

Slacker's Manifesto

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Our generation doesn't even know what to call itself. "Twentysomethings" is just a descriptive term; a numerical fact, much like the term "13th Generation", (since America hit the world scene) which seems to augur something disastrous in the future. The term "Baby Busters" just signifies that we are the bust after the Boomers, the whisper after the Youthquake, the great demographic downswing. Douglas Copeland may put it best when he calls us "Generation X" - not for Malcolm, but because we are unquantifiable, a complete X-factor, paradoxical. Nobody knows who speaks for us; what market niches we occupy; what things are closest to our hearts. We are an enigma to our predecessors, and perhaps will be one to the generation after us, the so-called Millennials born after 1981. The X Generation is made up of Slackers, Hackers (a.k.a. Phreakers, Cyberpunks, and Neuronauts), and New Jackers, those ever-disposable urban youth prophets of Hiphoprisy. We are Ravers and Atari Wavers, Stuck-in-the-70s-ers, and Particle Men, zooming to and fro without a place to go. According to most demographers, we are more street smart and pop-culture literate, and less versed in the classics, ethics, and formal education (especially in areas like geography, civics, and history : areas where we appear to be, in short, an academic disgrace.) Many of us do not read, do not vote, and make sure not to care. Polls show us to be greater risk-takers, more likely to do things that would result in self-harm, and more materialistic than our predecessors, the Boomers. We are said to have less ambition, less idealism, less morals, smaller attention spans, and less discipline than any previous generation of this century. We are the most aborted, most incarcerated, most suicidal, and most uncontrollable, unwanted, and unpredictable generation in history (or so claim the authors of 13th Generation).

If you look at the political organizations that define our generation, you don't see Yuppies, SDS, the Diggers, or the Weathermen. Instead, we have groups like Lead or Leave! and Rock the Vote!, which do the radical things of registering people to vote against censorship and asking politicians to sign pledges to reduce the deficit or leave office. Ho hum. This is the most socially conscious, radical stuff our generation can do ? Blaming retirees and the elderly for the deficit crisis they didn't create ? Pitting the young against the old ? Surely we can do better ! There are 20+something groups out there, fighting homelessness, working for the environment, and attempting to reform education (U.S. PIRG, SEAC, USSA) but the media never seems to notice them. Why do we allow groups like Lead or Leave to define us ? If we really wanted to solve the deficit problem, we need to deal with entitlements, but we also must take on the omnivorous appetite of military spending as well... something Lead or Leave seems to ignore.

The good news is that we are a generation that believes little in talk and much in action. We shun ideology and dogma for a basic pragmatism in all areas of life. We are less prejudiced and less sexist than any previous generation, yet polls also show us strangely to be more likely to commit acts of bigotry. As a generation, many of us feel that it is our job to clean up the messes left by the ones before us - a spiralling budget deficit, a decaying environment, or national "malaise" and decline. We are more focused on the future than the past - we are tired of all this "retro" nostalgia crap. Most of us detest our childhoods and the junk culture of that time (though it seems to continually get recycled into movies and plays, like the Brady Bunch) and are hesitant to look on our family life as something idyllic or "the best years of our lives". We are fiercely independent and self-motivated, able to get whatever we need whatever the circumstances.

We despise the "retrohippies" and New Agers of our time - bot for holding up strong ideals, but for never living up to them. We are partisans of the New Edge - willing to explore new places, transcend old boundaries, and

think bigger than anyone else. Despite the fact that as a generation, we seem to have accepted that we will have a worse standard of living than our parents, individually our members express an almost incredulous personal optimism that "I'll make it no matter what". We HATE to be categorized, to be lumped together or labelled. Even this long list of generalizations are only approximations - trends and tendencies that some Xer somewhere is fighting to buck. Nobody know what music we like - is it rap, punk, progressive, industrial, acid house, Eurotrash, technorave, hip-hop, world beat, or none of the above ? Nothing defines us the way rock n' roll did the boomers. Our consumer demographics drive marketers up the wall; their ads always claim that they know what we like and what we are like, and they are always wrong.

Our politics transcend definition as well. Most of us live by the maxim "all politics is local". We feel that we were born after two big revolutions began, ended, and rolled back. The Sexual Revolution left us with divorce, AIDs, herpes, date rape, and skyrocketing teen pregnancies. Instead of sexual exploration, we are left with sexual chaos. It almost seems like none of us date anymore. We still have sex, to be sure, but never fall in love. The Drug Revolution left us with crack, PCP, and heroin. Today's gangbangers are too worried about their turf to want to "turn on and tune out". We are more "conservative" than our parents only in the sense that we feel that they went about their revolutions the wrong way. Some of us are still searching for free love, and the true head trip, but we want to do it Better than the Boomers : that's our motto.

Some of us are predicting eventual generational warfare between us and the Boomers. Personally, I don't see it. We may slug it out over a vanishing Social Security fund and exploding deficits. But ultimately I think that our hatred toward the Boomers is concealed jealousy. Imagine : a generation that thought it could change the world ! We're lucky to do what we can to survive, let alone believe something as amazing as that. I admit to Boomer envy. The things I am concerned about - consciousness expansion; human liberation; a truly just, fair, and equal society; a unified world, at peace; and the humane development and dissemination of technology - seem like reruns of 60s slogans. The goals do remain the same; but the tactics are ever so different. We are cleverer than they : they wore their slogans on a shirt sleeve. We hide ours, not because we don't want anybody to know them, but because we know invisibility is a weapon.

Some demographers have assigned to our generation some pitifully "retro" roles. They say we will restore "family values" - you know, Ward Cleaver, et al. - after the "attacks on the family" of the 60s and 70s. We're to restore the "communitarian" ethos of the 50s - you know, when everybody trusted their neighbors and left doors open for them to stop by - after the crime and civil disintegration of the following decades. We're to restore the "self respect" of those years - you know, when people were clean, neat, disciplined, uniform, etc. NOT ! In fact, we children of the 70s are not going to bring the 50s back to America. Instead, we are going to make the chaos of the 60s look like kid stuff - 'cause it was. We are here to bring change - sudden and shocking, if we have to. We are ready to bridge gaps : between people and nature, people and technology, and most especially, people and each other.