

JENNIFER ERNISSE

Talkin' 'bout the 13ers' generation

I would like to expand on William Strauss and Neil Howe's book "Generations." It is probably a manifesto extraordinary for conservatives, but it is truly a book whose audience excludes no one.

"Generations" is about life on a cyclic continuum. It defines the 14 generations of the United States and how they exert influence on one another. A generation is generally a 20-year span of peers/cohorts with a distinct identity characteristic of one of four types: civic, adaptive, idealist, and reactive.

The "GI's" are from the era of JFK, Ronald Reagan and John Steinbeck, and they fall under the civic category.

So do the 13ers, next-juniors, the millennials, born in and around the year 2000. Those with the cohort group of Martin Luther King Jr., Gloria Steinem and Woody Allen belong to the adaptive-type generation and called the silent.

The boomers, the most prominent generation so far, are considered idealistic. We, the 13th generation, range from age 8 to 28 and are reactives.

As I said before, the power of this book comes from its commentary on society and how a generation's relative position in society dictates its role — or sentence — whichever way you look at it.

So, as we await the arrival of our first boomer president, this column is dedicated to the 13ers and understanding their unique place in history.

The 13ers were dismissed from the very beginning. Many of our parents were spiritually born of the 1960s and '70s psychedelic drug culture — uh, excuse me, mental expansion — and a self-absorbed "times they are a

changin'" feeling.

Problem is, their self-immersion was too deep to understand where they were going as a collective. Couple that with conflicting international missions, confused leaders and the narrowing of sex roles in the family stimulated by the feminist movement, and it isn't hard to fathom the actions of the boomers as first-time parents.

No Stove Top stuffing and June Cleaver here. My childhood is full of memories of "Breakout" and "Space Invaders," my favorite Atari games, and waiting for my single-parent mom to get home with food from McDonalds so she could break up the fight between my sister and I. Like other 13ers, I was expected to grow up fast.

And our first round of standardized test scores proved what underachievers we were. The 13ers, shunned and scorned, were dubbed the "Baby Busters," arising tide of mediocrity. These are the perceptions of youth culture that consumes our elders.

While our parents struggle to branch out from an overly focused center of gravity in their coming of age, the 13ers are characteristically tangential and diverse, mocked and forgotten by elders who can't understand that it is our alienation and cynicism — especially toward institutions such as education and government — that binds us tightly.

In an almost perfect metaphor, the Seattle grunge rock, which inspired Nirvana and Pearl Jam, shows our true generational colors. The macabre, sepulchral, almost indistinguishable lyrics over a driving beat pegs not only the disdain and disappointment with a society which has failed, if not to give us at least a fighting chance, then to provide us a protective bubble until we decide it's our time to flower into adulthood. We have had the luxury

of neither. But we have come to welcome, to skirt the limelight in favor of an underachieverhood, the unappreciated persona with the knowledge that it is our uncanny perceptiveness and resilience which will prevail in our mid-life.

Society has been cruel to us in many ways, but it is especially the mixed messages that have been doled out which are among the most heinous. It troubles me that, as 13ers, we are caught between our experimenting parents, who overindulged in sex, alcohol, and drugs but who were too confused about it — they probably enjoyed it too much — to form a collective moral denouncement of those behaviors until their 40s.

Incredibly hypocritical. And, of course, there is the fear of AIDS. The 13ers are the most aborted and birth-controlled generation, yet we still outnumber the boomers. But they have upped the stakes. We are a fearless, risk-taking generation because expectations of us can't get any lower. So, first society fixates our attention on MTV and all around sexuality in the most media driven society ever, but, if we have sex, unlike our parents, we could die unless we stymie our upgraded libidos.

In essence, we were given all the freedom early, only for it to be revoked as soon as we could enjoy it.

But we aren't dubbed the 13ers for nothing. Although foreboding and entrenched in superstitious bad karma, we mimic the all-powerful 13th card in a suit — the ace. In the "Blackjack Game of Life," playing either role, it is the card that always beats the perceived kings and queens of the game.

Ernisse is a senior pre-med major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

SAM KEPFIELD

Stop the guilt about Thanksgiving

Now that we have all been told how awful we should have felt during Thanksgiving, I would like to have us all face reality.

I quit watching the news on television after about the dozenth story on the homeless and how rotten a Thanksgiving they had in the city missions and about the kind souls who volunteered to serve them. When they really wanted to jerk a few tears, the newscasters threw in a couple of homeless children.

Then, of course, there were the stories on improved consumer confidence this season, compared to the slumps of the last three seasons. All of the stories laid the credit for renewed confidence squarely at Bill Clinton's feet. Nary a word said about the 4 percent growth in GNP over the third quarter.

The final straw for me came on Thanksgiving day. As I relaxed after a wonderful, traditional dinner of turkey, I glimpsed the headline of the Lincoln Star, "Pilgrims' lessons changing." What I read nearly made me hit the ceiling.

The whole story — the lead story, mind you — was an endless diatribe about how a group of politically correct wackos are trying to indoctrinate Lincoln schoolchildren into thinking the pilgrims were a bunch of genocidal maniacs, all under the banner of multiculturalism or diversity or sensitivity. That wasn't the slant the reporter put on the story, of course, but it's the essence I got from it by using common sense.

Some of the gems gleaned from the article are truly amazing. Thanksgiving is a time for "human dependence on nature and each other." It is to be used as a "springboard to combat stereotypes of American Indians," teaching respect for their culture and values. Thanksgiving was an oppressive myth perpetrated by whites. Children should not forget what followed

the first Thanksgiving dinner: genocide by white Europeans.

The most ridiculous use for Thanksgiving was "to deal with language issues." Does anyone out there know that the term "Indian summer" is derogatory? I'm not making this up, folks. I couldn't, it's just too bizarre an example of the hypersensitivity afflicting these people.

Worst of all, it's not happening in Berkeley, Calif., or Madison, Wis., or New York City, or some other American suburb of Moscow. It's right here in Lincoln, the heart of the Great Midwest. And your kids are being fed this garbage.

It's high time to throw cold water on these people and their lunacy. I want to speak a few truths about what Thanksgiving is all about.

First of all, we've got plenty to be thankful for. To begin with, we live in the greatest country on the face of the planet, in the history of the planet. We are Americans.

All the shortcomings attributed to us by the PCers pale in comparison to the rest of the world. You want genocide? We're amateurs compared to the Germans, the Soviets or even other bargain-basement dictators such as Idi Amin or Pol Pot. For every Wounded Knee or Sand Creek in our past, is a Buchenwald, or Treblinka, Katyn Forest or a killing field in everyone else's.

You want racism? Look at places like Japan, where an entire class of people, the burakumin, are shunned universally, even though they're Japanese. Or India, with its "untouchables." Or take a look at all the tribal warfare, black-on-black violence in South Africa. You want sexism? Look at India again, where they only recently gave up the practice of burning widows. Or Africa, where many tribes practice ritual mutilation of women's genitals.

Homelessness? Try Bosnia, where people are homeless because their homes have been shelled, and they are thankful to be alive at the end of each day. Hunger? Try Somalia, where

people are starving at an unbelievable rate. And where are the citizens of these countries turning for help? To us, that's who. That alone should tell you everything you need to know.

We are the greatest country on the face of the planet, in the history of the planet. But the loony left doesn't want you to know that. You're supposed to feel guilty because you're American, more so if you're white and/or male.

I refuse, however, to buy into the "race guilt" notions that they tried to peddle over this holiday, attempting to induce shame because of my heritage. It won't bring back the dead, and it won't make everything equal today. Quick — name me the last leader who tried to take power with a race guilt theory. Here's a hint — he was a German political figure in the 1930s, distinguished by his toothbrush mustache.

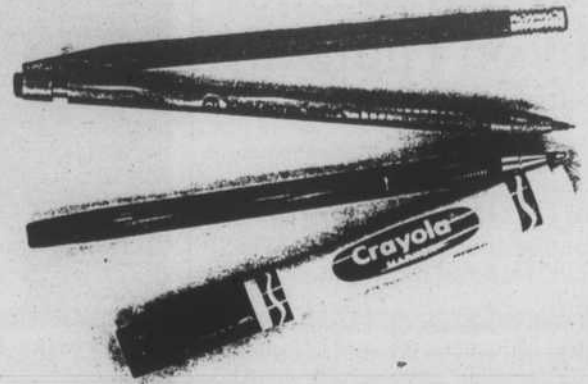
No, we have much to be thankful for this year. We had two examples of it this last month, in fact. The first was Nov. 3, when we held elections. Even though I disagree with the outcome, there is still wonder in it all. We did something in our country, without firing a single bullet, that takes a coup d'etat in most of the world. We take it for granted; half of us value the ballot so little that we don't even bother to vote.

The second was Veteran's Day. We live in a country so great that men have laid down their lives in combat to preserve what we stand for. Men like my father, who had to get his father's permission to enlist in the Marine Corps in 1943, because he was only 17. It broke my granddad's heart to do it, but then he had done the same thing a quarter of a century earlier. Luckily, they both survived two of the biggest wars humanity has ever known, but millions did not.

So be thankful this year, for your good fortune and, most of all, for your country.

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