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# NOMADS AND COMMANDERS

## WELCOMING GENERATION X

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Generational models of social change are common today. I'll relate one to archaeology. Winograd and Hais (2008) recently argued that the emerging millennial generation (Table 1) will transform American society and politics, and dominate these for most of the twenty-first century. Their claim is based on the premise that the millennials are like the G.I. generation of World War II fame as they are both civic minded heroic generations. I have no argument with this claim other than it comes early in the generational secession process. The G.I. generation was led and mentored by their next elders, the Lost Generation. Likewise, the millennials will be led and mentored by Generation X (in Europe called Baby Busters or the Seventies Generation). Thus, we need to understand the Xers as they are transitioning into senior leadership roles. This essay briefly summarizes their generational type and outlines what can be expected of them as leaders; it also recognizes the mythological relationship between Gen X and Indiana Jones.

### The Generations Model

Strauss and Howe (1991, 1997) provide a model of four generational archetypes that rotate over approximately 80 years. The types are idealist, reactive, civic, and adaptive (Table 1); they are also known as prophets, nomads, heroes, and artists. Gen X is the reactive nomad type. Different endowments characterize the four types. Idealists focus on principles, religion, and education. Reactive generations focus on survival, pragmatism, and liberty. Civics focus on community building, technology, and affluence. Adaptive generations promote pluralism, social justice, and expertise. Civics and Adaptives are collectivists focused on social cooperation. Idealists and Reactives are individualists pursuing self interests. In academia, Idealists moralize a complicated world, Reactives simplify it into manageable fragments, Civics offer simplistic grand narratives, Adaptives add complexity and nuance to simple grand narratives, and the cycle repeats. Since the European colonization of America there have been 19 generations living through five rotations that have influenced American culture and history. Table 1 lists recent ones of interest to archaeology.

As sociological concepts, generational types assist in understanding collective history and individual behavior. Civil War historians often contrast the leadership styles of Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant. It is useful to know that the former was an Idealist (Transcendentalist) and the latter a Reactive (Gilded) because it informs why they did what they did. Lee initiated campaigns into enemy territory (Antietam, Gettysburg) in the belief that a victory there would be symbolic enough to end the war. Grant preferred to use his larger force in sustained engagement until his smaller opponent was subdued (Vicksburg, Petersburg). The generational types of Lee and Grant reflect the leadership styles of Boomers (values driven) and Xers (pragmatic) that are nearly opposites.

### Reactives are Free Agents

Reactive generations are the roughest in American history; they are the "bad" generations, using that word in all its variations. They generally come of age during moralistic culture wars and they suffer economic hardship most of their adult lives; many live a boom and bust life. Gen Xers have been caught in the midst of age-graded wage stagnation. Despite economic growth, the standard of living for a 30 year old in the year 2000 was much less than it was for a 30 year old in 1970 because real median income (inflation adjusted) has stagnated in the United States since the 1970s and personal savings rates have hit lows not seen since the Great Depression; meanwhile, household debt ratios have risen to new highs (Kemenetz 2006; Krugman 2007:124–152; Mooney 2008; O'Shaughnessy 2008; Strauss and Howe 1997:236). The tough economic times that Reactives live through, and the culture wars they try to avoid, casts them as survivalists, bottom-line realists, and scrappy innovators and entrepreneurs. Their values are in stark contrast to prior generations: a career is not the most important thing in their lives, they cannot imagine working for the same company or in the same line of work for their entire lives, they expect to be respected, they are reluctant to commit to much of anything, and they expect to get as much as they give (Peters 2001:48–49).

Table 1. Recent generations with their types and examples.

Name	Type	Birth years	Examples
Transcendentalist	idealist	1792-1821	Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Henry Schoolcraft, Lewis H. Morgan, E. G. Squier, Abraham Lincoln, Susan B. Anthony
Gilded	reactive	1822-1842	Daniel Brinton, Edward B. Tylor, Albert S. Gatschet, Hubert H. Bancroft, Samuel Clemens, Louisa May Alcott
Progressive*	adaptive	1843-1859	Sigmund Freud, William H. Holmes, Franz Boas, C. B. Moore, Woodrow Wilson, Arthur Conan Doyle, William H. Jackson
Missionary	idealist	1860-1882	Alfred L. Kroeber, Hetty Goldman, Howard Carter, H. B. Hawes, Edgar Lee Hewitt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Julia Morgan
Lost	reactive	1883-1900	Ruth Benedict, Edward Sapir, Alfred. V. Kidder, Ann A. Morris, Winifred Lamb, Dorothy A. Garrod, Neil Judd, Luther Cressman, William C. Holden, Carl Guthe
G. I.	civic	1901-1924	Waldo Wedel, Betty Meggars, James Griffin, Mary Leakey, Kathleen Kenyon, Gordon Willey, James Ford, Bruce Goff
Silent	adaptive	1925-1942	James Deetz, Cynthia Irwin-Williams, Lewis Binford, Alice B. Kehoe, Thomas King, Dean Snow, James N. Hill, Mark Leone
Boomers**	idealist	1943-1960	Linda Cordell, Ian Hodder, Deborah Pearsall, Kenneth Ames, Michael Shanks, Alison Wylie, Michael J. O'Brien
Gen X	reactive	1961-1981	John Kanter, Andrew Duff, Laurie Wilkie, Cornelius Holtorf, Kelly Dixon, Shannon Dawdy, Troy Lovata, Julie Schablitsky
Millennials	civic	1982-2002	Female celebrities currently reign: Mandy Moore, Scarlett Johansson, Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan, Britney Spears, Miley Cyrus
Homeland	adaptive	2002-	Toddlers and elementary school kids

Adapted from Strauss and Howe (1997).

\*No heroic generation emerged from the Civil War possibly because it ended with everyone feeling tragic; the Millennials could fizzle out as well.

\*\*The post WWII baby boom was a spike in the birth rate from 1946 to 1964; the Strauss and Howe model defines generations based on social cohort differences not changes in birth rates.

As survivalists Xers are not beholden to any moral agenda other than individualism and eclecticism. Unattached as they are to the agendas of their next elders they are called nihilists which, of course, is inaccurate because what they are doing is not engaging in the culture wars of their elders; they are apathetic toward and tired of those crusades. The generational tiff between Boomers and Xers is real. The former look upon the latter as amoral slackers too focused on rascally fun ("These losers will run society some day? God forbid!"). Xers view Boomers as hypocritical culture warriors too incompetent to manage society ("Will they ever shut up and stop arguing?"). Living in the wake of the Boomers has not been pleasant; so they write about it (Coupland 1991; Gordinier 2008) waiting for their turn at leadership.

Xers have already made lasting impressions on American culture and archaeology. First and foremost, they are interested in having fun. Xers are simplifying the complicated moral world of the Boomers and they are focusing on enjoyable learning experiences. To them, archaeology is fun—it's not a moral crusade, it will not change the world, and debating its status as a science is a wasted effort. Xers are also extremely physical, giving America extreme sports, bungee jumping, snow boarding, and the now popular fist pump. Within the generation there is gender parity in terms of employment; in historical archaeology,

employed women may outnumber men. Gen Xers are also the most tattooed and pierced generation in American history. Colorado archaeologists are having fun with it (<http://www.coloradoarchaeologists.org/Funstuff.htm>, accessed July 26, 2008). As strong romantics Gen Xers are changing popular culture toward super athletic *and* pleasantly plump characters because curves, firm or soft, are more appealing than rational slimness and angularity. In archaeology Xers live up to their nomadic ways. They embrace the life of shovel bumming with a sense of irony, caricature, and nobility (de Boer 2004). The shovel bum novel *Swamp* (Pachinco 1997) is both a great description of contemporary CRM archaeology and of the lifestyle of low income Gen Xers. Their hard-hitting commercialism is seen in companies like Amazon, eBay, Google, Yahoo, and Dell, all founded by Gen Xers. What the entrepreneurs of these companies did was take something that already existed for corporations and made it efficiently available to individuals because their focus is on personal satisfaction, fun, and survival. As it is done today, archaeological research could not be done without the services of companies like these.

Previous reactive generations offer clues to what Gen Xers may be like in senior leadership roles. American presidents George Washington, John Adams, Grant, Hays, Garfield, Arthur, Cleveland, B. Harrison, Truman, and Eisenhower were all Reactives.

Table 2. Mythical characters and generational types.

<b>Idealists / Prophets</b> Jesus, Mohammed, Moses, Dumbledore, Gandalf, Obi-Wan Kenobi	<b>Reactives / Nomads</b> Huck Finn, Indiana Jones, Lara Croft, Sam Spade, Snape, Aragon, Han Solo
<b>Adaptives / Artists</b> Buddha, Confucius, Merlin, Yoda, Sherlock Holmes, James Bond	<b>Civics / Heroes</b> Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Harry Potter, Frodo, Luke Skywalker

The traits that connect them are pragmatism, fiscal conservatism, and a low tolerance for risk taking while in office. They were also generally unpretentious. These presidents had had prior military service and several had been generals. They all took their leadership roles during or directly after American culture was in secular crisis (the Revolution, the Civil War, and the Depression-WW II). Since September 11, 2001, America has again been in secular crisis and the midlife reactive generation is standing up. Additionally, Reactives attaining high office fairly young may tend toward autocracy (Sarah Palin, Michelle Rhee) that likely moderates with age. The nomadic type also has its flamboyant characters such as Barack Obama, George Custer, and Sir Mortimer Wheeler.

Reactives are best understood as Nomads and Commanders with keen analytical, management, and writing skills. Nomads wander geography, but also the mind, the soul, and the heart. As they have no cultural agenda other than survival they are not wedded to any theory or methodology. Nomads will pursue concepts that are productive toward planned goals; they will even abandon useful concepts in the desire to experiment with others. Previous reactive scientists include biologists Alfred Wallace, Thomas Huxley, Julian Huxley, and Francis Galton, economists Friedrich Hayek and Karl Polanyi, and geographer Carl Sauer. There is nothing wrong with being classified with these thinkers even as some of them pursued concepts that are generally unacceptable today (Social Darwinism, eugenics). More than other generations, nomads explore all corners of life, its wonderful pleasures (Mae West) and its darkest powers (Adolf Hitler).

The Lost Generation of archaeologists left a strong imprint on the profession, most notably because they were the core group of journeymen who founded the SAA (c.f., Guthe 1967). They also established the basic outlines of regional chronological sequences and provided richly described reports. Their theories are largely forgotten and their methods and categories (the Direct Historical Approach, the Pecos Classification System, and the Midwestern Taxonomic System) are embedded in today's research. A roll call of the generation provides a few famous mentors and many forgotten ones: V. Gordon Childe, A.

V. Kidder, W. C. McKern, Frank H. H. Roberts, William Duncan Strong, Ann Morris, William Albright, Gertrude Caton-Thompson, Raymond Dart, Dorothy Garrod, Winifred Lamb, Matthew Stirling, Helge Instad, and many more. The Gen X legacy will be similar to the Lost: unpretentious, generally non-ideological, and grounded in data. Archaeology will take a strong pragmatic turn in the next few years.

### Reactive Mythology

Reactive generations are also the source for America's most iconic archaeologist, Indiana Jones, whose plotline places him within the Lost Generation (Table 2). This icon combines several reactive traits. From the Gilded Generation Indy takes the cowboy and gunfighter images, the nomadic lost souls of the Old West (Wild Bill Hickock, Buffalo Bill Cody, and Wyatt Earp). From the Lost Generation he takes the images of adventurers and explorers (F. A. Mitchell-Hedges, Roy Chapman Andrews) and blends them with characters from Lost mystery writers (Agatha Christie, Raymond Chandler, and Dasheill Hammett). As an anti-hero Indy is an Archaeologist-Detective and Archaeologist-Adventurer (Holtorf 2007: themes A and D). He is Hammett's Sam Spade but not Arthur C. Doyle's Sherlock Holmes (an adaptive character). Indy, of course, does not reflect the full range of reactive traits. In the Indy movies he is mostly a nomad. There are brief scenes where his commander side is shown but it is not the focus of the movies. Action movies with reactive main characters do best commercially when the nomadic image is emphasized.

Modern Western mythology has provided audiences with several stories—Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, and Star Wars—that typecast the reactive commander role. In these apocalyptic tales the young civic heroes always come in teams with a team leader (Harry Potter/Hermione/Ron; Frodo/Sam/Merry/Pippin; Luke Skywalker/Princess Leia). These heroes are the focus of the stories and their exploits are legend. However, they cannot succeed without help from the next elder generation, as mentors, teachers, and leaders (Snape/Hagrid/the Dark Arts teachers; Aragon/Arwen/Boromir/Gimli/Legoas; Han Solo/Chewie/robots). In the commander role Reactives are often military officers or peo-

ple of action but they can also be teachers and defenders of culture (Holtorf 2007: themes R and C). Reactives live nomadic and dangerous lives while young; they may even be iconoclasts. They mature into careful, pragmatic, and conservative leaders who enable the younger civic heroes to greatness.

Every generation has a sociological function, its mythic destiny, and they can succeed or fail. Heroic generations provide the critical mass that pushes a crisis-laden society to greatness; afterwards, they are the builders of a new society. Adaptives are the social reformers who spread elegance and grace through society; and yet they may compromise it through indecision. Idealists are culture warriors who polarize and potentially destroy society; from within their chaos comes a visionary offering a new moral order. Reactives wander a cultural wasteland and then they redeem it, assisting its rebirth. For Generation X history has charged them with the task of demonstrating that Americans can still enjoy "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" without letting the world fly to pieces, without bankrupting the nation, and without squandering scarce global resources. They get to do the dirty work, have a little fun, and help the heroic kids behind them (Howe and Strauss 1993:228).

### The Eternal Return

America in the '00s has been a fearful place. Since 9/11 we have been afraid of terrorists, of blue and red states, of our inept leaders, and of the economy. Two Boomer presidencies (Clinton and Bush Jr.) have wracked the culture off its moorings, letting it flounder in a crisis of confidence. The economy is in systemic crisis. The collapse of the Bush administration in 2006 sent the conservative movement into shock and Boomers everywhere are anxious because the failure of one part suggests the failure of the whole generation that believed it could change the world. They are, actually, living out their destiny as culture warriors who may be destroyers. Mythology helps to sway the fears because during the apocalypse there is always a prophet giving moral courage and guidance to the younger generations. Harry, Frodo, and Luke all had steely eyed gray-haired champions to look up to (Dumbledore, Gandalf, Obi-Wan Kenobi). This gray champion has yet to emerge from the Boomer generation. History suggests that he or she will as they always have in the past (Franklin D. Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln, and Benjamin Franklin). This secular crisis is far from over. There is time for a Boomer to stand up, deliver a vision of a new moral order, and complete a generation's destiny.

Gen Xers are also doing their part; they are entering upper management positions and tenured professorships. They bring to archaeology pragmatism, flexibility, fiscal conservatism, and keen analytical abilities. They are unpretentious and mostly non-ideological. They are not culture warriors but are redeemers of culture. Nearly 80 years after the creation of SAA, Reactives are

here again to assist in the reinvention of archaeology, something that millenials will fully materialize. As it stands now CRM is the part that needs the most help. It, like life in general for Gen Xers, is a swamp of inequity and foolishness that needs redemption. Gen Xers can do it as it is their destiny. Welcome back Indy.

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