

Redemption clock still ticking

The saga of the generation gap continues. My particular chapter is titled "Generation X," and the theme is attitude. More specifically, the critics (otherwise known as the current media) say my generation has a cynical, lazy and unfocused attitude about life.

I think we should be offended. What they don't see is that our attitude is optimistic. It's an element of our survival in this chaotic world.

"We" (my generation) are the generation born around the mid-'60s and the '70s. "They" are the Woodstock generation: the Vietnam activists, soldiers, civil-rights children, our parents. They're known as the generation that made a change. They had a unifying national focus for peace and love, and they think the only issue we have is trying to graduate from college in four years.

They say the future of our generation is in trouble because we're proven to be slackers. They attribute our short attention span to our MTV upbringing; our prolonged college graduations to our fear of the real world; our self-consumed attitude to the superficial fads and uncreative subcultures to which we belong. They say we're too lazy to enter the real world and too lazy to find our own ideas.

Lazy, you say? Well, give me a second to prove otherwise.

Foremost, their generation is not putting itself in our shoes. The forces against us are not as trite as they may think. We may not have the Vietnam War, but we have nearly two million HIV-infected people in the United States right now, and we've watched nearly 200,000 of our friends and family members die from AIDS since the early '80s.



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The two issues may not seem comparable to them, but the conceivable stress seems just as real for us. We fear an abstract war that every one of us is fighting either directly or indirectly. We feel the constant pressures of a virus that has its highest death rate in our generation, and yet we have no one to blame. We can't accuse the government for innocent deaths, but we must face the reality of a possible doomed future for ourselves and our children. We've taken the issue into our own hands, changing our lifestyles as a result. But they haven't acknowledged our efforts; instead, they still call us lazy.

Even if some of us do lack motivation, isn't it reasonable that we wouldn't be very anxious about taking on the immense world problems facing us, some of which their generation has left to us?

Our depleting ecological system, for instance, is a direct result of generations of neglect. And with the realization that each generation gets its share of past burdens, we're tackling the issue. We've become eco-activists, nature-hungry and at the very least, recycle-conscious.

We can't hide beneath the clouds of free love and fun drugs. In their time, these were accepted. They were considered experimental phases expected for young adults. Now we know the consequences,

and our serious and impatient world insists that we don't make the same mistakes. We're forced to grow up faster. We're pressured by the forces of societal issues while, just like past generations, we deal with our own personal pressures.

But instead of one unifying experimental phase of young adulthood, we've created different subcultures, into which we can each mold so we can vent our frustrations and pressures.

Our subcultures represent rebellion, music, activism and beliefs — the same things for which their unified peace generation stood. But their older generation, part of which are the creators of the Generation X term, ridicule our subcultures for having uncreative trends and superficial concerns.

Yet if those who call us a generation of selfish slackers would look a little closer, they would see that our intentions are good and our efforts already have begun. In turn, they would see that our subcultures have the same intentions and serve as the same creative outlet that the unified Woodstock generation had.

Generation X has a fervent concern in securing the future of the world, but "they" haven't given us the time to prove ourselves.

When we are given the time, we will not let down this generation or the generations to come.

As the list of eternal bleakness continues to balloon, our generation must remember that we do have a conscience and we're not slackers. The only attitude we have is the one of realistic optimism in a world that has been left to us.

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Legal procedures may not be moral

Those trying to ram through the appointment of Henry W. Foster Jr. as surgeon general say the abortions he performed and his involuntary sterilization of retarded women are (in the case of abortion) or were (in the case of the sterilization) "accepted medical procedure" at the time.

This reasoning is what is wrong with our culture. It reflects our spiritual malnutrition, which has led to many of the social problems we now lament.

Even a spokeswoman for the National Organization for Women was shocked when she heard about Foster's sterilization procedures. "I'm appalled," said Diane Welsh, president of the New York City chapter of NOW. "NOW is an organization that's for choice for women in any reproductive health matter, and we're utterly opposed to anything resembling forced sterilization."

(Does this mean NOW can be expected to withdraw its support of Foster? No, because abortion is more important to NOW than forced sterilization.)

In defending the administration's choice of Foster and his sterilizations of the retarded, Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala said, "Medicine has changed. ... In the '60s (Foster did) a procedure that was legal at the time." She is certainly right about medicine changing. Throughout most of the profession's history, a doctor swore an oath never to perform or assist in an abortion. When the Supreme Court ruled in 1973 that abortion could not be made illegal, Hippocrates was rewritten along with the law.

We've seen before what happens when medicine changes based on shifting moral standards rather than absolutes. The eugenics movement came of age in the 1930s, and its practice of ensuring sound offspring was nowhere more effectively applied than in Germany.

When the Prussian Council on Health met on July 2, 1932, its goal was to relate eugenics to public welfare. (Isn't that what the Dr. Fosters of our time do with the "unfit" and the unborn?) According to members present who reported on the meeting, "the legal approval of a strict eugenic sterilization (not castration), under suitable controls, is demanded."

On July 14, 1933, the Law for the Prevention of Hereditary Disease in Posterity was enacted,



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effectively legalizing voluntary and forced sterilization for individuals with afflictions defined by the state as contributing to a dilution of the gene pool. This law was necessary, according to its backers, to guard against an explosion of "defective" people who might soon outnumber and overrun the "normal" Germans.

The Journal of the American Medical Association carried an article in its Sept. 9, 1933, issue called "Sterilization to Improve the Race," which helped form part of the rationale accompanying the sterilization law: "Countless individuals of inferior type and possessing serious hereditary defects are propagating unchecked, with the result that their diseased progeny becomes a burden to society and is threatening, within three generations, to overwhelm completely the valuable strata ... sterilization is the only sure means of preventing the further hereditary transmission of mental disease and serious defects."

Accepted medical procedure at the time.

Perhaps during Foster's confirmation hearing (if the nomination gets that far) someone might ask him what caused the change in accepted medical procedure of sterilization, and whether he now views that practice as wrong and immoral. Someone might also ask him if, in view of the history of Germany, acceptability and legality ought to be the only criteria by which a physician decides whether to engage in certain practices. Might abortion, like sterilization, someday be regarded with the horror and revulsion we now feel about once-accepted medical procedures in Germany?

The goal of public health should be preserving the welfare of the least fortunate and the weakest, from the unborn to the mentally and physically handicapped. That is accepted medical procedure.

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Instinct denies multiculturalism

Nowadays the magic wand that opens doors and flowers our speech is the word multiculturalism. Not only on our campus, but also nationally and internationally, multiculturalism is a concept that fills the ears of the listener as much as it does the mouth of the speaker.

With its round, full sounds, it is as pleasant to pronounce as to hear. Despite that its aesthetic and conceptual beauty brought this word into the spotlight, I still see a problem with the whole idea. It lies with the absolute hypocrisy that surrounds multiculturalism, which in itself is just a banal modernization of two Latin words. This concept gained popularity thanks to the over-simplistic attitude of society as a whole, which sought to erase decades of uniculturalism by frantically waving the multicultural banner.

I am obviously not against multiculturalism as a concept; how could I be? I am an Italian who lived five years in Africa, married to a Russian and studying in the United States. My doubts, however, arise when such a mask is used to leave untouched the problems that lie beneath the surface. I dislike the whole concept of multiculturalism when it's used as a screen that makes everyone more beautiful. It is the nauseating "people's persons" who promote the bettering of humanity through a mutual multicultural understanding. A masterpiece of self-deception. The destruction of such a notion is the partial aim of my bi-weekly reflections.

My position is that, alas, it is merely utopian to think that we ever will have a multicultural society. It is simply against human instincts, just like sincerity and altruism.

It is an awful discovery, for you



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"people's persons," but humanity cannot do without prejudices and preconceptions; that is who we are. Partial proof of that lies right here under our eyes, in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus, where despite the multitude of ethnicities and nationalities, the strongest bonds are formed among individuals with the same cultural background. This happens not by chance, but by choice. Of course, there can be the exception that confirms the rule.

None of us wants to admit being prejudiced, but the fundamental reason that makes prejudices our inseparable companions is that they hold a basis of truth. Italians do love fashion, Japanese do travel in groups, Russians do drink vodka, and on and on.

Thus, prejudices will remain. It is, however, necessary to focus our attention away from an artificial cover to our problems and toward knowing ourselves better. Painting a house built with rotten wood will make it look better, but it won't improve its structure. Similarly, frantically waving the banner of multiculturalism will not change what's inside the head. That, instead, is what we have to work on.

We should turn away from a wishful-thinking view of the world and ourselves to a more truthful realization of our characteristics. Only by taking control of our

thoughts will we be able to see the inner paradoxes within a concept such as multiculturalism. How can we aspire to such an Eden-like view of humanity, when Palestinians and Israelis kill each other because of nationality?

Or in this country, where a person is defined by the percentage of blood he or she has of a certain nationality. Never had I heard, before coming to the United States, a person being described like a horse — as a quarter-, half- or purebred. It seems incredible that someone would actually keep track of the origin of one's blood. Ironic is the fact that such classification based on bloodlines emerged in the melting pot of the world.

This proves that if people don't have physical boundaries to respect, like in Europe, they create their own. Very likely the biggest void felt by newcomers to the New World was the absence of prejudices and nationalistic feelings, which abound in the Old World.

As a reaction to the lack of such reference points, a society with a high number of prejudices was born. Evidence of this is the multitude of nationalist jokes that exist in the United States; this is unparalleled in any other country in the world. Furthermore, the stark divisions within the large cities of the various ethnic groups show an inborn need to associate with one's own kin.

If we cannot come close to a multicultural society, we can be tolerant of each other. Nowadays, we have barely begun to be open to new cultures, and that is a great improvement compared to only a few decades ago.

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