

## Other Views

# Learning that we're not so special is key

By Ruben Navarrette

SAN DIEGO — A few weeks ago, I spoke to a group of high-school students enrolled in an Advanced Placement course on American government.

I said something shocking — at least I assume so because, when I said it, several students let out gasps or shook their heads.

What surprised me is that what the kids considered controversial, I'd call common sense.

I had been asked to talk about government and media. But since both of these institutions are in disrepair, I got bored with the subject matter.

So I moved on to what I'm really interested in at the moment — bigger issues about how human beings relate to one another. I'm intrigued by the instincts and idiosyncrasies of this latest generation of young Americans, the so-called millennials, and what is for parents the challenge of raising young children (in my case, an 8-year-old, 6-year-old and 4-year-old) in an environment where the messages they get on a daily basis seem to run counter to the lessons and values that we're trying to teach them.

"In my case," I told the students, "I'm trying to teach my 8-year-old that she is not special, that she is not the center of the universe, and that the world doesn't revolve around her."

Bam! That was the

shocker. One young man called out, "Oh snap!" Others seemed taken aback. They seemed to wonder, "Why would any parent teach his kids that they're not special?"

Because they're not. We have a whole generation, by now maybe two generations, of young Americans who have been raised to worship at the holy trinity of Me, Myself, and I. Show me an 18-year-old in America and — in most cases — I'll show you someone is stuck on himself.

Blame the parents. These kids were told they were special since before they could speak.

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And the toy industry. These days, toddlers carry dolls that have been especially made to look just like them. Creepy.

And the public schools. In elementary school, these kids have been spared the humiliation of having papers graded in red ink because educators decided the color was too oppressive.

And our society's obsession with self-esteem. By the time today's kids got to middle school, they had figured out that it didn't matter who finished first because everyone got a trophy.

And we should blame the entertainment industry. When these kids were in high school, they were glued to reality shows where overconfident young people who can't sing shrug off judges' criticism in pursuit of this generation's favorite drug: fame.

And technology. By the time they entered college, these young people had logged thousands of hours on popular social media websites where anyone can be a chronicler of events, and everyone's opinion is equally valuable.

And finally, we need to blame our society's culture of narcissism.

Look around, I told the students. It's all about us. We live in a society where there are an infinite number of ways you can order a cup of coffee, hamburger or sandwich. It is all tailor-made to suit our tastes. All because we're

supposedly special and unique.

My 8-year-old hears these messages every day. And so it's no wonder that she's convinced that she's entitled to have it because she's the center of the universe.

I have to teach her otherwise, I said. Because if I don't, someday, a cold and unforgiving world will do just that. And not in a way that's loving and compassionate.

It was right about then that the applause came.

Ruben Navarrette is a syndicated columnist.