



13TH GEN

ABORT, RETRY, IGNORE, FAIL?

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by Neil Howe & Bill Strauss



crashed by **Ian Williams**

'tooned by **R.J. Matson**



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To our children:

Giorgia, Rebecca, Eric, Victoria, and Melanie.

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We are grateful to the countless “13ers” with whom we’ve spoken in recent years, plus the hundreds of writers and artists whose comments adorn the margins.

CONTENTS

Computer Log Summary Sheet

From 11/28/92 to 12/01/92

session 1: start 9:54:03 pm 11/28/92 (logtime: 5:10:00).

file: c:\13th-gen\part1.doc

>PART ONE: ABORT, RETRY, IGNORE, FAIL?

1. We Don't Even Have a Name	3
2. Something of a National Curse	17
3. Doing the Things a Particle Can	28
4. A Lot of Adult Mistakes	33
5. Woodstock—Blech!	42
6. Born a Little Late	50
7. Parents' Things Are Always More Important	55
8. Way Big Into Raisins at the Time	63
9. Are We Being Tested On This?	69
10. Heavy Thoughts Tonight	81

session 2: start 9:54:23 pm 11/29/92 (logtime 3:44:26).

file: c:\13th-gen\part2.doc

>PART TWO: THE AMERICAN DREAM HAS NO 13TH FLOOR

11. Is It All Downhill?	93
12. Tell Me When They're Moving Out	101
13. Room to Move as a Frycook	107

14. We Trust Ourselves, and Money—Period	114
15. New Jack School	120
16. We Could Care Less, Care Less	126
17. That Funny Vibe	133
18. Sometimes We Get Sick of Sex	146
19. The Choices Are Ugly and Few	160

session 3: start 10:31:50 pm 11/30/92 (logtime: 2:38:41).

file: c:\13th-gen\part3.doc

>PART THREE: THE 13ING OF AMERICA

20. We're This and That's That	177
21. It's Our Culture, So Naturally We Use It	183
22. Trying to Strip Things Down and Simplify	191
23. The Bottom-Line Generation	199
24. Dead, Famous Wild People	206
25. The 21st Century Breathing Down Our Necks	214

PART 1

ABORT, RETRY, IGNORE, FAIL?

>1. We Don't Even Have a Name

Imagine coming to a beach at the end of a long summer of wild goings-on. The beach crowd is exhausted, the sand shopworn, hot, and full of debris—no place for walking barefoot. You step on a bottle, and some cop yells at you for littering. The sun is directly overhead and leaves no patch of shade that hasn't already been taken. You feel the glare beating down on a barren landscape devoid of secrets or innocence. You look around at the disapproving faces and can't help but sense, somehow, that the entire universe is gearing up to punish you.

This is how today's young people feel, as members of

Not ready error reading drive B

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Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail? a

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C:> ph-bill

ATDT 1(703)555-0991... Phone number being dialed... Connection made...

<TRAN> bill this is neil are you there? i'm having trouble printing the 13th generation text. can't even "abort" it. sure we need hard copy?

<RECV> no. here's more bad news. our agent says he can't get anyone interested in this book idea. seems publishers all think 1) today's teens and twenties have an attention span no longer than a soundbite, 2) they wouldn't be caught dead near a bookstore, 3) they don't want to read about themselves, and 4) nobody else cares what they are anyway. those publishers must think every 13er is a totally stupid, MTV-wasted eraserhead.

<TRAN> well that's that. so much for fat advances and oprah phil arsenio. guess it's time to trash it.

<RECV> hold off. can't we send our 13th gen file out over USA-TALK, that computer bulletin board you use? what's to lose?

<TRAN> ok let's do it. god knows who's up and watching at this hour.

<RECV> hope it doesn't make anybody too mad. 13ers'll probably hate our yuppie guts for it.

<TRAN> i'm serene. what about our factoids and rj's cartoons?

<RECV> i'll feed them in as you upload the text.

<TRAN> here goes. stay online while i switch to DOS and dial out. set to be a boomer and spout truth?

<RECV> i'm already pouring my classic cola. go ahead.

C: > usa-talk

ATDT 1(202)555-3850... Phone number being dialed... Connection made...

*** Welcome to USA-TALK On-Line Bulletin Board.

*** Your handle is: 2boomers

*** Log on at 10:05:46 pm, 11/28/92.

*** Messages to/from other current USA-TALK users will appear in upper-right cb box. At any time press alt-e to enter cb box.

*** SELECT: (D)ownload, (U)pload, (M)enu, (Q)uit? u

*** Upload channel currently open. Specify file at prompt:

>C:\13th-gen\part-1.doc

*** USA-TALK uploading 13TH-GEN\PART-1.DOC by 2BOOMERS at 10:06:08 pm: stand by...

PART 1

ABORT, RETRY, IGNORE, FAIL?

>1. We Don't Even Have a Name

Imagine arriving at a beach at the end of a long summer of wild goings-on. The beach crowd is exhausted, the sand shopworn, hot, and full of debris—no place for walking barefoot. You step on a bottle, and some cop yells at you for littering. The sun is directly overhead and leaves no patch of shade that hasn't already been taken. You feel the glare beating down on a barren landscape devoid of secrets or innocence. You look around at the disapproving faces and can't help but sense that, somehow, the entire universe is gearing up to punish you.

This is how today's young people feel as members of what 30-year-old writer Nancy Smith calls "the generation after. Born after 1960, after you, after it all happened." After Boomers. And before the Babies-on-Board of the 1980s, those cuddly tykes deemed too cute and fragile to be left *Home Alone*. Who does that leave stuck in the middle? Eighty million young men and women, ranging in age from 11 to 31. They make up the biggest generation in American history (yes, bigger than the Boom); the most diverse generation—ethnically, culturally, economically, and in family structure; the only generation born since the Civil War to come of age unlikely to match their parents' economic fortunes; and the only one born this century to grow up personifying (to others) not the advance, but the decline of their society's greatness.

As they shield their eyes with Ray-Ban Wayfarer sunglasses, and their ears with their Model TCD-D3 Sony Walkmen (\$229.99 suggested retail), today's teens and twenties tone-setters look shocking on the outside, unknowable on the inside. To older eyes, they present a splintered image of brassy sights and smooth manner. Families aside, what the older crowd knows of them comes mostly from a

It's like, we don't even have a name. Yours—"Baby Boomers"—is so big we fall in its shadow.

Nancy Smith,
"25 and Pending," in the
Washington Post

The future's so bright, I gotta wear shades

Timbuk 3,
"The Future's So Bright"
(song)

We're street smart,
David Letterman clever,
whizzes at Nintendo.
We can name more
beers than Presidents.
Pop culture is, to us,
more attractive than
education.
I don't think we can
do this dance much
longer . . .

Daniel Smith-Rowsey,
"The Terrible Twenties,"
in *Newsweek*

Students come along in generations. First there was the generation without a cause, then the generation with too many causes, followed by the tired generation.

Arthur Holmes,
philosophy professor,
Wheaton College

We are lost between doing for ourselves and doing nothing at all.

Lynnelle Detzler, student,
American University

The brave new world has faded, and materialism is back. Status, for teens, centers around money and possessions . . . For boys, the ascetic look of the flower child is out. Muscles are a must; otherwise, you're a "nerd," a "geek," or a "wimp."

American Demographics
magazine

BART SIMPSON

Most Common Misspelling of Name: Brat.

Typical Quote: "I didn't do it, nobody saw me do it, you can't prove anything."

Official Occupation: Underachiever.

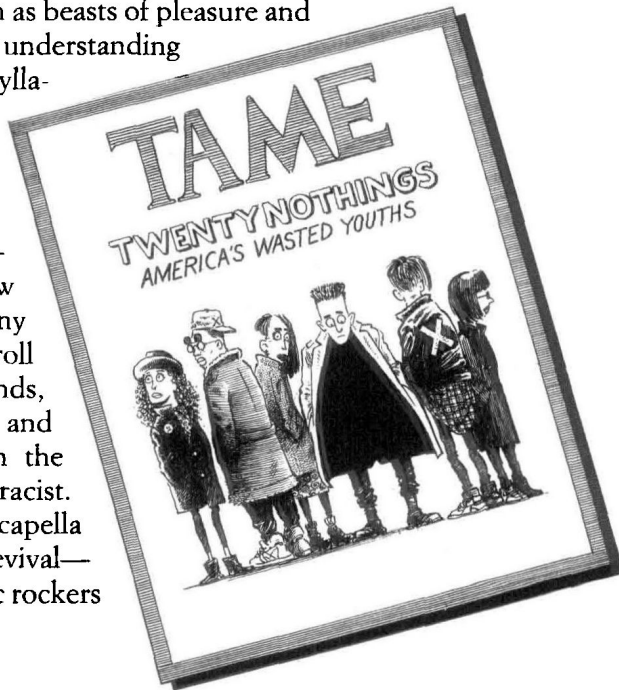
Secret Shame: Bart has no shame.

Zillions magazine

mix of film cuts, celebrity blurbs, sports reports, and crime files.

Over-30 moviegoers see them as hard-to-like kids, kids who deserve not a break but a kick, a pink slip, maybe even jail time. They are *The Breakfast Club's* "brat pack," enduring pointless punishments at the hands of befuddled adults. Hard Harry trying to *Pump Up the Volume* for his "why bother generation." Bill and Ted having adventures that could only seem "excellent" to somebody as terminally stupid as them. Tom Cruise proving he's a *Top Gun* only by breaking a few rules. A *Heathers* wilderness of teen suicides. Death-dosed *Boyz n the Hood*. Rob Lowe's *Bad Influence*. An evil teenage *Hand That Rocks the Cradle* for a baby far more precious than she ever was. Here and there, screenwriters lighten up a little—for example, when Ferris Bueller combs for pleasure in a world gone mad, or when *Edward Scissorhands* becomes an artist with the aid of his deformity, or when Wayne emerges from his parents' basement to find a "Way" in a "No Way" world. But, mostly, the impression is of kids growing up too hard to be cute.

The shortened scripts of TV sitcoms and the quick bites of ads and music videos leave an even brassier image of affluent wise guys and sassy girls more comfortable shopping than working or studying. Ads target them as beasts of pleasure and pain who have trouble understanding words longer than one syllable, sentences longer than three words. Pop music on their ever-declining number of Top 40 stations—the heavy metal, alternative rock, New Wave, rap—strikes many an older ear as a rock 'n' roll endgame of harsh sounds, goin'-nowhere melodies, and poetry that ranges from the clumsy to the foul or racist. There's other stuff—a capella "voicestras," acoustic revival—but not many aging classic rockers ever hear much of it.



News clips document a young-adult wasteland of academic non-performance, disease-ridden sex, date-rape trials, wilding, and hate crimes. Today's youngish sports figures often look to elders like American Gladiators, athletically proficient but uncerebral, uncivic, lacking nuance. To older eyes, the Neon Deions differ from the Namaths and Aarons partly in their size, speed, and muscularity, but also in their in-your-face slam dunks, end-zone boogies, and weak team loyalties. Those who, like Mary Lou Retton, do succeed in capturing our hearts invariably set off to "rettonize" themselves and capture our product endorsements. Team logos, once sources of local pride, now mark territory for inner-city gangs. But the Ickey Shuffle, Shark jacket, and Air Jordan high-top aren't the only sporting icons new to this generation: There's also one-armed Jim Abbott pitching in the major leagues, America's world-champion women soccer players, and second-generation black student-athletes like Duke's basketball star Grant Hill (the son of Yale and Dallas Cowboy football star Calvin Hill).

Yes, this is a generation with a PR problem. Its collective reputation comes from young celebrities and criminals, from the biggest stories of success and failure. Yet most in their teens and twenties are quick to insist that *People* cover stories and police blotters tell little about them personally, about their circles of friends, about their lives in school or on the job, about what it means to come of age in 1990s America. And, they insist, their generation will remain a mystery until elders take the trouble to block out the iconography and look more discerningly at the young men and women in daily American life.

In polyglot American cities—New York and Los Angeles especially—we see them as the reckless bicycle messengers (who, like *Bicycle Days* author John Schwartz, like to "live a little faster"), the rollerblading commuters, the pizza and package-delivery drivers, the young Koreans helping their fathers at grocery stores, the local-access cable TV producers, the deal making wannabees whom trader-turned-writer Michael Lewis says "age like dogs" before making their fortunes—or going broke trying. Other times, we notice them as the directionless college "slackers," the non-voters, the wandering nomads of the temp world, the store clerks whose every declaration sounds like it ends with a question mark, the women in tennis shoes lurching at the gym, the computer jockeys loading games onto their office PCs when the boss isn't looking.



***crasher

>well what have we here? this looks interesting.

Ain't no wrong now,
ain't no right
Only pleasure and pain

Jane's Addiction,
"Ain't No Right" (song)

The signs are that this will be a more ambitious, pragmatic, skeptical, selfish, goal-oriented, materialistic generation. They will have narrower goals Baby Busters probably will not want to teach the world to sing. They probably will not want it all, but are more likely to want what they have earned.

Matthew Greenwald,
president of survey
research firm

We are clueless yet wizened, too unopinionated to voice concern, purposefully enigmatic and indecisive.

Bret Easton Ellis,
"The Twentysomethings:
Adrift in a Pop Landscape,"
in the *New York Times*

Mine is a generation perfectly willing to admit its contemptible qualities.

David Leavitt,
"The New Lost Generation,"
in *Esquire*

Ain't nobody lookin'
out for me but me.

O.F.T.B. (rap group)

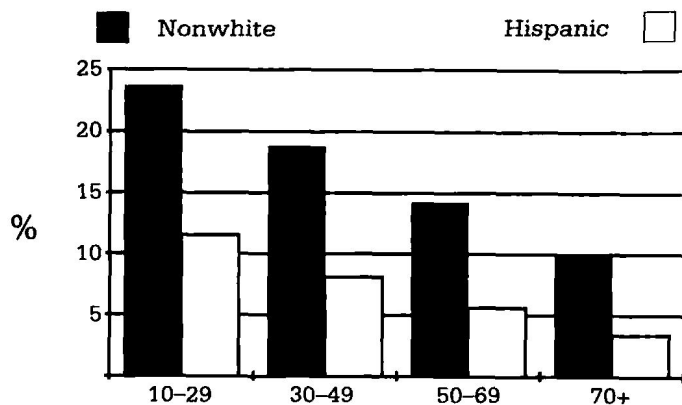
In the inner city, they're the unmarried teen mothers and the unconcerned teen fathers. They're the lethal gangsters, the Crips and Bloods—and the innocent hiphoppers who have no illusions about why older white guys cross the street to avoid them. Across the landscape of urban youth, we see more millionaires and more hopelessly poor, more immigrants and more nativist skinheads, more social fractures and cultural fissures than today's 40-, 60-, or 80-year-olds could possibly remember from their own younger days.

In 'burb and town life, they are kids at the mall. Kids buying family groceries for busy moms and dads. Kids doing the wave at the ballpark. Kids of divorce. (Omigosh, it's Saturday, and I'm supposed to be with Dad, and I have, like, *so* much homework this weekend.) Kids battling back against drugs and alcohol. Kids in mutual-protection circles of friends, girding against an adolescent world far more dangerous than anything their parents knew. Kids struggling to unlink sex from date-rape, disease, and death.

In school, the diversity of student bodies has never been greater—not just in ethnicity, but also in attitude, performance, and rewards. Asian-Americans (and immigrant children generally) are achieving at a tremendous clip, and black and Hispanic aptitude test scores are rising, while Anglo aptitude test scores remain below levels seen one, even two generations ago. On campus, women outperform men and soar into graduate programs, while collegians of both sexes struggle with a faculty-fueled debate over how to undo their various alleged insensitivities. Their handbills are more likely to promote products than ideologies, their protests more against the immediate scourges of their world—hikes in tuition, cuts in library hours, the hiring of teaching assistants who can't speak English—than against injustice in the world beyond. Most of them support global causes but don't have the money or time to contribute. Besides, they figure, what difference could they possibly make?

As college alumni, these are the grads with the big loans who were

Percent of Population Classified as Nonwhite or Hispanic by Age Group in 1990



Source: 1990 Census

***crasher

>pardon me for interrupting, but this has to be one of the silliest things I've ever seen on this network. why did you even bother? don't you know that categorizing and defining stuff you have no clue about is one of the fatal flaws of being a baby boomer? you guys sound like nerdy dolphins talking about hang gliding.