

Apathetic trends of Generation X

Baaaaa!...
Calling all sheep!



A Closer
Look
S.T.
SUTHERLAND

That could be you. It's almost certainly someone you know. You have to look to find them, but not too hard. This campus is populated with sheep. We have become a university of followers in a school of complacency.

Remember the days of sit-ins, demonstrations, and a voice of freedom for the common citizen? Probably not.

Many of you were in diapers when African Americans were still called "Negro," and the Rev. Martin Luther King peacefully, purposefully, marched his people into the promised land of freedom and opportunity. Who knows how many fell to violence born of ignorance along the way?

You might have been just an itch in daddy's jeans when Rock n' Roll got louder, hairstyles changed, and a free thinking generation of young Americans called "hippies" by their confused elders tuned in, turned on, dropped out, and wandered, scattered down Abbey Road, rode the Peace Train to the Shangri-las of Haight-Ashbury and Greenwich Village, seeking their own brand of freedom. We'll never know how many of them fell along the way.

And were you around when blind militia following blind orders cut down protesting students at Kent State University in a burst of rifle fire? Bullet-riddled students bled on American soil at the hands of American soldiers for your freedoms and mine and we do know how many fell that day.

Would one death be enough for you to care that freedoms

are being trampled? How about one hundred? Or do you only care when the eroded liberties are yours?

There is a problem today with Generation X. Some argue that they are a lost generation, wedged in between the last of the baby boomers and those who will lead in the first half of the next century. It's said they have no values, no causes.

Look a little deeper. Their values and causes are one and the same: themselves.

What amount of exhortation would convince Generation X that there are other causes worth standing up for? Monday before last, students opposing proposed cuts to education funding held a rally to drum up support for their cause. Kudos to those kids! But notice: the action was mercenary, motivated by an issue that would take money out of their pockets.

Even at that, attendance was light. There were almost more speakers on the program than actual students participating in the audience. Even if class or work schedules kept many from attending, it seems many more should have been there than were. The promoters of the rally publicized it well in advance.

Now, it's natural for anyone to take personal interest in events that impact them personally; I do it. You probably do too.

But where are the young adults protesting the civil war in Bosnia? Twenty years ago campuses nationwide would have pulsed with outrage at the human rights violations occurring there.

Related News

Freshmen show record disinterest in politics

(NSNS) — American college freshmen are less interested and involved in politics than any previous entering class, according to an annual survey of entering freshmen conducted by the University of California-Los Angeles Higher Education Research Institute.

Just 31.9 percent of fall 1994 freshmen said that "keeping up with political affairs" is an important goal in life, the lowest in the 29-year history of the national survey. This figure compares to 42.4 percent in 1990 and 57.8 percent in 1966.

"Considering that the figure from last year—a non-election year—was 37.6 percent, the sharp drop observed during this recent election year is all the more remarkable," said Alexander W. Astin, survey director and UCLA professor of higher education.

The number of students calling themselves politically "middle-of-the-road" increased, while the numbers of "liberals" and "conservatives" were down.

Reliance on college loans rose for the eighth time in the past decade, while reliance on Perkins loans, Stafford loans and other need-based sources reached an all-time high of 18.9 percent.

"Considering these trends, it is not surprising to find that more students than ever are concerned about college finances," said Astin.

The annual freshman survey, sponsored by the American Council on Education, is the nation's longest-standing and most comprehensive assessment of student attitudes and plans.

Today I asked five students to give me 20 words on what's going on in Bosnia. Who's fighting whom, and why? One and all gave me blank stares and "I don't know's." One said "Who cares?" Still another thought Herzegovina was an East European car rental company.

You see what I mean.

Apathy runs rampant in the ranks of the so-called lost generation. Much of it may stem from the feeling that "nothing can be done, so why bother?" I'm not advocating U.S. involvement in Bosnia, simply highlighting an example of unconcern toward global events.

But much apathy also comes from the prevalent feeling that efforts exacting a price are best spent toward improving one's own lot. Judging by the turnout at the education funding rally, though, it seems there are all of 25 students on the entire UNLV campus who care whether or not they can pay tuition next year.

Will the lost generation lose its place in history through apathy? So many issues face them, but few seem to care enough to take active voice and speak out, sit-in, or march on. Other means of being heard include writing articles, letters to representatives, or organizing interest groups.

Environmental concerns promise dramatic changes in global living conditions, but who actually makes a point to boycott products made of rain forest woods?

How many, as they "drive through" for favorite fast foods, decline South American beef raised on lands razed by slash and burn? Realize that dollars raise the volume of your voice. Know that corporations listen, when they must. Speak through your spending.

Generation X, what will you do in the next presidential election year? That's right around the bend, coming at you, the steamroller of national politics. Ready to jump? Speak

out or get creamed!

Political analysts may hope you do nothing; not cast an erratic vote nor upset anybody's bandwagon. Realize that you have the power to topple platforms. To bravely pull down those who, by omission or commission, refuse to serve the better interests of you, your generation, your fellow man and your planet. Realize that the future is up for grabs only to those who reach out and grab hold.

Lost ones, make a point of voting. Let that become one of your values. If you don't stand on your principles at the polls, no one will do it for you.

In defense of Generation X, some might contend that their preoccupation with themselves results from busy schedules and other involvements. Possibly economic conditions today do pose challenges not offered students in the '60s, but many of yesterday's students also held jobs, pursued their educations and raised families.

If there are any differences between students today and those of yesterday, they may lie in the area of education and preparedness for the demands of life. Generation X grew up with advantages their predecessors never dreamed of. Computer technology opened the door to the information age, putting up-to-the-minute information and knowledge within easy reach of virtually anyone.

The quality of their general educational backgrounds are better, too, giving today's students the potential to bring a sharper intellect into whatever fray their issues might lead them. No one denies that campuses are currently populated with bright, well educated, talented young adults.

Mary Hausch, a professor at the Greenspun School of Communication, put her finger on the big difference: "Campuses were alive (in the '60s). Student leaders seized

on new issues every day. They looked at the newspaper and reacted to what was happening in Washington."

So maybe the problem with Generation X is social, political, environmental numbness. Numbness often results from over stimulation, in this case a glut of world events and problems confronting tomorrow's leaders. Whatever the cause, however, few bother to react to the world around them.

Before Watergate, young Americans didn't balk at the cost of first seeking, then demanding their freedoms. Most times, that cost was high.

Jails, crowded with people who marched for civil rights, and those who burned their draft cards to protest the war. Streets, full of men and women busy practicing civil disobedience bludgeoned, trampled, shot with water cannon and rubber bullets; all bleeding for their causes, paying the price for the liberties Generation X now take for granted.

I am a proud American today because I was there yesterday. I remember the race riots and Walter Cronkite counting bodies for me every night. I remember the forgotten generation of soldiers dying for principles they didn't always understand. For these reasons and others, sometimes today, I bother to react.

And you can look the future right in the eyes, even if you weren't around until recently. Because you are a living, thinking being, you can examine and learn the lessons of history. You can react. Pick one concern that touches you not just as an individual, but as a global citizen. Even if you

just educate yourself or others about world issues, that will be a beginning.

Or will posterity portray Generation X as sheep: livestock led around with rings in their noses?



THE REBEL YELL

The Student Newspaper of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas

UNLV
4505 MARYLAND PARKWAY
LAS VEGAS, NV 89154-2011
PHONE (702) 895-3479
FAX (702) 895-1515

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR SHOULD BE TYPED AND FEWER THAN 300 WORDS. THEY MUST INCLUDE NAME, ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NUMBER. WRITERS AFFILIATED WITH UNLV MUST INCLUDE CLASS AND MAJOR, OR FACULTY/STAFF POSITION. LETTERS ARE SUBJECT TO EDIT FOR LENGTH AND CLARITY.

TERESA HINDS
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ERIN NIEMEYER
NEWS EDITOR

MICHAEL MELISSA
SPORTS EDITOR

HYUN-HO HAN
PHOTO EDITOR

RICK APPIN
COPY EDITOR

LORI CALLISON
BUSINESS MANAGER

RUCHIRAWAN PHONPHONGRAT
ADVERTISING MANAGER

JAN WILLIAMS
FEATURES EDITOR

S. T. SUTHERLAND
OPINION EDITOR

MICHELLE SHENSKY
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

CALLIE KOLB
PRODUCTION MANAGER

MARY HOWELL
OFFICE MANAGER

MARY HAUSCH
FACULTY ADVISOR

—S.T. Sutherland is
the Opinion Editor
at The Rebel Yell.