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Millennium pioneers

'Generation X' title belittles responsibilities, capabilities of American youth

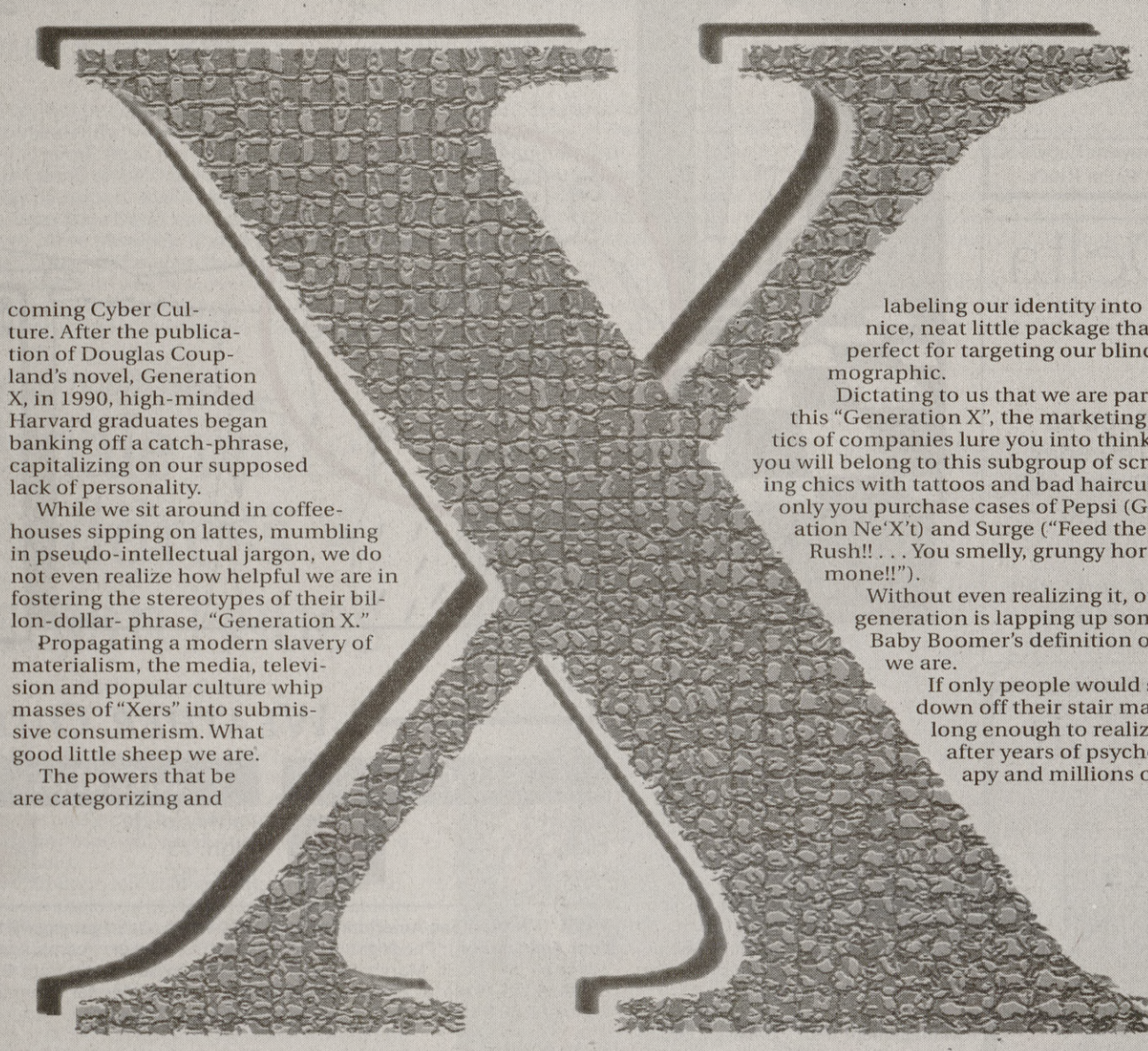


MICHELLE Voss
columnist

Like God thundering down the Ten Commandments to Moses, corporate America has blasted down their verdict of our generation's identity, a quick, simple image perfect for our short attention spans: "X." The stone tablet?

- Thou shall suffer indigestion from Taco Bell.
- Thou shall watch bubbly-headed MTV veejays and pointless dating games.
- Thou shall learn to love Microsoft, and think it ever blessed.
- Thou shall have a universal Blockbuster card.
- Thou shall be loyal to Nike sneakers.
- Thou shall drive a compact foreign car.
- Thou shall drink espresso coffee malts from Starbucks.
- Thou shall wear Calvin Klein jeans.
- Thou shall amass mountains of CDs and jewel cases.
- Oh, yeah, and although we really shouldn't even be mentioning this, because we think abstinence is the best policy, Thou shalt not have unprotected sex.

From the years 1961 to 1981, 76 million children were born. While we were carrying our Star Wars lunch boxes to school and playing with Strawberry Shortcake, stuffy board-rooms were looking to the future, deciding how to market a new consciousness to the up-and-



coming Cyber Culture. After the publication of Douglas Coupland's novel, *Generation X*, in 1990, high-minded Harvard graduates began banking off a catch-phrase, capitalizing on our supposed lack of personality.

While we sit around in coffee-houses sipping on lattes, mumbling in pseudo-intellectual jargon, we do not even realize how helpful we are in fostering the stereotypes of their billion-dollar phrase, "Generation X."

Propagating a modern slavery of materialism, the media, television and popular culture whip masses of "Xers" into submissive consumerism. What good little sheep we are.

The powers that be are categorizing and

labeling our identity into a nice, neat little package that's perfect for targeting our blind demographic.

Dictating to us that we are part of this "Generation X", the marketing tactics of companies lure you into thinking you will belong to this subgroup of screaming chicks with tattoos and bad haircuts if only you purchase cases of Pepsi (Generation Ne'X't) and Surge ("Feed the Rush!!... You smelly, grungy hormone!!").

Without even realizing it, our generation is lapping up some Baby Boomer's definition of who we are.

If only people would step down off their stair master long enough to realize that after years of psychotherapy and millions of bot-

ties of Prozac and Ritalin, we "Xers" have been drugged into a numb state of passivity and indifference.

Yeah, that's right, where have all the flowers gone? Do you naively buy into the bombastic propaganda that your life as an "Xer" must be one endless series of distractions: computers, television, beer, sex, the Internet, cars, clothes, beer, sex, outlet malls, movies, beer, sex, et cetera, and that you must have them?

Our haughty national leaders have taken it upon themselves to trap us in an ambiguous political rhetoric which leaves us wondering what the heck "X" means.

Where is our Jack Kerouac, Bob Dylan or Alan Ginsberg? All we have to show for ourselves are the Spice Girls and a gangsta rapper by the name of Puff Daddy.

In other words, who can we point to and say, yeah, man, I feel that; you said it.

Rather than defining ourselves, society has bombarded us with images that supposedly represent our state of mind: Nintendo, Kurt Cobain, herbal ecstasy, 90210, Kate Moss and stovepipe jeans. Is this you?

By the year 2000, our generation will comprise 40 percent of the voting public, and we have some serious issues to sort through like porn on the Internet, AIDS and the bankruptcy of social security.

We are the pioneers of a new millennium, and we must begin to think like leaders. We cannot be "Xers," anonymous, with no identity and oblivious to the beauty of the future and ourselves.

Michelle Voss is a sophomore English major.

Campus involvement enriches college life



LEN CALLAWAY
columnist

As one walks around campus these days their eyes are flooded with various images on T-shirts. Some are on the front and some are on the back, but they all carry a message.

My favorite shirts are the ones that deal with extra-curricular activities or student organizations, of which one assumes the wearer is a participant. These shirts are the best because they give someone an idea of where their interests lie. They help display the diversity of interests amongst the students on our campus. Besides, it makes people watching more fun because now one can make fun of the shirts as well as the people.

Students should seek out societies and groups that are interested in or pertain to the same things as themselves. These groups do not necessarily have to be in the field of one's major or even pertain to anything that is of previous interest to the individual. Students should join these organizations to meet new people or to learn about something new.

At A&M we are fortunate to have such a large student body, which naturally demands a diverse and extensive collection of student organizations. It seems that year in, year out, the two most controversial student organizations are the Corps of Cadets and the Greek system. Both groups have broken into numerous smaller groups, but they are both criticized as they were each one unit.

The Corps of Cadets and the Greek system as whole entities are both excellent organizations and should be recognized as such. While it is true that the Corps and fraternities have their problems, as separate entities they are extremely successful at maintaining motivation and molding military and civilian leaders.

Both organizations have been accused of harshness in allegations of hazing. Hazing is inexcusable, however, the important thing to remember about hazing is that it does not represent the organization as a whole. It does, however, prove that the one perpetuating the hazing is a mental

weakling that lacks the intelligence and capability to properly instruct and guide a younger member of their organization. If one continues to haze because that is the manner in which he or she was dealt with, then they lack the ability to become a leader anyway. These people (Greek or Corps) are merely weak followers.

On a more positive note, the Corps of Cadets and the Greek system both provide avenues for students to grow and mature while developing personal communication skills and connections for the future. Both organizations put a high priority on social experiences and camaraderie.

By joining either one of these organizations, students can expect to basically inherit an entire new crowd of friends and associates. Obviously, life in the Corps is absolutely demanding and completely time consuming, but the rewards in personal growth cannot be beaten. Not to take away from the value of the Greek system, but success in the Corps requires total dedication and absolute control over one's destiny. Fraternities are definitely the easier way to live, but their list of benefits compares almost exactly to that of the Corps.

Both of the previous organizations are lifestyles, so to speak. They take large amounts of time each week, and if not handled properly, can interfere with one's academic pursuits.

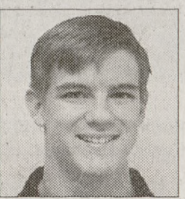
There are literally tons of organizations that do not put such a constraint on students' time. There are organizations for every sort of activity in which a student could possibly be interested.

Most organizations are open to everyone that cares to participate, but some are restrictive and require an application process. This type of organization will have periodic meetings and will provide an opportunity to mix and mingle with current and former students which could provide incalculable opportunities for students in the years to come.

All students should venture out and make an effort to become involved in some sort of organization on campus. The best times in college are the times spent learning about something new, getting something accomplished and networking for opportunities in the future. If we all expect to succeed in life then we must begin to take a proactive role in determining our destinies.

Len Callaway is a junior journalism major.

College of Liberal Arts deserves respect



CHRIS HUFFINES
columnist

Back in 'Ol' Army days, when real Aggies were men wearing khaki, Texas A&M University was literally that: Texas Agricultural and Mechanical University.

Within the past few years, a number of new departments and colleges have been created. Business, science and liberal arts, among others, have both been born and risen to national prominence in the last several decades.

And, while many of these colleges, the College of Business in particular, have become major draws for Texas A&M, the overwhelming conception of A&M's College of Liberal Arts is not that it is one of the premier Colleges within the University.

The College of Liberal Arts should be recognized as the academic triumph that it is, and should receive more support from the University for this reason.

Most students experience the liberal arts only through that ponderous behemoth of efficiency, the University Core Curriculum.

Cookie-cutting out "well-rounded" students, the core curriculum manages to force students through various classes without ever managing to incite them to learn.

This includes everything from 2000-student political science and history classes to the much smaller foreign language classes, all of which are required for graduation.

One-third of all credit hours taught at A&M are administered by the College of Liberal Arts, according to Dr. Charles Johnson, head of the Department of Political Science.

Our College of Liberal Arts, a college which did not even exist 30 years ago, now provides more class hours than any college on campus, publishes more articles in academic journals than any other Liberal Arts college in the state of Texas, and offers numerous international programs, most notably in Normandy, France; Lancaster, England; and at our sister campus in Castiglione Fiorentino, Italy.

However, there persists the impression that liberal arts is not an effective major for the job market. This is patently untrue. A recent *Fortune Magazine* article stated that 90 percent of CEO's of major companies want critical thinking skills and 77 percent want problem-solving skills,

which the liberal arts are uniquely able to provide, according to Dr. Linda Putnam, Head of the Department of Speech Communications. Only 37 percent of these CEO's said they thought a student should learn work skills while at college. The companies these CEO's represent prefer to train their new employees. This is directly opposite of what 75 percent of parents and 85 percent of their children think.

The reason these skills are so sought after by business is best explained by Dr. Woodrow Jones Jr., Dean of the College of Liberal Arts. "Liberal arts gives students the ability to understand a broad range of issues. Our graduates are prepared to be productive members of the workforce because they are adaptable, they have the background to continue a life of learning, and they have the ability to work with others from various backgrounds.

Jones also said, "The Liberal arts help students understand the forces that have shaped the world's greatest civilizations. ...They inspire students by removing blinders and opening minds to the world of ideas that are of enduring importance."

The college has improved, but still most students see the required courses as hurdles to overcome, not opportunities to enrich themselves.

As Head of the Philosophy Department Dr. Robin Smith said, more than technical skills are needed in today's workplace. The ability to learn and to think is vitally important, as technology and society progress beyond students' current knowledge. Liberal art's focus is on those very skills. However, as Dr. Smith pointed out, students will not gain these skills without the proper attitude. This attitude is what is lacking, and what the University needs to assist in providing.

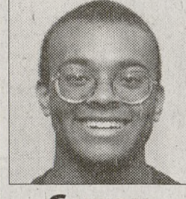
The Liberal Arts are "working in different spheres, under different constraints," than the other colleges, as Dr. Larry Mitchell, Head of the Department of English stated.

They are meant to complement, not compete with other classes. Within a student's mind, however, there is the rush to get a degree, to get a job, a mentality statistics have proven is not grounded in reality.

Students do not understand that without the liberal arts, without the vital communication and thinking skills they provide, students may land a job immediately with their engineering degree, but they will not climb the corporate ladder.

Chris Huffines is a sophomore speech communications major.

Multiculturalism suggests more than stereotypes



GENERAL FRANKLIN
columnist

In spite of greater opportunities for cross-cultural awareness such as Hispanic Heritage Month, much of our knowledge of other groups on campus does not extend past the artificial, superficial or generic.

This trivialization of other cultures stems from sheer indifference to ideas, values and beliefs different from our own.

Although Americans pride themselves on their fair-mindedness and tolerance, the reality differs starkly. In fact, dominant culture prefers to mute ethnic or cultural distinctions to preserve the idea of being American. It seems unfortunate that one's adherence to his or her own particular set of cultural values is somehow less American or conventional.

This type of papering over the richness of culture in America occurs often in education, politics and society. Cultural legacies are omitted, ignored or oversimplified to lessen

the burden of understanding and tolerance.

Society also has the tendency to reduce culture to stereotypes. In line with this idea African-Americans are athletes, Hispanics are aliens, and Asian-Americans only study. The problem with this thinking is that we drape dumb and insulting superficiality over others, without attempting to understand the groups themselves.

It is time to shirk the impulse to gauge and determine the internal values of a people externally. Society should strive to scope beyond facades to understand people for themselves.

A far better approach is to broaden your thought by understanding the struggle, heritage and experience of other groups.

With a new willingness to understand people, we can begin to understand ourselves and how we all fit into the broad patchwork of humanity.

Obstacles unfortunately remain, such as our tendency to reduce cultural distinctions to cuisine, style or mannerisms connected to a certain group. It seems offensive to reduce the entire experience of a people to matters of food and dress.

How does Chinese food enlighten you on the close bonds of the Asian family? Does

basketball convey the complex nexus between the church and family in African-American communities?

Clearly not. We must overcome our narrow view of the unknown to see people as they really are, not as we perceive them to be from a safe distance.

Occasionally we must tread outside our own reality to encounter perspective from those with a different world view. This new perspective not only tears down old barriers, but it enriches us with the knowledge of our togetherness and uniqueness.

Together, because we establish common ground on which to understand and appreciate our distinctive histories and traditions. Uniqueness comes from the realization that your particular experience, values, and faith make you unlike no other, yet still apart of the whole.

The remedy to this dilemma is simple. Communication beyond the stiff formalities of everyday interaction is vital. It is amazing how reciprocity of spoken language can bestow us with deep insight into who we were, who we are, and who we are to become.

General Franklin is a junior history major.