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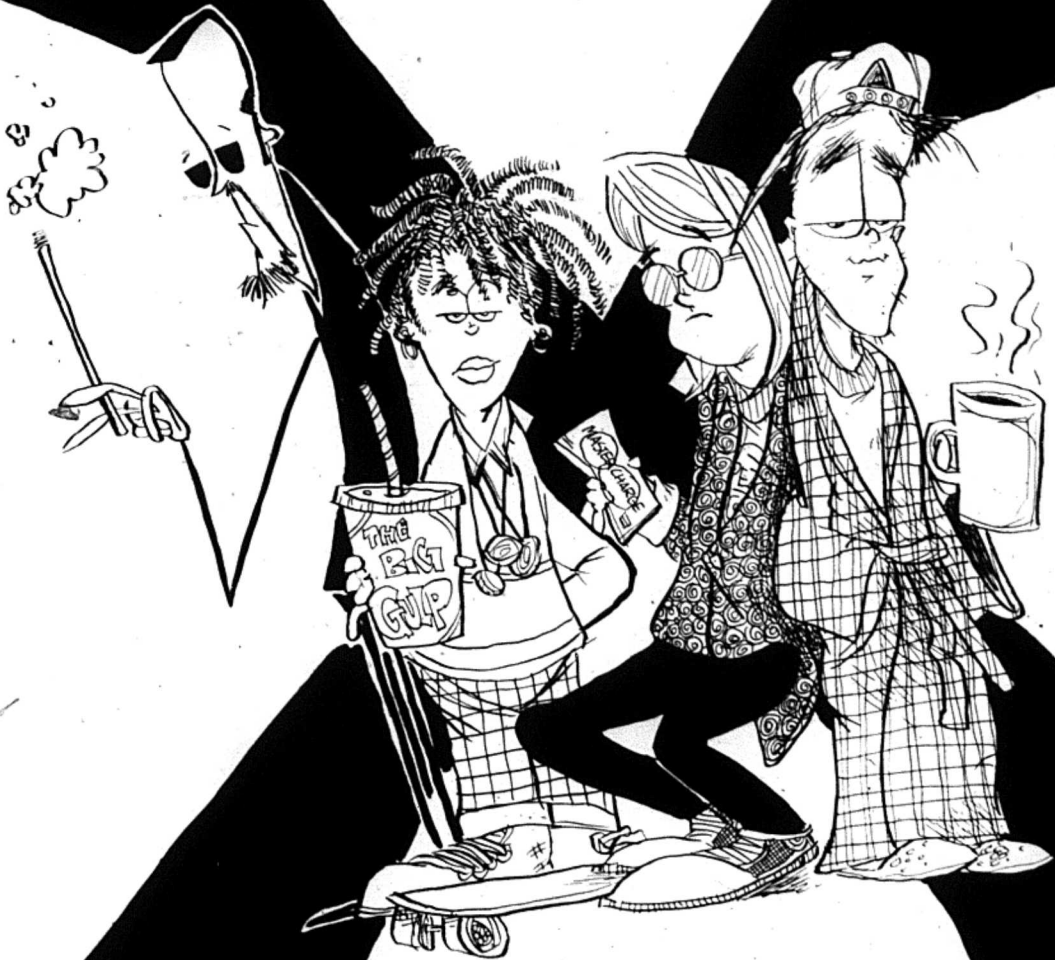
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PHASE

the College Heights Herald Magazine

.....
September 27, 1994

GENERATION



GENERATION

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PHASE

the College Heights Herald Magazine

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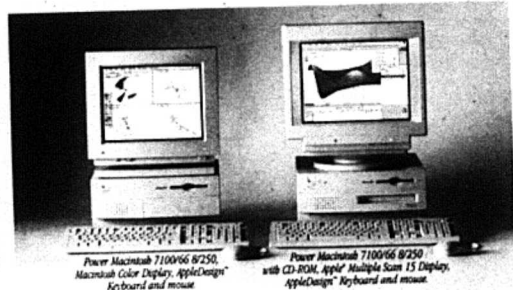
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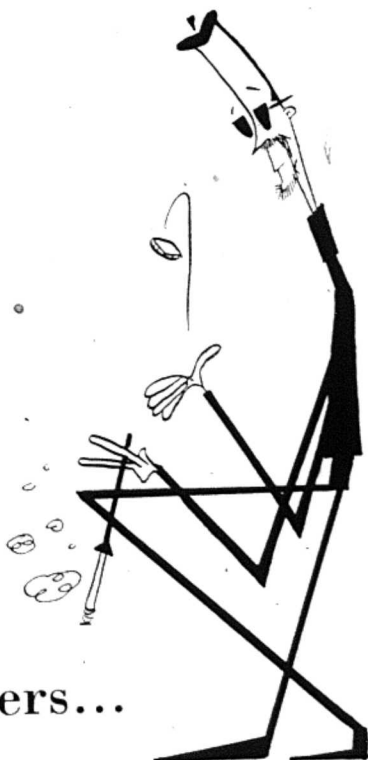
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OUT with the old, IN with the new

Move over Baby Boomers...

GENERATION X HAS ARRIVED

STORY BY SHERRY I. WILSON



Answering life's problems with mom and dad's credit card, staying in college six or more years and not having any real goals or responsibilities is seen by many as the easy way out.

For some students, it's the only way. They are members of the latest media stir and marketing craze — Generation X.

Some students admit they have no money, no goals, no motivation. They are in college to find a position in life, something that will make them happy — the thing is, they just haven't found it yet.

"I think I'm part of it," Harrodsburg freshman Stephanie Royalty said of the term "Generation X."

"I'm so confused right now, and I have no idea what my interests are."

She feels targeted to buy and spend but does not know if she will ever learn to save money.

Royalty, an undeclared major, is looking for a part-time job so she can keep up with her growing expenses. She spends most of her money on cigarettes, gas and alcohol.

Until she figures out what she wants to do, she said she will take life one step at a time, looking for what will one day motivate her.

"I eventually want to do something worthwhile," she said.

WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

The phrase was coined in a best-selling novel by Douglas Coupland when he decided to establish a look and feel for the '90s. His book, "Generation X," introduced the United States to its latest version of the young adult.

When Coupland decided to term himself and his peer group, the only clear thing was that they were not yet labeled, or just an X generation.

Soon after the book was published, media found there is power in the labeling of groups of people.

There are 46 million 18- to 29-year-olds who feel the same way. Falling under this new generation's mysterious label, they also are falling prey to the marketing world.

The fashion industry, fast-food franchises, alcohol companies and advertisers all have admitted to the fueling of Generation X, which has grown into a frenzy of money-spending, sex-selling and fast living among the young.

Television and radio target twentysomethings, fashioning a certain image which every young person "should possess" and strive for.

"They'll buy anything," psychology professor Patty Randolph said — especially looks.

High-fashion tights with flea-market tops and sweaters set "X"ers apart. Young people look to appearance as a pastime. It's a feel-good quality about them, Randolph said.

"X"ers look and dress within certain boundaries. Famous ones such as Kate Moss have decided on a starved physique and shiny face. Marketing has edged the look by giving it a name, "the waif look," and by making it a feminine must among the new generation.

SAFE SEX

"X"ers have grown up in a sexual revolution that is the first to establish "safe sex."

"The college population seems to take sex quite seriously,"

This generation is influenced more by peers, rather than by adults.

—JUDY OWEN,
Career Services Director

Randolph said. "Although they are unclear about goals, they are very aware of the materialistic market value of sex in ads."

"X"ers watch MTV, Fox Broadcasting Co., Entertainment TV. They read magazines such as Details, Spin, Rolling Stone and Entertainment Weekly. All of them are geared to the lifestyle and all of them feed off the current trend of "What next," Randolph said.

THE WORKING WORLD

Career Services Director Judy Owen said most of the articles about "X"ers are negative and show young people with no ideas about careers or jobs.

"I see nothing helpful in making those kinds of judgments. I don't think that is helpful to lump them into one title," she said. "I would rather look at people individually. I find that is an easy way to find excuses."

College students should take their time in deciding what they want in life, she said.

There are all kinds of careers available, and the important thing is to determine the kinds of things students are doing

and see if that's offered as a career, Owen said.

Young adults have grown up with single parents or as latchkey kids, and these could be some of the reasons for the feelings of doubt when it comes to getting motivated in life, she said.

Values and perceptions are learned as children, Owen said. "This generation is influenced more by peers, rather than by adults."

Randolph, who read the book "Generation X," said she believes this generation is comparable to the generation around the turn of the century.

"If we look at the disaffected 1920s, at the people taking time to find a place in life, going to Paris and studying art as a way of life, it was a very elite group then, and now it is on a bigger level," she said.

The young people who took life at a slow pace and were continually financed by their parents were criticized. Famous ones such as Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald were included in the group of the "unfocused ones" who traveled to Paris to spend time with friends and to Spain for bull-fighting, Randolph said.

"Now there is opportunity to explore that again, mostly because of college opportunities," she said.

Students have the means to travel abroad for study, to take time off for themselves and to open their minds up to the world.

"Twenty years ago, we believed careers were for a lifetime. Where now, careers change midway through life. It's not predictable; students can say 'OK, now if I don't like something, I'll do something else.'"

STEREOTYPE IS NOT REALIST

Bowling Green freshman Liz Tims said she disagrees with it all.

"I have heard about it, but I don't think it's a stereotype," she said.

Tims, who is looking for a part-time job with finances, said she takes everything

To cut down on expenses, Tims said, she wears her clothes. It is just a way to be responsible, she says with my big college exp

"The money I spend is very important. I'm not aimlessly going through life."

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"People in our age group are finding out exactly what it is they want to do and controlling their own life..."

Two Generation Xers speak out on life

Bowling Green senior Jennifer Armstrong and her brother Jimmy admit it. They fall into the "X" identity. It's a late Friday night, and Jennifer sits, crossing her legs underneath her stiff green dress. Jimmy sits next to her, smoking a cigarette. Both are reflecting on their lives and if or when they will take off.

They have gone through life giving opportunities a shot and finding career paths by going out on a whim.

Jennifer, 22, came to Western wanting to start a career in photojournalism. She changed her mind and a few semesters later became an art major. Later, she spent a semester studying art photography at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and has recently transferred back to Western to complete a degree in art with emphasis on painting.

Armstrong's brother Jimmy, 25, is a freshman nursing major. After three semesters studying civil engineering, he "flunked out" of Vanderbilt University in 1992. To pay off an accumulation of student loans, he joined the army, where he trained to be a medic. He's starting out "fresh" now and wants to focus on a medical career.

"Life is kind of like going through and experiencing and picking out what you want and what fits you," Jimmy said.

Jennifer agreed, and she said she has never been afraid of succeeding.

"That's what Generation X is about," she said. "During post-World War II, you were supposed to do something like get married and get a job to support the family. Today, it's about getting out of that ruled set."

Jennifer and Jimmy both live at home with their parents and younger brother to save money, and they both work part-time jobs. They want to graduate knowing that they chose the life they want to lead.

Jennifer said she went to Chicago to study art because she was trying at the time to get focused.

"It's what I wanted to do, but at this point, I'm not ready to get focused," she said.

The main reason for coming back to Western was expenses, but she also said

she was displacing what she could do at Western.

"The two schools are really not that much different," she said. "It was like the little-minnow-in-the-ocean effect. I do plan on going back, though."

Switching directions has been good for her, she said.

Jimmy has had the same experience.

"The army for me was really good," he said. "It helped me make up my mind for what I wanted. Academically, I have been doing well here at Western; it's different."

Both have spent more time than usual looking into a career to follow, and they say their parents are very supportive. "Our parents have always been great, and they never give us. Why don't you get a real job?" Jennifer said.

Their parents are always supportive of what accomplishments they do complete, Jimmy added. He said he and his sister want to take time to find their individualism instead of sliding into a form.

"As much stuff as is out there, it takes a while to take it all in," he said. "You've got to take the time to formulate a belief system."

Jennifer said she knows so many people her age who have promised not to get married just because they don't want to

taking control

STORY BY SHERRY I. WILSON

conform.

"The two of us have had an advantage because we have been forced to adjust to different ways of life," she said.

The siblings have lived in seven cities while growing up. They went to school in what seemed like "ghettos" in Baton Rouge, La., and have attended upper-class, all-white schools as well.

Their father moved the family a lot because of his job as an accountant.

"He got caught up in the 'I've got a family.' He did the right American thing," Jimmy said. "People in our age group are finding out exactly what it is they want to do and controlling their own life."

Don't look at this generation in a negative way, Jennifer said.

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LISTEN UP

Media teaches Xers how to eXpress themselves

Those of us included in the term Generation X know that "Reality Bites."

It is echoed by our music, satirized in films and displayed in all its morbid glory by MTV's "The Real World."

Our culture mocks us and the media has slapped our entire existence with a black censor bar. And yet, through it all, our diversity and contributions endure.

Through our lives we have watched ourselves grow up on the big screen and witnessed ourselves reflected in the revival of music.

Can the identity everyone claims we have lost be found on that long media highway of the '90s?

Let's say it can. The following are some of the most accurate reflections of Generation X:

▲ "Pump Up the Volume" is the most accurate representation of our generation's fight against one another, besides being one of the best (and most underrated) movies of the '80s.

It mirrored the miniature society of high school and how different social types are heterogeneous when mixed. And, of course, it brought to light the struggle we all have of finding our own identity.

"I don't find it particularly encouraging that we live in this like exhausted decade where there's nothing to do and no one to look up to," Christian Slater's character said in the movie.

"All the great themes have been used up

and turned into theme parks."

▲ The song "Smells Like Teen Spirit" defined teen angst. It was the ballad of frustrated youth, as was the entire Seattle Sound.

Nirvana's frontman, Kurt Cobain, epitomized that angst with his shaggy hair,

scratchy screams and power riffs. His death was t h e

ultimate reflection of the struggles of Generation X.

▲ MTV defined our generation rather than reflected it.

The entire concept of MTV revolutionized Generation X. It gave us a medium of our own to brandish our scarred emotions in the form of hit songs and surreal music videos.

MTV told us what was cool, showed us how we looked and always gave us something to watch.

Its music became our anthems and its images were our therapy.

▲ "The Breakfast Club," although a little before the growing up of Generation X, was a perfect model of teenage confusion.

Patrick Bernardy

Commentary



The movie is a cult favorite to Generation X because of the relatability of its subject matter. All of us were labeled either a basket case, athlete, princess, brain or criminal by our peers in high school, and what continues to amaze Generation X about the movie is the truth it manages to capture.

▲ Pearl Jam's "Jeremy" and another Christian Slater movie, "Heathers," touched upon one of the most important issues facing Generation X — suicide.

Unfortunately, Generation X seems to think suicide is a powerful way to deliver a message to someone who otherwise would not listen.

Both were powerful reflections of Generation X's attitude toward the evil and sad fact that suicide sometimes gives someone a soul no one thought they had.

▲ And last but not least is "Reality Bites," that testament to a dying job market where even a college education cannot pull us out of fast-food work.

The movie was well-timed and helped Generation X receive a little sympathy about their opportunities and future. Winona Ryder was the model character, a college valedictorian.

But where is that identity? It's there somewhere.

While we're looking, maybe we can use what's left of our lives to make a better world than the one left to us.

Perhaps yet, we can put our hypocritical parents to rest, knowing we have done them proud.

FACING LIFE AT 21: Where's my cane?

I'm over the hill.

I can't believe it; I don't know how it happened. It's not that one morning I had arthritis or started losing my hair or anything.

It's just that I'm on the fading side of youth.

Why? Because there are no more target ages. As a young teen you can't wait to be 16, when you can drive; then 18, when you can walk

comfortably into R movies; then

21, when you can drink.

Then hello, adulthood.

No wonder they call people my age disillusioned. This is it? We thought it was cool to be this old.

Now I see it was more fun pretending to be old because you could get away with a lot of things

— simply by being young.

Say you're 21, like me. Now

there are no rules to play around with, except the big, serious ones. No slipping out at night to see friends, no sneaking into movie theaters, no fake IDs or telling an older friend to get a certain bottle for you as you wait outside the liquor store.

The next age marker for me is senior citizenhood, and frankly, AARP benefits aren't half as fun as making out in the high school parking lot.

I've felt this coming since I turned 21 in May. After that, life stretches ahead with no markers, no birthdays introducing new freedoms. But being over the hill really smacked me in the face this summer, when I worked in Florida. Being new in town, I was trying to find things to do, places to go. I tried roller hockey.

The boy at one business mumbled into the phone with a voice I used to think was sooooo cute, and now it just sounds drugged: "Yeah, we have roller hockey. Does your son play or something?"

What? "No, I do."

"Oh. How old are yuh?"

Feet planted on the floor, eyes burning in what I thought was his direction: "21."

"Oh. We don't have league play for people that old."

That old, that old; it echoed as I hung up.

This was new: too old to do something?

I feel like I've locked myself out of my house. I look back through the lighted window and see the next generation: a group of 12-year-olds,

some sexually active, some computer-savvy, some already prepping for college. All who have nine more years before they hear the door slam behind them, and they whirl around and say, "Where the hell am I?"

You know, I've always looked at the label "Generation X" with skepticism. It's too clinical; a well-defined age range, economic factors,

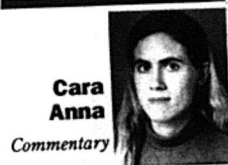
educational factors.

Dump those determinations, and I'm willing to say a Generation X does exist. It's full of people who aren't sure of the next step in their lives.

It's me, but then again it could be my dad a few years ago, after he left his office job and took a hard look at his future. It could be anyone, of any age, anywhere, who slips from a routine to take charge of an unsure life.

So today I say I'm over the hill. But tomorrow I may laugh at that and think I have my whole life ahead of me. That's just the way it goes.

This column originally ran this summer in the Palm Beach Post.



Cara Anna

Commentary

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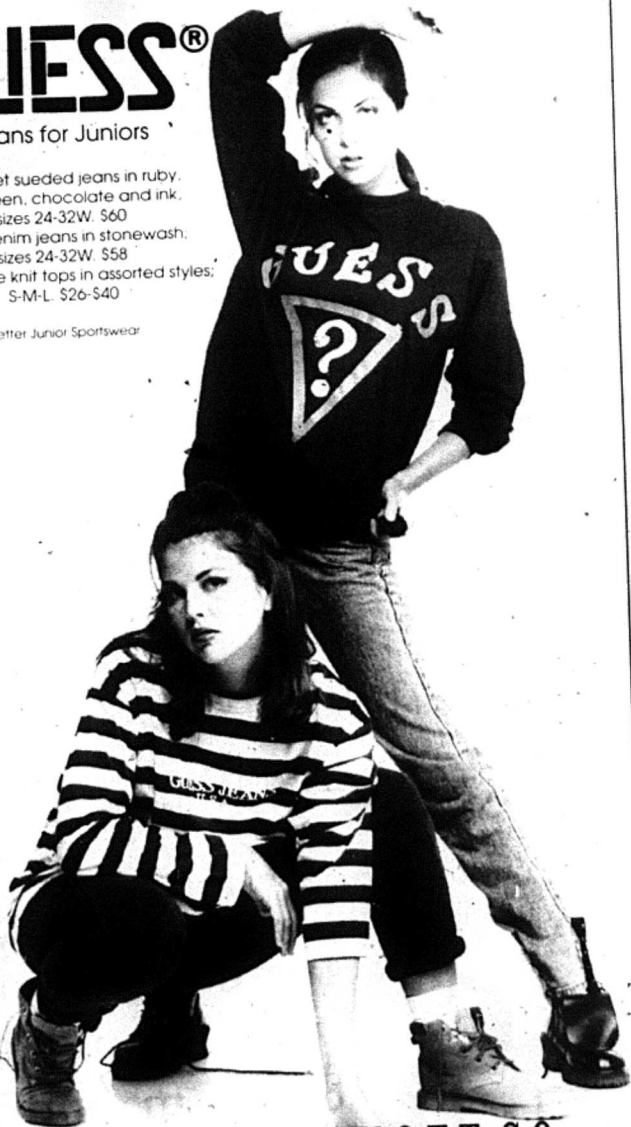
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THINK AGAIN: Call us what you will, but slackers we are not

Generation X, Slackers and Baby Busters. Yes, this is what the previous generation, the Baby Boomers, are calling you and me.

Why?

Because to them we are a bunch of whiny, spoiled brats who go to college only because we have nothing better to do, then drop out only to seek employment at McJobs — Blockbuster Video, The GAP or Tower Records — and sit around in coffee bars, smoke cigarettes and whine all day about how the national deficit has ruined our future while reading the latest issue of Details magazine.

Well, I for one am not about to let a bunch of Woopies — well-off older people — sit back all secure in their savings and loan-financed houses with their Bass loafer-clad feet propped on the Ethan Allen coffee table, drink wine coolers and define who we are.

WE ARE NOT SLACKERS

These people only exist in Hollywood movies such as "Reality Bites," "Singles" and "Slacker" and the Douglas Coupland novel marketably titled Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture.

I don't know anyone as self-consumed and depressing as the Winona Ryder character in "Reality Bites," nor do I want to.

The soundtrack was good. Other than that, the movie served no purpose. Most of us already know that reality doesn't have teeth, so it can't bite, and that Domino's takes checks — but charging the gas to Dad and pocketing all the patrons' cash wasn't a bad idea, Winona.

Nor do I know anyone like the characters in the Coupland novel who drink all day and make up stories to tell one another instead of dealing with reality.

WE DON'T WHINE — AT LEAST NOT ALL THE TIME

Well, "whine" is not politically correct enough, so let's say we worry a lot.

And we have reason. Take a look at our inheritance — a trillion-dollar deficit, an environment that makes life on Mercury look inviting and, worst of all, AIDS.

I'm not saying this doesn't affect everyone, but we are in the high-risk group. Boomers didn't have to worry that sex would turn into a near-death experience — not unlike bungee jumping with a very worn rope.

WE JUST DON'T BUY IT

If we are so wishy-washy and unable to find a job worthy of our Boomer parents, then why do advertisers target us so heavily?

A McJob only pays so much. Stop with the twentysomething movies, television shows — "Melrose Place" is unforgivable — novels and magazines. The only good thing that came out of this "Pin the tail on the Xer" marketing game was Details magazine. Anka Radakovich was

a blessing; the creator obviously was not a Boomer.

SO WHAT IS GENERATION X?

Unlike the Boomers, yuppies, woopies and grumpies — grown-up mature professionals — who think we live for cappuccino and the next sale at The GAP, we are:

□ Realistic about relationships. We'd rather be single than rush into marriage — we were not fooled by June and Ward — and have kids, only to use them as negotiating tools in divorce court.

□ Committed to causes. We protest with a purpose and not just because it's the fashionable thing to do. We know more about how to save an environment bruised by Boomers.

□ Scared about the job market. The twentysomethings entering the job market are finding a country still in recovery from a Reaganesque recession, and employers are not all that excited to see us and our degrees.

So all you bad-mouthing Boomers, get off our plaid GAP shirt-covered backs and let us drink our coffee and live.

**Mitchell
Quarles**
Commentary



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