

# Understanding the Culture: Generation X (1964-1980)

## Defining Events

- Watergate
- End of Vietnam
- Iran Hostage Crisis
- Presidential and Pope Assassination Attempts
- Space Shuttle Challenger
- Chernobyl
- Iran-Contra Scandal
- Black Monday
- Berlin Wall Down
- Cold War Ends
- Operation Desert Storm
- Aids/HIV
- Latch-Key Kids

## Attitudes and Values

- Diversity
- Think Globally
- Balance
- Techno-literacy
- Fun
- Informality
- Self-Reliance
- Pragmatism

## Characteristics and Skills

- Self-reliant
- Survivors
- Serious About Life
- Stressed Out
- Loyal
- Skeptical

## Heroes

- No Heroes!



- What you talkin' 'bout Willis
- Where's the Beef
- Read My Lips – No New Taxes
- Wouldn't be Prudent
- I've Fallen and I Can't Get Up
- I Pity the Fool
- Well, I'm Not a Crook
- May the Force be With You
- Conjunction Junction, What's Your Function
- Wax On, Wax Off
- 867-5309

Generation X was a generation of children that saw an increase in divorce, single parents, and both parents in the workforce. The term "Latch Key Kids" became the norm. Twelve percent of Xers were at home along during elementary school and 30 percent during middle school. This factored heavily into the strong sense of individualism as well as a desire for relationships. Friends and extended family were what they depended upon for support during a time when afterschool programs did not exist.

One of the biggest issues between the Baby Boomer and X Generations has been the search for a balance between the X personal lives and careers. Boomers have viewed Xers as unmotivated and/or apathetic, referring to the generation as the 'ME' generation. Well, what is in it for X?

- ❖ Self-Reliant
- ❖ It's Just a Job Mantra
- ❖ Unimpressed by Authority
- ❖ Skeptic
- ❖ Tech Savvy
- ❖ Live for Adventure
- ❖ Look Out for Self First
- ❖ Independent Workers/Thinkers
- ❖ Work Hard – Play Hard
- ❖ Entrepreneurial
- ❖ Professional Relationships Become Friends
- ❖ Predominately Use Email/Phone
- ❖ Thrive on Training
- ❖ Prefer Highly Informal Culture
- ❖ Need Feedback
- ❖ Comfortable with Change
- ❖ Want Flexibility
- ❖ Family/Friends Come First

Xers were faced with such defining events as Watergate and an era of corporate downsizing which created a very skeptical generation. Company loyalty has become a thing of the past. With Social Security threatened by the retirement of the larger Baby Boom Generation, it has become more of a question of 'Well, what will be left for X?'

Generation X has become a group of individuals focused on financial security, self improvement, diversity and relationship.

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## Why is X so Skeptical?

**BLACK MONDAY:** In 1987, stock markets around the globe crashed. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 508 points. This decline was the largest one-day percentage decline in stock market history.

**SAVINGS & LOAN CRISIS:** 2,412 savings and loan associations in the US failed costing around \$560.1 billion, about \$324.6 billion paid by US taxpayers. Between 1980 and 1994 more than 1,600 banks insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) were closed or received FDIC assistance.

**SOCIAL SECURITY:** Today's workers pay for today's retirees. With over 80 million Baby Boomers getting ready to retire, the 45 million Xers behind them are picking up the tab.

**HIV/AIDS:** The height of the AIDS epidemic was in 1988. Fear spread quickly when Life magazine 1985 issue's front cover read "Now No One is Safe From AIDS". Schools were teaching students about AIDS and aggressively discussing safe sex practices.

**RODNEY KING:** In 1991 Rodney King was beaten by four LA Police Officers after being stopped for speeding. The incident was caught on tape however,

only one of the police officers was convicted. News of the acquittal of the remaining three officers triggered the Los Angeles riots of 1992. The result was 53 deaths, 2,383 injured, over 7,000 fires, 3,100 businesses damaged, and close to \$1 billion in financial loss.

**VIETNAM AFTERMATH:** Nearly 3 million Americans served between 1965 and 1973. The US spent \$120 billion on the war resulting in a large federal budget deficit.

**UNREST IN THE MIDDLE EAST:** The *Iran-Contra Affair* (1986) comprised two issues – arms sales to Iran and funding of contra militants in Nicaragua. In 1979, 52 employees of the US embassy in Iran were taken hostage by Iranian students. Between 1982 and 1992, 30 Western hostages were taken. The *Gulf War* against Iraq (1991) resulted in 148 US soldiers killed in action, 458 wounded and 121 killed in non-hostile action. Veterans from this war started suffering from 'Gulf War Syndrome' in which the department of defense has spent \$247 million on 239 studies of the illness.

**LEADERSHIP:** *Watergate* led to the resignation of Richard Nixon (1974). Gerald Ford took over the office and gave presidential pardon to Nixon. Bill Clinton was impeached by the House of Representatives in 1998 and acquitted by the Senate in 1999.

*"What are we doing here? We're reaching for the stars." Christa McAuliffe*

Where were you?

Most can tell you where they were when Kennedy was shot. For Generation Xers, they can tell you where they were on January 28, 1986.

Space Shuttle Challenger exploded over the Atlantic Ocean at 11:39 AM EST. On board was Christa McAuliffe, the first member of the Teacher in Space Project.



Live from New York ... It's Saturday Night!

October 11, 1975 marked the debut of the NBC's Saturday Night. Featuring up-and-coming actors this show quickly became a staple in many homes. Many unforgettable characters from SNL spawned several movies including:

The Blues Brothers (1980)  
Wayne's World (1992)  
Coneheads (1993)  
It's Pat (1994)  
Night at the Roxbury (1998)  
Superstar (1999)