that can be done at a policy level to restore the country. Sasse's book is primarily addressed to parents: how to raise children to become real adults. His book (outline below) is divided into two parts: identifying the problem and suggesting things that individuals can do to address it within their own families.

Introduction: My Kids ÆfÆç Æ Æ Æ "Need ÆfÆç Æ Æ Æ Æ • Air Conditioning

Part I Our Passivity Problem ---- One: Stranded in Neverland ---- Two: From Little Citizens to Baby Einsteins ---- Three: More School Isn't Enough

Part II An Active Program ---- Four: Flee Age Segregation ---- Five: Embrace Work Pain ---- Six: Consume Less ---- Seven: Travel to See ---- Eight: Build a Bookshelf ---- Nine: Make America an Idea Again

Postscript: Why This Wasn't a Policy Book

Sasse is uniquely well prepared to write on these themes. Son of a churchgoing high school wrestling coach, fourth generation in the small town of Fremont, Nebraska, he worked on farms as a kid. His drive and intellect powered him through five academic degrees, including Harvard and Yale, a career in consulting and (at age 37) a university presidency. He married a fellow Christian and has two teenage daughters and a kindergarten aged son. This is an outstanding book. My extensive reading notes appear as comments.

Exceeds expectations by challenging both parents and our culture, offering compelling and timely solutions. We now emphasize the protection of our children rather than their productivity. While our kids may be safer, they ÆfÆç Æ Æ Æ are also softer ÆfÆç Æ Æ Æ • more hooked on comforts like AC, their own bedroom, an Xbox, etc. They are unfamiliar with manual labor at a time when lifelong learning and flexibility are more important than ever in our disrupted economy. This is a big problem because ÆfÆç Æ Æ Æ "America ÆfÆç Æ Æ Æ Æ Æ's next generation will be our next

generation of rulers that shows how a republic works. Fragile teens cannot be virtuous, because virtue implies strength. And citizens that lacks self-reliance cannot be truly free. Sasse puts delayed adolescence into a historical context. He helps readers understand just how concerning this crisis is, given our changing economy and our unique time in history. His writing style is sometimes advanced, but worth the effort. Call-out boxes at the end of each chapter feature helpful practical suggestions for implementation. The Vanishing American Adult is a timely and enjoyable read. It can spark a much-needed discussion about how we can help our youth become American adults in the 21st century.

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