

Generation X: Rebels without Applause

Shortly after publishing a brief editorial on Generation X spirituality in the local diocesan paper, I found myself cornered in the break room by the diocesan accountant. “I read your editorial,” she said politely, “and I was very disturbed.” She cocked one eyebrow at me. “You really have a lot of guts putting yourself out there like that.”

“Well, that’s how I see it — and I think how most Xers see it,” I said.

“Well, I don’t see it that way,” she said. She looked about fifty, a matronly Boomer. “The way I see it,” she went on, “is that you’ve been brought up with a lot of love, you’ve had everything handed to you on a silver platter. Why all the whining?”

I was shocked. How could anyone older than I really be so out of touch with the world I grew up in? But before I could get a word in edgewise, she continued. “I think you’re pushing nihilism, here, and I just don’t get it. I’d like to have a public debate with you over this stuff.”

I almost choked on my coffee. I studied her face carefully. She was being polite, yet she was definitely feeling very angry. I had hit a nerve, no doubt about it.

Although her vehemence took me by surprise, I could have predicted her attitude. Boomers have been almost uniformly hostile to my writing on Xers. It is as if we live on two different planets, or more likely, exist in different social strata. Xers present quite a conundrum to Boomers, who don't understand the anger, apathy, and apparent "nihilism" so evident in Xer's lives and art.

Not that they aren't trying to. While the first-wave Xers are just beginning to face midlife and the final-wave are exiting high school, everyone from presidential hopefuls to marketing gurus are trying to figure out what makes this particular generation "tick." Violence, drug abuse, teen pregnancy, pierced tongues, depressing music, tattoos, laziness, poor academic performance, non-cooperation, group sexual arrangements, and an eerily pervasive cynicism are just a few of the puzzling factors that confound elders when speaking of Generation X.

For Baby Boomers and others the enigma of this generation often feels like a life-or-death scenario that they must figure out, especially with the recent rash of school shootings. Some small part of them feels that they are responsible for this "teenage wasteland." And in their heart of hearts they are terrified that these feelings might be correct.

Motivations are not purely altruistic, however. People in business know

that unless they can get a handle on this generation, their advertising days are over. Figuring out Xers is critical for anyone to succeed in business today, yet getting a grasp on these people often seems like an ever-receding goal.

In the meantime, a very real generation gap is widening between Xers and Boomers, as Xers are becoming old enough to exert themselves professionally and politically, and Boomers are finding some of their sacred cows endangered. Many Boomers hold a vastly different worldview from their children, and like my friend at the diocese, it causes them pain to think that the next generation might be suffering to the degree that our art demonstrates. They don't see how it is possible; they don't want it to be possible.

What are these painful forces that have shaped an entire "nation" of people? If the disturbing attributes of this generation are not a conscious conspiracy to disrupt the system and anger us, how could such an "alternative" culture have arisen out of such hallowed soil? "How could these children possibly have come from us?" "Why the rage and violence that so plagues these young people?" These are the questions Boomers like my friend at the diocese are asking.

This chapter will only answer part of this question. To understand the inner worldview — and the resulting spirituality — of Generation X, we first need a solid understanding of the environment in which they came of age. In this chapter we will focus on Xers "from the outside in," providing an overview of this generation's upbringing as gleaned from such sources as

newspapers, polls, and scientific studies. As such it is not a subjective view, but a verifiable basis from which our further arguments may take place.

Demon Kids

Every since there was an awareness of Xers as a distinct group, they have been vilified by their elders. Xers have been typified as cynical in the extreme, reckless, pragmatic, unsentimental, and highly dubious about their future. They have garnered an incessant barrage of negative press, as well. Xers are portrayed as greedy, stupid, shallow, and apathetic. Among the generations, Xers have become “the bad kids” in the family, bearing the collective shadow of our culture. As Howe and Strauss write, “A quarter-century ago, kids called older people names. These days, the reverse is true.”¹

It’s hard to say just when this negative attitude towards young people started, but 1960 is not a bad guess. This is the year when the G.D. Searle Drug Company of Skokie, IL, marketed the first birth control pill, Enovid 10. For the first time, people had a real choice about whether or not they would have children. It precipitated an age when sex was seen in a more recreational light, rather than being strictly reproductive. Having children was seen as optional and increasingly undesirable. As “the pill” caught on, and the “sexual revolution” of the late 1960s gathered steam, children were seen more and more as cramping the style of young adults. Before anyone knew what had happened, babies had become tragedies to be avoided rather than blessings to be celebrated. Babies were considered to be much “like headaches, things you take pills not to have.”²

You know it’s gonna be like this all day, man. Teachers lecturing us about what kind of monsters we are.

—*River’s Edge*, movie.

Into this changing landscape a best-selling book emerged that would have a devastating impact on children. Stanford biologist Paul Ehrlich published *The Population Bomb* in 1968. This “instant classic” gave America seemingly incontrovertible scientific evidence that there were too damn many people on the planet already, and that having more was simply irresponsible. Various zero-population-growth movements resulted from this pseudo-scientific scare, cementing the notion that not only were children in the 1960s and 70s a hassle, but they were, quite simply, “bad for the earth.”

Whereas before, having children was an antiquated leftover of the oldster’s morality, after the arrival of Ehrlich’s book having children suddenly became morally *verboten*, as every new baby added an untenable burden to the planet’s already scarce resources. “Babies are the enemy,” wrote historian John Sommerville. “Not your baby or mine, of course. Individually they are all cute. But together they are a menace.”³

Not surprisingly, this anti-children mentality found its way into popular culture. The late 60s and early 70s saw the rise of a new film genre previously unthinkable: the evil child horror flick. *Rosemary’s Baby*, delivered in 1968, presented an infant as the child of Satan, a menacing and ghastly presence deserving of destruction. As the Boomers’ children grew up, so did the cinematic demon-babies. By 1976 the baby had become a boy, wrecking havoc on adults in *The Omen*. By the late 70s, the child had grown into a teenager, with a taste for even more blood in both *Carrie* and *Halloween*. In addition to these telling films, there were many, many others, including *The Exorcist*, *It’s Alive!*, *Firestarter*, *The Children*, *Demon Seed*, *Children of the Corn* and all the various sequels these movies spawned.

Negative portraits of the young were not limited to horror films however. As Strauss and Howe point out, “By the 70s, moviegoers left the theater worried about what kids might grow up to be. Would they be hucksters (*Paper Moon*)? Prostitutes (*Taxi Driver*)? Molls and racketeers (*Bugsy Malone*)? Emotional misfits (*Ordinary People*)? Spoiled brats (*Willie Wonka*)?”⁴ Xers got the message loud and clear: children are monsters, creatures to be feared and, if possible, destroyed.

During this time television underwent a major transformation with undeniable effects on the psyches of the children watching. Never before were children capable — and even encouraged — to witness such a ceaseless barrage of violence before they were even old enough to go to kindergarten. Not only were cartoons more violent than ever, but for the first time popular comedies featured adult (read “sexual”) themes, and murders became ever more graphic and frequent. Adults seemed obsessed with the loss of innocence, and in exploring this mythic theme in popular culture, they stole the innocence of their child viewers. As one Xer wrote, “Generation X watched as TV lost its innocence, from the noble image of the man on the moon to ‘Baywatch’; from ‘Father Knows Best’ to ‘NYPD Blue.’” We have become cold and detached from the notion that we are in anyone’s best interests.”⁵

**Even if you didn't want us,
you made us. But we're
here, and we're going to
make the best of it.**

—Marie Xavière, 25,
New Haven, CT.⁶

Absentee Parents

On the whole, the parents of Xers were unwilling to allow their children to dominate their lives. By the late 1970s, an amazing two-thirds of Xers were cared for by people other than their parents.⁷ And no more would adults be sacrificing their lives to their families. While children in the very early 60s

**I circumcised myself
because I knew
that you were busy.**

—David Usher,
“It’s Not So Far,” song.

received an average of 30 hours per week of their parents' time, by the early 80s, that time had been whittled down to a nearly half that amount, a paltry 17 hours.⁸

The age-old motto "We're staying together for the kids" became passe for those experiencing marital strain. Throughout the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, the nationwide number of divorces involving children had remained relatively static, about 375,000 per year. By 1975, however, that number had tripled, with an amazing one million divorces involving children on record. While only 11 percent of Boomers were children of divorce, nearly half of Xers are.⁹ Boomers, somehow, were worth "staying together for the kids." Xers knew that somehow, they were not.

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead writes that following a divorce, "all too often the adult quest for freedom, independence, and choice in family relationships conflicts with a child's developmental needs for stability, constancy, harmony, and permanence in family life."¹⁰ As Xer Geoffrey T. Holtz points out, divorce often means not only the loss of one parent for children, but in many ways, *both*.

In many cases, children took over caregiving roles for younger siblings, as single parents spent most of their time away from home earning a living or looking for Mr. or Mrs. Right. In many circumstances, children even became caretakers for their single parents. As adults flitted around from one flame to another, the child's need for stability and predictability often had to be asserted and acted upon by the children themselves. This phenomenon is reflected in a string of films from the late 70s through the 80s in which chil-

The images I had were of people being driven mad by living in the city. Images of parents who were so hungry and unfulfilled that they ate their own children.

—Bret Easton Ellis, *Less Than Zero*, book

dren and adults switch places, such as *Freaky Friday*, *Like Father, Like Son*, and *Vice Versa*. Television shows such as *Silver Spoons* also reflected this age-inversion, where the children are the voice of responsibility and reason instructing the out-of-control adults. As Charles Krauthammer wrote in the *Washington Post*, “The ultimate effect of our mass culture is to make children older than their years, to turn them into the knowing, cynical pseudo-adult that is by now the model kid of the TV sitcom.”¹¹

How to Control and Eliminate Dangerous Offspring

The notion of children as liabilities was not limited to the mass media, unfortunately, but pervaded all areas of American life, from housing to business. While few apartment complexes in the 1960s excluded people on the basis of children, the number of those that did rose by a significant 50 percent during the 1970s. One study by the University of Michigan found that nearly half of those living in complexes with “no-children” policies lived there, not so much for the location or the beauty of these apartments, but specifically because of their zero-tolerance stance towards children. By the end of the 70s, a quarter of all rental properties were off-limits to those with children, with nearly half of the rest accepting them under strict conditions. Children, no longer the norm in American families, became marginalizing factors for parents unlucky or unhip enough to have them.

**“Why the fuck did you
have me if you didn’t
want me? . . .
Why was I raised to lose?”**

—Smashing Pumpkins, song.

The Fair Labor Standards Act, passed by Congress in 1938, guaranteed that children would be protected from operating dangerous machinery and working exploitative hours. These standards were rarely violated—until the Xers arrived, that is. In 1983 over 11,000 underage employees were reported, a

number which doubled to over 22,500 violations by 1989, higher than any previous year, including the year the act was passed.¹² And these numbers only reflect those violations which were reported. It is impossible to tell how many Xers were actually exploited. A 1990 crackdown found that nearly half of the workplaces investigated were in violation.¹³ An estimated 75,000 children were estimated to be illegally employed in New York City alone.¹⁴

While neglect and exploitation of the Xers was rampant, few are aware that Xers were also the recipients of the ultimate negation: murder. The decade between 1970 and 1980 saw homicide replace disease as the number-one killer of children one to four years of age.¹⁵ And these were not random murders, either. In 1983, 13 percent of murders were committed by a child's own mother, another ten percent by the father, and a whopping 44 percent by other family members or friends. In fact, nine out of ten of those murdered under the age of eighteen were done in by family or friends of the family.¹⁶ So prevalent has violence against the young become that by the late 1980s, over 80 percent of all murder victims were 19 or younger.¹⁷

Even though most of the Xers' parents did not, in fact, murder them, it did not mean that they felt prepared or willing to deal with the demands of parenthood. Instead of putting in the time and effort necessary to help a child grow through their rambunctious elementary-school years, many parents opted to simply drug them into submission. In 1970, over one hundred and fifty thousand children were put on the drug Ritalin.¹⁸ Prescriptions were written freely for any child who seemed to be even slightly hyperactive (what second grader isn't?), until by 1977 over a million American children were forced to take the drug by their parents or teachers — and this two million

only reflects the *new* prescriptions written in that year.¹⁹ All in all, experts estimate that between 3 and 4 million children (most of them boys) were prescribed Ritalin during the 1970s.²⁰

The effects of this “pill-popping” remedy on “problem” kids has been more long-lasting and devastating than anyone could have imagined. Studies have found that those who were given Ritalin as children are four times as likely to have drug-abuse problems as adults as those who were unmedicated as children.²¹ Nor have we yet seen the error of our ways. A recent issue of *Time* magazine reported that each year an estimated 500,000 to 1 million prescriptions for antidepressants are written for children and teens.²²

For some parents, even drugged children were too much of an encroachment on their precious time and energy. At the beginning of the 1970s, it was rare for a minor to be admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Nationwide, only about 6,500 children were committed. By beginning of the 1990s the number of minors being warehoused was a staggering 200,000.²³ As Holtz notes, “from the time the last of the Boomers hit his teenage years to the time the last of the [Xers] did, the chances of being institutionalized as a minor increased by a factor of thirty.”²⁴ And while children had previously been admitted for such serious problems as violence towards themselves or others, more recently young people have been locked away for such spurious maladies as “conduct disorder” or “adolescent adjustment disorder.”²⁵ A mid-80s report by the House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families found that at least 40 percent of children were committed unnecessarily. Even more damning is a University of Michigan study which found that 70 percent of these instances were “inappropriate and potentially harmful.”²⁶

**Father: I'm very
disappointed in you."
Daughter: "Join the club."**

—*Maid to Order*, film.

"You young people are a disgrace to the human race, to plants even. You shouldn't even be seen in the same room as a cactus."

—Teenager to his buddies in Rivers Edge, film.

Mental institutions are not the only places where adults have found fit to confine their "problem kids." The number of 18- through 29-year-olds incarcerated in state and federal prisons rose by 350 percent between 1970 and 1991.²⁷ Incarceration is epidemic for all Xers, but young black men have fared the worst. A 1990 study found that one young black man in four was either in prison or on parole — a greater number than were even enrolled in college.²⁸

Simple incarceration is not enough. Even the death penalty has been leveled against minors. In 1985, 15-year-old Ronald Ward was sentenced to die by lethal injection in Arkansas for the murder of two elderly women and a twelve-year old. Another 15-year-old, Wayne Thompson of Oklahoma was likewise sent to death row for participating (with three others) in the murder of his brother-in-law following an argument. Seventeen-year-old Terry Roach was sentenced to die in the electric chair for murdering a young man and his girlfriend.²⁹ Thirty-one prisoners were on death row in the US in 1986 for crimes they committed as minors.³⁰ An Amnesty International report put the U.S. in a chilling light: between 1978 and 1988, eight people were executed for juvenile crimes. Of those eight, three of them were in the US. The only other countries to claim this ghastly privilege were Pakistan, Rwanda, and Bangladesh.³¹

With this kind of antipathy towards children, it is little wonder that so many of them have tried (and in many cases succeeded in) running away from home. Although an accurate number is difficult to gauge, experts put the number of youths who ran away at somewhere between 1 and 1.5 million per year during the 1980s, almost double the number of those who ran away in 1970.³²

From feeling unwanted, to being branded as downright demonic, Xers came into the world with a profound sense of inferiority. Their insecurity was heightened exponentially by the record number of broken homes they hail from, homes in which so many of them were neglected. Add to this their alienation from a frowning, punitive society that institutionalizes them or incarcerates them at the drop of a hat. In their analysis of how adults could allow such atrocities to be visited upon their children, sociologists Strauss and Howe note that, “The English language doesn’t have a word to describe this kind of adult behavior. The Germans do: *Kinderfeindlichkeit*. Translation: “A society-wide hostility toward children.”³³

Stolen Birthright

In addition to the negative attitude towards them, Xers have had to face an increasingly unwelcoming social environment from which their parents often did not protect them. Though not aimed directly at them, many aspects of American culture and politics in the last thirty years have made today’s society a very dangerous place indeed to come of age. Before Xers were out of diapers, they were faced with fears and uncertainties unknown to any previous generations.

Though there are plenty of aspects of modern society which children might best be shielded from until they are of an appropriate age to handle the emotional stresses such information might cause, many of the Xers’ parents felt that shielding children from the grim realities of life was hypocritical. Many Xers were therefore brought up under a “full disclosure” policy. Children’s author Judy Blume wrote, “I hate the idea that you should always protect

children. They live in the same world we do.”³⁴ Unfortunately, that world is colored by many aspects that are beyond a child’s control. Children most often assimilate the attitude that the parents have about the world around them. If the parent presents the world as a harsh and fearful place, then a harsh and fearful world is where the child will live.

Xers learned early just what a fearful worldview looks like. As the first generation brought up under the threat of complete nuclear annihilation, Xers learned to “duck and cover” during bomb drills in Kindergarten. The nightmarish and all-too-real possibility of an atomic holocaust haunted Xers throughout their childhood and adolescence, overshadowing “traditional” teenage anxieties such as acne and academic performance. In 1982 a national survey ranked nuclear war as the number one fear amongst teenage boys, and the number two fear for girls. Another study in that same year showed that many male high-school seniors worried about it four times as often than male seniors in the 1970s.³⁵

When her father asked the question, “What are you most afraid of?” almost every year, Anna replied, “War.”

—from the Russian film *Anna*.

As Xers grew up, they faced many more wars than simply the nuclear variety. On many different fronts, a war was on for their futures. Unfortunately for this generation, no one seemed to be fighting for them.

Education. In the late sixties, many Boomers were advocating “alternative” theories of education which they simply couldn’t wait to try out on the new generation. Theorists such as Illich and Neill, Jonathan Kozol, and James Herndon, excited educators by eschewing the “oppressiveness” and “conformity” of traditional educational models.³⁶

All we want is to be treated like human beings. Not to be experimented on like guinea pigs or patronized like bunny rabbits.

—Veronica in *Heathers*, film.

What has come to be called “Open Systems Technology” was all the rage during the 1970s. Teachers were sure that if left free to explore those areas which interested them, children would learn better and would become better life-long students. As Diane Ravitch wrote in her book *The Schools We Deserve*, “The idea was no longer to ‘educate’ the child in the traditional sense of filling him up with knowledge, but to free him from his dependence on teachers, schools, and books.”³⁷ Open Systems Technology might be a boon for adults who feel shackled by structure, but for kids, it was a nightmare.

The experiments couldn’t go on indefinitely, however, as such creative curriculae necessitate generous funding. Just as the first Xers were entering high school (and nearly seven years before the last wave of Xers would be born), Californians passed Proposition 13 which cut public school funding by more than half. Over the next two years thirty-seven other states followed suit. This funding crisis severely impacted the quality of Xers’ education, narrowing their course of study to the basics and eliminating many culturally enriching programs. Overwhelmingly it was the humanities — those arts which describe what it means to be human — that were cut.

The very first year that Proposition 13 was enacted in California, \$105 million was cut from summer-school programs, \$1.5 million was cut from library acquisition budgets, and San Francisco’s science programs lost their funding. The situation only became worse in subsequent years as California’s budgetary reserves dried up.³⁸

As money for payroll was severely limited, class sizes soared, decreasing teachers’ ability to provide individualized education or even simple one-on-

one time with students. Education took on a “cattle-car” mentality: ship them in, teach to the test, test, ship them out.

The cruel irony is that it is the same pedants who used elementary school children as guinea pigs for their educational theories who later turned around and blamed those same children for being so stupid when they were graduating from funding-eviscerated high schools. Books such as *The Closing of the American Mind* and *Cultural Literacy* mercilessly raked Xers over the coals for being both academically anemic and culturally illiterate. Robert Bellah, professor of sociology at Berkeley noted that, “A third of my students are illiterate. By that I mean they are unable to understand a complex sentence, or write one that makes much sense.”³⁹

Other experts agree. Helen S. Astin writing in the *Educational Record* stated that at UCLA, “Though we admit only the top 12 percent of graduating high school seniors, half of all our new freshmen are placed in noncredit remedial math and English courses. The reality of working with underprepared students must confront everyone.”⁴⁰ A late-eighties survey revealed that amongst 17-year-old white children, 8 percent were functionally illiterate. Amongst black students, the number was as high as 42 percent.⁴¹ As if this were not enough bad news, America was further “outraged” by the results of a 1988 Gallup survey of young Americans (18-24) showing that over half were unable to locate Central America on the globe. Seventy percent could not identify England, and a fifth of the students polled could not point out the United States. Of course, the sad fact that geography was no longer taught in public schools — and that only one in twenty Xers had opportunity to study pure geography — was not mentioned in the study.⁴²

Michael Gose of Pepperdine University asked teachers who had taught Boomers in the 1960s to compare them with Xers they taught in the 80s. Inquiring about 43 measures of aptitude and achievement, a whopping 38 out of 43 teachers favored the Boomers, rating them superior in all “fundamental skills, academic inclination, personal responsibility, task orientation, morals and ethics, communication skills, and willingness to work hard for the purpose of learning.”⁴³ Xers outdistanced Boomers in only a few categories: “skills in negotiation, defenses to prevent extreme dependency on parents or authorities, skill in interacting with adults on an equitable basis, and information about...where to go for business, consumer, or personal wants and needs.”⁴⁴

Regardless of the opinions of the “experts,” Xers are not stupid — they knew they were getting short-changed. A comparison of surveys taken in 1972 and 1980 shows that those high school students wishing for greater stress on academic subjects grew during this time by fifty percent,⁴⁵ and in direct contradiction to popular opinion that minority students need special (read “less demanding”) instruction, a whopping 66 percent of black students wished school were more challenging for them.⁴⁶

From ginuea pigs to scapegoats, Xers populate an entire metaphorical barnyard when Boomers are trying to avoid responsibility for the mess they made of their children’s education. Ask any of the slack-jawed, distant-eyed youth looking forward to a bright future at McDonalds. They’ll tell you precisely how badly their education sucked. Over 400 million served.

Employment. Education is not the only department in which Xers have been

short-changed. As soon as they graduate from high school or college they are met by a brick wall in the job market. Ever resourceful, Xers do what it takes to get by. They frequently take jobs well below their level of skill, education, or competence not out of laziness or misguided ambition, but because very often low-end jobs are all that are available. K Mart, Sam Goody record stores, and Burger King thrive on the low-pay, no-benefits exploitation of talented young people, while corporations lumber on, saturated with ambitious Boomers.

Sixty percent of young men in 1963 were able to earn enough to keep their family above the poverty level. In the mid-eighties, only 42 percent were able to make that claim.⁴⁷ In the 1980s, white full-time male employees under 25 experienced a 15 percent drop in earnings. Among men who did not go to college who were in their late twenties, the drop was still 10 percent.⁴⁸ Young black men fared the worst in this assault. Those with college degrees witnessed a 14 percent decline in their earnings compared to Boomers in the early 1970s. For those without college degrees, the figures are even grimmer: an earning decline of 25 percent.

The cost of housing has not helped the Xer financial situation one bit. A Boomer family (with children) in 1973 spent an average of 23 percent of its income on their home's mortgage. An Xer family in 1986 spent over twice that percentage — 51 percent.⁵⁰

Not only were Xers earning less than Boomers did at their age, but when companies “downsize” or restructure, Xers are the first to go. During the recession in 1990, 1.45 million jobs were eliminated. Sixteen through twen-

**The Silver Fox types
own everything and
the Boomers run it.
And I'm living in a
basement apartment
working at Copy Cop.**

—Ron Rutland, 25; Brighton, MA.⁴⁹

**The trouble is,
you don't believe
that it's true
When the sun goes down,
there's something left
for you.**

—Bangles, “Angels Don’t Fall in Love,” song.

**Noticing the common
[Xer] tendency to strip
jobs of deeper meanings,
and their disinterest in
work for its own sake,
many elders interpret
the youth work ethic
as shallow, unrooted,
unpromising.**

—Strauss and Howe⁵⁵

ty-one-year olds, who represent only 17 percent of the workforce, suffered 65 percent of these job losses. All in all, Xers were fired or laid off four times more than any other age group.⁵¹ Victor Lindquist of Northwestern University noted that “This is the most troublesome job market for college graduates in the last twenty-five years.”⁵² No Xer with a college degree I know would dispute this.

Though there has been a great deal of economic recovery in the last few years, the resulting jobs have mostly been of the low-end variety. Hourly wage earners cannot hope to make any more than 60% of what their salaried counterparts bring home, and only 22 percent of them have employer-sponsored health insurance. The Bank of America, in fact, in order to eliminate the need to provide benefits, now hires tellers almost exclusively for part-time positions.⁵³

The only Xers who are “making it” are those entrepreneurial enough to forge their own path. The technological revolution has created an unforeseen bounty of opportunities for Xers, and many have made their fortunes via the Internet. But these success stories are the exception, not the rule. Most Xers either suffer in demeaning positions in Boomer-driven corporations, or squeak by in even more degrading manual labor positions. This has created a very different attitude towards work than those in previous generations have experienced. Work is compartmentalized in the minds of many Xers. One’s job is not one’s life; rather one’s job is a necessary evil to be endured in order to continue one’s life. The Boomer cliché of the actress who moonlights as a waitress until her big “break” comes is familiar to most Xers. They may work as fry cooks, but when they punch out for the day their real

life begins. Consequently, though Xers will work tirelessly on artistic or community projects, these energy reserves are rarely wasted on work. While 27 percent of elder Americans consider themselves “workaholics,” only 15 percent of Xers describe themselves that way.⁵⁴

Xers are very interested in “meaning,” and jobs that offer little or none hold miniscule interest for them beyond their paychecks. This is not to say that the Protestant work ethic is dead amongst Xers — they, more than anyone, are aware that “there is no free lunch” — but they are not willing to give of their time and effort beyond what is strictly required of them. And why should they? There is little hope that they themselves will reap the rewards of their effort. They are just as likely to get laid off next week as to get a raise. And besides, “real life is elsewhere.”

Social Security & Taxes. Not only are Xers getting a raw deal in the present, current domestic policies insure that they will be screwed in the future as well. Intuitively most Xers are aware that they will never see a fraction of the money they are paying into Social Security, while seniors and Boomers can expect to receive many times their investments, all at Xers’ expense. Young Xers in the late eighties saw a 331 percent rise in what they paid into the system, as opposed to what similarly aged Boomers paid in the early 70s.⁵⁶

As Strauss and Howe note, “It is not the youngest Americans who have reaped the benefits of Social Security COLAs, runaway Medicare spending, S&L bailouts, senior saver discounts, unlimited mortgage deductions, CEO golden parachutes, and tax cuts for \$100,000-plus households. And it is not the oldest Americans who must pay the price for mounting budget deficits,

**The generation in power
has the luxury to ignore
the debt they’re imposing
on us. They’ll be gone
when the bills come due.
We won’t.**

—Caroline Frederickson, recent grad
of Yale Univ.⁵⁸

Society doesn't pay for the education of most children beyond high school. Yet it shovels out free health care for elderly millionaires.

— Minnesota senator David Durenberger⁶¹

**By the time I'm sixty-three
There won't be nothin' left for me
When all the Boomers have retired
And bought a house in Santa Fe**

— Susan Werner, "Born a Little Late" song.⁶⁵

unfunded benefit liabilities, dwindling savings rates, lackluster R&D, crumbling highways, and deepening foreign import penetration."⁵⁷

It is no wonder the President is trying to shore up Social Security. Studies have predicted that by 2010 there will be 40 recipients for every 100 workers. By 2030 that number will be as high as 65 recipients per 100 workers.

⁵⁹ According to the Federal Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance Trust Fund (OASDI) the percentage of every workers' paycheck needed to maintain benefits to the army of retiring Boomers will be as high as 40 percent.⁶⁰

That 40 percent is for Social Security only. Taxes are another matter. The U.S. income tax code allowed a child exemption equivalent to 19 percent in 1948, but by the mid-eighties, it had fallen to only 2 percent of the median family income.⁶² In the span of time between the early 1970s and the late 1980s, state and local taxes rose a staggering 520 percent.⁶³ The enormous jump in taxes seemed timed to take place exactly as Xers entered tax-paying society. While most income groups found their taxes relatively unchanged between the mid 70s and the mid 80s, two groups were impacted: the very rich, who saw their tax responsibilities decline, and the very poor, whose rates escalated substantially. A family of four in 1979 subsisting at poverty level paid only 2 percent of its income in taxes, while only seven years later in 1986 a similar family would pay more than 10 percent of its income. Xers comprised a substantial portion of the latter group.⁶⁴

This change could not help but affect young children. While first-wave Xers were struggling to make their first rent payments, last-wave Xers were still

“[We are] the first society in history in which a person is more likely to be poor if young rather than old.”

—Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan⁶⁹

Living in a world where grown-ups break the rules. Paying for a lot of adult mistakes.

—Janet Jackson “Living in a World (They Didn’t Make),” song.

in diapers. By 1983 more than a fourth of all children in the United States below the age of six lived in poverty, a two-thirds jump from a decade before.⁶⁶ And even though most of them at least had roofs above their heads, a staggering 500,000 of them did not.⁶⁷ The situation has not improved in the decade since. Almost two-thirds of children under six who live with a single mother are impoverished.⁶⁸

As of 1983, when first-wave Xers were yearning to throw off the shackles of childhood and high school and strike out on their own, they found the odds stacked impossibly against them, with the lowest percentage of those living in poverty being over 65 years of age, and the greatest percentage under 18. The U.S. Bureau of the Census reported in 1984 that the ratio of federal government spending on the elderly vs. what was spent on children was an astounding eleven to one.⁷⁰

All this has happened without much of an outcry. Older generations have persistently pushed legislation through Congress which benefited themselves at the cost of the young. The bumper sticker seen on an army of RV’s stating “We’re spending our children’s inheritance” does not seem that funny to Xers. Xers have been singled out to suffer a purely artificial depression, engineered by elder generations. Columnist Robert Kuttner calls this a “remarkable generational disease...a depression of the young,” all of which makes them “uniquely thirsty in a sea of affluence.”⁷¹ During the great Depression (1929 to 1933) household income fell by 25 percent all across the U.S. The horror stories of this period are legend, and Xers have heard plenty of stories about how hard it was to eke out a living. Yet the dip in income suffered by young Xers is 20 percent, and for young Xers with families, 30 percent.

"Each generation has an obligation to leave the following one at least as well off as it had been itself."

—Thomas Jefferson

Look, like it or not, we are chronologically following the biggest pile of demographic dung in American history, and if that means categorically rejecting everything that they stand for, then I don't mind being pigeonholed for a bit. My hatred for everything they represent is as real as it is irrational.

—Ian Williams⁷⁶

Yet no one from the depression-era generations is saying a word about this "new depression;" nobody is writing protest songs or picketing on behalf of the young. As Strauss and Howe point out, Xers are enduring "a 'quiet' trauma today's older people would regard as a history-shattering catastrophe if it fell mostly on their heads."⁷²

No wonder so many Xers, despite their best efforts, find themselves "boomeranging" back to their parents' homes. Forty percent of men and fifty percent of Xer women who leave home eventually find themselves back at mom-n-pop's, at least for a little while.⁷³ Other statistics are even more staggering. By 1988, 61 percent of men and 48 percent of the women between the ages of 18 and 24 were living with their parents — the greatest percentage since the Great Depression. Nearly 13 percent were living with other relatives, meaning that only one-fourth of men and nearly one-third of women were making it on their own that year.⁷⁴ Completely blind to their complicity in this schema, one writer in *American Demographics* magazine had the gall to assert that "if anyone deserves pity, it's the affluent parent who has feathered such a nice nest that the fledglings won't leave."⁷⁵

As Xers continue to suffer the greatest economic plight in living memory, you can bet that they are angry and resentful about it. Even if ignorant of the statistics, Xers intuitively know that the pie has already been eaten and only the crumbs are left for them.

In his insightful novel of young adult angst, Douglas Coupland speaks for all Xers when his character lashes out at a Boomer, saying, "Do you really think we enjoy hearing about your brand new million-dollar home when we can

barely afford to eat Kraft Dinner sandwiches in our own grimy little shoe boxes and we're approaching thirty? A home you won in a genetic lottery, I might add, sheerly by dint of your having been born at the right time in history? You'd last about ten minutes if you were my age these days, Martin. And I have to endure pinheads like you rusting above me for the rest of my life, always grabbing up the best piece of cake first and then putting a barbed-wire fence around the rest. You really make me sick.⁷⁷

Not all elders are unsympathetic, however. In a 1994 speech to business people in Oklahoma Lee Iacocca, speaking of Boomers, said "I'm ashamed to say that this is probably the most irresponsible and selfish generation that this country has ever produced... There is talk of a generation war coming. Hell, if I were 25 years old and really understood the debt burden I was being forced to carry — for the rest of my life — I think I'd be mad enough to go to war with the old geezers who did this to us... The most damning thing we can say about ourselves as Americans is that we're pushing this big load off on our kids. And we're doing it with our eyes wide open."⁷⁸

As the self-appointed saviors of education, Boomers tried out their experimental learning systems on us, and denied us the most basic of educations. Boomers stacked the employment deck against the next generation, even as older Americans gave themselves the gift of a lavish retirement, while sending Xers the bill. Cutting their own taxes and raising Xers' so high that they simply cannot keep up with it, older Americans virtually guaranteed that Xers would wind up back at home, and then blamed them for intruding. All of this explains the Xers' ironic fascination with the crucifix: the image of the parent sacrificing his own child for the sake of his own insatiable hunger. An entire generation hangs on that cross, and Xers intuitively know it.

**"Every day,
I crucify myself."**

—Tori Amos, "Crucify," song.

Disturbing Behavior

In addition to the birthright of a prosperous lifestyle being stolen from them, Xers have also swallowed the messages about their own worthlessness and inadequacy whole. They possess none of the swaggering self-confidence of the Boomers, and their art is filled with self-deprecation so severe it sometimes borders on parody. When popular singer Beck laments, “I’m a loser, baby, so why don’t you kill me?” you understand that the singer is going a little overboard to make his point, but when Xer band Social Distortion sings, “I’m born to lose and destined to fail,” they are simply stating the truth.

No group of people could emerge from such cultural devastation with their psyches intact. The ambivalence Xers feel towards themselves leads to chronic depression and a number of self-destructive behaviors. In fact, experts estimate that as many as 1 in 20 American preteens and adolescents suffer from clinical depression.⁷⁹ A similar number of young women are anorexic, and the rate of bulimia amongst young women is even higher.⁸⁰ One study revealed that a fourth of Xer children between the ages of six and eleven were considered obese.

Not surprisingly, drug abuse amongst Xers (especially first-wave Xers) is staggeringly high. A 1962 study showed that only 4 percent of the US population had tried an illegal drug, by 1982 more than 64 percent of Xers had tried them before graduating from high school. The Department of Health, Education and Welfare revealed that one-ninth of first-wave Xers smoked marijuana in high school on a daily basis.⁸² The alcohol abuse rate is even higher. Nearly 60 percent of high school students in the mid-eighties report-

**“I’m a creep . . .
I don’t belong here.”**

—Radiohead

**“There’s a growing
malaise that young
people suffer from . . .
They feel they’re not to
be trusted, they’re not
good people . . . they’re
not worth anything,
they’re not appreciated.
And if you don’t feel
self-esteem, you tend
to become a bit more
reckless and a bit more
careless, and willing
to do things you
otherwise would not.”**

—Victor Herbert, director of New York City High Schools.⁸¹

ed being drunk at least once, and one survey revealed that 65 percent of 13-year-olds had drunk alcohol at least once that year.⁸³

**You don't get it, do you?
Society nods its head
upon any horror the
American teenager
can think to bring
upon itself.**

—JD in *Heathers*, film.

Not only have Xers been hell-bent on destroying themselves via eating disorders and drug abuse, but now sex also serves their self-destructive streak. And Xers are not shy about liking sex. This is not surprising, since Boomer culture shoved sex down the throats of Xers practically from birth. But fate played a cruel game of bait-and-switch, since just as Xers were coming of age and were ready to share in the “free love” boon, the AIDS virus arrived to make even recreational sex a life-threatening activity. By the early 80s, fifty percent of Xers had lost their virginity by the time they were 17,⁸⁴ yet of all those who were sexually active, 25 percent of them said they “never” used protection, and only a third of them used it all the time.

**You're a little late
I'm already torn.**

—Natalie Imbruglia, “Tom,” song.⁸⁵

Pregnancies amongst young Xer women skyrocketed. A study by the Alan Guttmacher Institute in 1988 showed that a shocking 44 percent of all girls experienced a pregnancy before turning 20. The number amongst black Xers was even higher: 63 percent.⁸⁶ These pregnancies are not always the result of carelessness, of course. Some of them are quite intentional. As Laurie Brecklund wrote in the *LA Times*, “Increasing numbers of girls, some as young as thirteen, say they are having babies because they want to.” One girl told her, “I wanted somebody to love. Why is that so hard to understand?”⁸⁷

Even amongst gay male Xers, those at highest risk from AIDS, the percentage of those using protection is far lower than their Boomer counterparts. And it is not out of ignorance; they know exactly what they are doing. This kind of risky sex is nothing more than slow suicide, evidence of a latent

**I like it. It's got that
"what a cruel world,
so let's toss ourselves
into the abyss-type
ambience."**

—JD in *Heathers*, film.

death-wish intrinsic to the generation. As one 19-year-old gay Xer told the *Los Angeles Times*, "I knew, and then I went out and did everything."⁸⁸

This sense of the inevitability of death is pervasive amongst Xers, and not limited simply to the gay community. A Gallup poll conducted in 1993 discovered that one in three Xers believed they would be shot to death before they reached old age.⁸⁹ Xers evidence little of the "teen invulnerability syndrome" pronounced upon them by Boomers. Xers know very well they are not invincible. One recent study showed that teenagers rated several dangerous activities just as risky as their parents rated them.⁹⁰ Xers know these behavior are risky; risk is the point.

Not all of Xers' despair and rage is turned inward, of course. Xers are far more likely to "act out" their aggression than previous generations. Vandalism and other "delinquent" activities are rampant in this generation, and even graffiti is seen as a way to "strike back" against the "corporate machine." Nothing, of course, matches the horror of the wave of school-shootings that the last wave of this generation is experiencing. As of this writing, the latest was on May 20, 1999, when fifteen-year-old Thomas Solomon from Conyers, Georgia took a .22-caliber rifle and a handgun to school with him and wounded six students. He was found with the barrel of the handgun in his mouth. When an assistant principal convinced him to put it down, Solomon broke down crying. "Oh, my God, I'm so scared," he sobbed.

We should all be scared, for unfortunately, Solomon is not an isolated case. Fourteen-year-old Barry Loukaitis killed one teacher and two fellow students

We students of Westerberg High will die. Today. Our burning bodies will be the ultimate protest to a society that degrades us. Fuck you all.

—JD in *Heathers*, film.

on February 2, 1996 at Frontier Junior High School with a weapon he also brought from home. According to reports, his mother was planning to divorce his father, and no one was taking his feelings into account. A year and a half later, sixteen-year-old Luke Woodham killed two students and wounded seven at Pearl High School in Pearl, Mississippi. Police later found that he had also stabbed his mother to death. Luke's father had left their family five years before his attack. Later that same year, fourteen-year-old Michael Carneal shot eight of his fellow students at Heath High School in West Paducah, Kentucky. Three of them died. He stole his gun from his neighbor. Three months later, in March 1998, Andrew Golden and Mitchell Johnson (aged 11 and 13, respectively) shot and killed one teacher and four students at Westside Middle school with guns they stole from relatives.

On May 21 of that year, Kipland Kinkel (15) shot two students and wounded 20 others at Thurston High School where he was a student. Police later discovered that he had also murdered both of his parents before setting off for school. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold's cry for help took the lives of 13 people before they took their own. There can be no louder "wake up call" to elder generations than these incidents which are becoming horrifyingly commonplace.

Misunderstood

The violence perpetrated against Generation X is not only economic and sociological, but ideological as well. Instead of trying to actually understand where young adults are coming from, powers-that-be are content to force square pegs into round holes whenever it suits their purposes. And if a

The good thing about our generation is you can be gay or straight, with someone your own color or not. Whatever you want.

—Brian Rich, 25, San Francisco.⁹¹

nation of voiceless young people are maligned in the process, who is going to know? Or care?

Political conservatives, eager to portray Xers as being in their camp are quick to point to the growing number of young voters who consider themselves fiscally conservative. Liberals are equally likely to highlight Xers' concern for social justice. Neither camp, however, really understands the underlying feelings and beliefs of Xers, and neither can predict how Xers are likely to vote. Attempts to appropriate the Xer vote rather than to understand them only serve to further alienate Xers, and to reinforce their distrust of "the system."

Ambiguity is not something that Xers seek to avoid, rather it is very much a part of the world they live in. Very little in their world is black or white; everything appears in gradations of gray. There are no really good guys, and the bad guys are probably just wounded and acting out. The lines between many of the old-timers' camps are blurred beyond recognition. To many Xers, such defining questions as "Are you Christian or Buddhist?" "Gay or straight?" "Conservative or liberal?" or even "Catholic or Protestant" are meaningless. They are often all of the above, and are impatient with what they perceive to be their elders' attempts to label them or to relegate them to pre-existing categories.

Xer Tom Beaudoin writes about the way Catholic Xers clash with the "old guard" ideologues:

...conservatives and liberals want to cast Xers as supportive of their agendas. While some want to see the generation as mostly "young and conservative" ...liberals want Xers to carry forward the Vatican II project as they interpret it.... [Yet] most Xers embrace much more

“Even though people today may try to categorize women as feminists or traditionalist, many of us are both in our thinking, and in how we live. In our mothers’ day, you had to choose.

—Lisa Pentage 27, *New York*.⁹³

We were sired by tradition, nursed on experimentation, and raised in ambiguity. Ambivalence is second nature to the twenty-something generation. It is a survival reflex with us.⁹⁴

—Steve Gibb, *Twentysomething*, book.

pluralism (spiritual, racial, sexual and so on) than conservatives would like. And they find attractive — often with an admixture of irony and sentimentality — many more traditional symbols than liberals can typically stomach. Similarly, Xers are often too politically and multiculturally sensitive (especially with regard to the politics of tolerance) for most conservatives, and too apathetic and bourgeois for most liberals.⁹²

This dissolution of traditional categories has had some unexpected positive results (depending on your perspective). Xers are far less racist, sexist, or heterosexualist than their elders. The issues that were fought so hard for in the sixties are for Xers *fiat accompli*, — they are no longer issues, just parts of normal life. In addition to taking justice issues for granted, Xers have deflated much of the rhetoric of the Boomers who pioneered those very justice movements. Xers have taken the best of the progressive and traditional perspectives and have married them in a way that works for them — a maddening development to many Boomer activists.

This eclectic approach to social justice reveals that Xers’ bottom line is pragmatic, not ideological. While Boomers might fight to halt Global Warming because it is violence towards the earth, and fight pollution due to a sense of their unity with nature, Xers support the fight because they want to see the planet habitable for the next generation. Xers oppose sexual harassment because it is unjust, not because of a centuries-old war between the sexes. The Hegelian pendulum that swung to the right in the days of the civics, and far to the left in the Boomers’ heyday, has settled in the middle for Xers. They are creating the synthesis of the Civic thesis and the Boomer antithesis — a middle path that actually works.

Those Xers who do choose to be activists are still very different from their

We don't want to get involved in any futile activity.

—Richard Linklater, director of *Slacker*⁹⁵

**With the Republican Party,
it's man against man.
With the Democrats,
it's just the opposite.**

—bumper sticker

**Withdrawing in disgust
is not the same as apathy.**

—Tarot card in *Slacker*, film.

Boomer counterparts. Boomers dreamed grand dreams, and worked to make their visions reality. In some cases, such as the civil rights movement or women's liberation, they were quite successful. Yet Xers (for reasons that will become clear in succeeding chapters) have little patience with such grand designs. Liberal Xers have cut back on their social agenda to include only what they know they can directly impact, keeping the focus on the local and tangible: soup kitchens rather than marches on Washington. At the same time, presidential hopeful George Bush, Jr. knows that if he is going to attract the vote of Xers who lean towards more conservative positions, he has to cast himself as a “compassionate conservative.”

The fact is, however, that most Xers are so suspicious of political agendas (socially-driven or otherwise) that they simply refuse to play ball. They have no hope that anything substantial is likely to change, and since the two major political parties in the country sound so much alike, it is difficult for Xers to get very excited about either of them.

And this is where Xers are most tragically misunderstood. While older generations like to paint Xers as lazy and apathetic “slackers” who are too dumb to understand politics and too self-absorbed to care, this caricature is far from the truth. As one 22 year-old graduate of Morehouse College says, “I think it's so much easier to accept the fact that nothing is going to change rather than to think, try to think optimistically that by voting something is going to change.”⁹⁶

Statistics support this sentiment. While their elders continue to turn out at the polls in about the same numbers as they did in the early 70s, participa-

Whatever went wrong,
[Xers] — not Boomers
— have gotten the
brunt of the backlash.
Again and again, America
has gotten fed up
with Boom-inspired
transgressions. But after
taking aim at the giant
collective Boomer ego
and winding up with a
club to back them for all
the damage they did,
America has always
swung late, missed, and
[POW!] hit the next bunch
of saps to come
walking by.

—Strauss and Howe¹⁰⁰

tion by eighteen- to twenty-year-olds has fallen by about a third since then.⁹⁷ So disillusioned are Xers with politics, most of them not only refrain from voting, but few even make an effort to stay abreast of current events. One study indicated that half as many young adults read newspapers today than in 1965. And while 60% of those young Boomers in the 60s read their news, only about 40% of Xers even watch news on television today.⁹⁸

While older Americans view this behavior as apathy or laziness, in fact it is a pointed political statement. Writer Geoffrey Holtz calls this “aggressive nonparticipation,” and asks the question most Xers would articulate if given the chance: “Since no one listens to you anyway...what’s the use of saying anything?”⁹⁹

Being misunderstood is nothing new for Xers. They’ve been experimented on, cheated out of their birthrights, and are paying for the excesses of selfish elders; Xers have been everything but *listened to*. Instead of truly understanding the very real, very important perspective of young people, elders — and especially Boomers — have settled for superficial portraits that serve only their own agendas. Media-savvy Xers, of course, see right through these charades and, feeling powerless to change anything, simply turn away in disgust — and then get blamed for apathy.

No Myth

Now that we have seen the horrors that attended this important generation’s formative years, it is clear that the world they were born into is not an inviting place. However, the survival skills they have developed and the attitudes

Squires: The most common X Generation subgroup and the only subgroup given to breeding. Squires exist almost exclusively in couples and are recognizable by their frantic attempts to recreate a semblance of Eisenhower-era plenitude in their daily lives in the face of exorbitant housing prices and two-job life-styles. Squires tend to be continually exhausted from their voraciously acquisitive pursuit of furniture and knickknacks.

—Douglas Coupland,
Generation X.¹⁰²

which pervade Young America are not causes for despair; they are, in fact, the harbingers of our country's salvation. While this chapter viewed Generation X from the "outside looking in" in the next few chapters, I hope to present the opposite perspective: the cynical and often surreal world of the Xers from the inside out. I hope to show that the attitudes and behavior of this enigmatic group are far from inexplicable. There is a simple internal logic to the world as seen by Xers, even if it is difficult for elders — or even Xers themselves — to see it.

Part of what makes it difficult to understand Xers as a group is the lack of a cohesive mythology to which Xers subscribe. Theirs is a baffling kaleidoscope of sub-cultures, each arising from seemingly exclusive perspectives and ideologies (if such a word even exists in the Xer lexicon). While goths¹⁰¹ have their vampire mythos, cyberpunks hold William Gibson's *Neuromancer* as their sacred text, and "squires" read the *Wall Street Journal* religiously, there does not seem to be any common story, no thread which connects them all.

Xers are simultaneously suspicious of and drawn to stories, especially "Big Stories" that bear archetypal themes. Mary Frances Shjonberg writes, "These Stories, what are sometimes called 'meganarrative,' are what have traditionally held societies together. They are the myths, the legends, the dreams. Generation X is having trouble believing in the American Dream."¹⁰³ Unlike Boomers, for whom the Utopian vision of a world built on peace and love provided a mythos and common vision in which most Boomers could believe, Xers have no obvious "meganarrative."

This confounds those who are trying to get a grip on what makes this generation “tick.” Not only do marketers find themselves flummoxed by this lack of cohesion, but even those genuinely interested in Xers’ well-being find this disparate collection of sub-cultures difficult to get a grip on.

Last year as I was attending an annual conference for spiritual directors, the keynote speaker Howard Rice was talking about the various generational peculiarities and how these affect their approach to spirituality. While he had most of the living generations in hand, Rice admitted he was at a loss with Generation X. “They have no heroes and no myth,” he reported. And although he could describe certain tendencies and attitudes held by Xers, he concluded that very little is known about them.

At that moment something clicked in me. Suddenly all of the pieces of a puzzle I had been working on for years snapped into place. At the time for questions and answers, I stood and announced to the assembly that I didn’t think that Xers are without a myth, they just aren’t conscious of it in its classical form. The fact is that Generation X is not the first generation in history to experience the tragedies, attitudes, and cynical tendencies that earmark them. They are not alone; others have gone before them, and they have told their Big Story, they have woven a viable myth. It is my hope that Generation X might discover the “meganarrative” that gave meaning to these predecessors. Perhaps within the twists and turns of the stories told by these “proto-Xers,” this generation can find some meaning to the pain and betrayal they have experienced in the twentieth century. Perhaps their story could become ours. Perhaps, unbeknownst to us, it already is.

“Either our lives become stories, or there’s just no way to get through them.”

— Douglas Coupland,
Generation X.¹⁰⁴

Acknowledgements

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