

below and their major activists.)

Echikson pays special attention to dissidents such as Polish historian Adam Michnik, Czechoslovakian playwright (now President) Václav Havel, and Hungarian writer Miklós Haraszti. What is original and refreshing about this book is its rich collection of information about the underground groups and movements in the region and Echikson's ability to highlight their role in their societies' awakening. He details, in a perceptive and thought-provoking manner, the rise of new political formations from the larger matrix of civil society. For him, the collapse of communism was caused by the growing chasm between the decaying official institutions and the mounting movements from below who represented the real interests and aspirations of the people.

Echikson claims that when the ruling elites have accepted their defeat, civil society has exhausted its revolutionary potential, and the time for the revival of political parties that would propose alternative strategies for social change has arrived. "When Eastern Europe's communist rulers accepted the principle of a multi-party state, the need to create conventional standard political parties replaced the slow, step-by-step construction of Civil Society. The opposition assumed power. People who were conditioned to think only of what they didn't want now had to think of what they wanted. They could no longer just be against. They had to be 'for' something. Civil Society was a product of living in defeat. A new political structure and strategy were needed to manage victory."

Echikson is right. Civil society represents a prerequisite for the reinvention of politics in countries where the system tried for decades to make the individual fearful and obedient. At the same time, one cannot categorically separate the new stage from the old: Civil society is also a methodology for society's self-organization—the construction of a social space that escapes governmental controls.

Today, as these countries engage in building free markets and unbinding the individual, the development of solid and

viable civil societies remains an actual component of democratization. This is even more urgent in countries such as Romania and Bulgaria, where the opposition to communism was less articulate than in Central Europe and where the former Communist parties have managed to preserve their domination even after the 1989 upheaval.

Structured along thematic lines, the book shows the author's skill in comparing different cultures and political traditions. Particularly exciting is the section dealing with the resurrection of old passions long repressed by communist rule. Echikson concludes his book in a moderately optimistic tone. He thinks that, at least in countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, the

leaders of the new Eastern Europe are people of great integrity and dedication. Although many dangers are looming in that region, including the rise of populist and ethnocentric movements, one cannot forget that these societies have learned much from their experience of totalitarian dictatorships.

There are strong nationalist passions in East and Central Europe, to be sure, but there is also a powerful desire to create free and prosperous societies.

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Generation Gaps

BY KARL ZINSMEISTER

Beyond the Boom: New Voices on American Life, Culture & Politics
 Edited by Terry Teachout, New York: Poseidon Press, 215 pages, \$18.95

Observers faced with the task of reading flows in American culture often do so by slicing off significant subpopulations for detailed examination. One favorite cut is by age—"generations" have long been viewed as crucial dividing lines for understanding social behavior and attitudes. But the recent track record of generation-based social theorizing is not very inspiring. An egregious example pertains to the '60s kids. We were told over and over that they were unlike anything the human race had produced previously, yet in middle age they've turned out to be mostly indistinguishable from other Americans.

Part of the problem with the 1960s generation-break blather was selective focus. The 10 percent who shredded draft cards, mixed them with hashish, rolled the by-product in their bras, and burned the whole concoction in a water pipe were put forth as representative. The regular-guy stiffs who joined the Marines, had children and then actually raised them, took jobs or created them, converted to



The *Beyond the Boom* bunch shares the "thirtysomething" tendency to whine.

Good News Christianity, and went deer hunting were, as usual, invisible to the people writing about over-affluent, greening, tuned-out Americans from their graduate school command posts.

Another part of the problem was that people not only can but almost always do change their minds about the world as

they grow up. A generation that in college decides that marriage is rape, slavery, or just too bourgeois will, you may be sure, have a somewhat different view 10 years (and eight shiftless boyfriends) later. In each generation, a somewhat different set of ideas smashes up against the walls of experience and revelation, so the process cannot be accurately predicted in advance, but we know important revisions in attitude will take place.

These problems bedevil current attempts at generational encapsulation every bit as much as they did previous efforts. Still, people keep trying. The latest effort is a collection of essays titled *Beyond the Boom*, in which 15 young writers try to make the case that "late baby boomers" between the ages of 29 and 39 comprise a cohesive group, far more accomplished than their older brothers and sisters of '60s fame, and influential to the point that they are likely to set the tone for American society in the 1990s.

Ambitious contentions, those. And complicated by the authors' further claim that, collectively, they are representative spokespersons—"the true voices"—of their generation. This is an interesting statement, given that the foreword elsewhere divulges that "all but three of us live and work in the New York [City] area." (The other three reside in Washington, D.C., Washington, D.C., and Brussels, respectively.) Maybe they covered the geographical-representation factor during their college years: "We went to Yale, Harvard, the University of Chicago, Berkeley, and all points in between."

Well, we won't hold any of that against them, but what about the real meat and potatoes—how many of them have joined in the ultimate human pageant by becoming spouses and/or parents, people responsibly linked to others by pledge and blood? These 15 representatives, average age "35," report they have produced a total of nine marriages and six children. The comparable figures for a true national sample of 30-year-olds would be about 12 marriages and 25 kids.

OK, there has never been any shortage of well-educated, undercommitted New

York City inmates willing to advise the rest of the country on how the world works, and sometimes—as in this volume—some of them even do a pretty good job of it. But it would be nice, *very* nice, to someday hear a few such pontificators acknowledge, in between bites on the national soul, that their wisdom represents but one small portion of this nation's collective intelligence.

Many of the contributions in *Beyond the Boom* would best be categorized as New York urban essays. They are interesting enough on their own terms. It is not possible, however, to pretend they form a complete generational portrait. And when the authors do extend their observation into generalities—as when Maggie Gallagher turns an understandable (and otherwise quite interesting) gripe about New York City's idiotic real estate market into a moaning complaint that young parents today have to put up with less grand houses than they themselves grew up in—the results can be both erroneous and a little annoying.

Similarly, I don't believe Roger Kimball's contention that the year 1950 "seems to us to have been a time of cultural giants" is going to set epiglottises vibrating among many of his fellow baby boomers. Relatively little of the spirit of our age is captured in the discussions of high and low contemporary culture presented here. I myself can't imagine not being at least a *little* pleased by some of the changes since 1950. Take architecture. Take the Nash Rambler. It's not hard to understand how a critic might have come to dislike many of today's movies, books, magazines, paintings, musical pieces, and so forth. But one might hope they could at least explain why so many of their compatriots do like the stuff. There's too much abstraction and too much distance, not enough "real life," throughout this volume.

But, for reasons I've already mentioned, I would have approached even a more balanced book on this subject with a measure of skepticism. It is, after all, extremely difficult to generalize accurately and usefully about the inner life of 42 million people (which is the number of Americans currently in their 30s). And

even if one could show that all 42 million really do, say, love Cajun food and Japanese industrial products and hate dams that hurt snail darters, it would be next to impossible, it seems to me, to know how they will feel about these and many other things after 30 years of regular experience with them. Who would have guessed Eldridge Cleaver and millions of flower children would end up as born-again small businessmen?

A smart observer would make his generational dissections only after the subjects had fully passed through middle age. At that point, lots of actual history is available, and it's unlikely many big surprises will lie ahead. A smart and lazy observer probably wouldn't do generational dissections at all. Fact is, consecutive age cohorts rarely show radically different patterns of living or opinion. New attitudes and practices tend to evolve across the nation as a whole, not just within peer groups. Factors like class, region of residence, family experience, and recent economic trends tend to be far more decisive in understanding and predicting personality than birth year.

That said, I will acknowledge that current trends *are* making age and generation membership more decisive influences on personal character than they were in the past. Several factors are involved. One is that it has become so much more common for different age groups to live separately. Increased wealth has allowed a great expansion in the number of separate households and a sharp decline in multigenerational living. Three-generation homes have virtually disappeared. The young have become separated not only from grandparents but even from parents in many cases, thanks to family breakdown and increased institutional rearing of young children. Same-age compatriots have become the dominant influence on many American children, and cross-generation bonds are weaker.

Government entitlements have also eroded natural alliances among age groups. Social Security payments have distanced old people from the young and supported the rise of completely segregated retirement ghettos in the Sunbelt.

Social Security has also caused the elderly to organize themselves into an astonishingly cohesive and self-maximizing political faction. Payroll-tax *payers* are consequently being forced into their own (age-stratified) defensive encampments. Working adults have also begun to differentiate their interests from those of very young Americans to a degree rarely seen in the past, thanks in part to the large and growing burden on their incomes of state levies imposed in the name of children.

Cultural developments have drawn age groups apart, too. Many new forms of music and whole categories of television and film have almost no cross-generational appeal. Private language, separate clothing fashions, and different tastes in food, cars, and consumer goods have always been hallmarks of youth, but only recently has our commercial culture been so efficient at splitting generations into marketing niches. (Does anyone over 30 watch MTV? Does anyone under 60 read *Modern Maturity*?) All of this is exaggerated by demographic and economic trends (fewer family meals eaten together, fewer all-family events in general, more money for teens to buy their own cars, a lot more single-person apartments, etc.). Put together, these changes may yet make generation-based political and cultural horizon-scanning a tenable undertaking.

Whether you think that day has arrived or not, several of the essays in this volume present worthwhile commentary. Susan Vigilante contributes an interesting description of baby boomers' powerful attraction to Alcoholics Anonymous-type recovery groups, suggesting that the Twelve Step program may offer millions of them a path back to religious truths. George Sim Johnston takes a less optimistic view of his generation's spiritual capacities and considers the watered-down alternatives that have replaced traditional religious teachings.

Maggie Gallagher defends yuppies against the charge that they are grasping and unreasonable in their material expectations. Andrew Ferguson describes tellingly how cynicism, and indeed a complete

inversion of traditional truths, has today become the dominant mode of intellectual interpretation and understanding. John Podhoretz's wise observations on how baby boomers' views of children have evolved over time—from millstones around a parent's neck, to independent and self-moderating mini-adults, to pathetic victims (and therefore political footballs)—left me wishing he would do more of that kind of writing and fewer goofy newspaper columns. And David Brooks adds a very funny and apt cartoon of the diseased Washington power hound.

Unfortunately there is also some dreadfully stuffy arts criticism here, too much self-absorption, and much too much in the genre of my-coming-of-age-

as-a-turning-point-of-our-era. There are a few shapeless clinkers and one strange piece mourning (quite rightly, in my opinion) the disappearance of qualities like valor, decisiveness, and ferocity among today's youth, while attributing it all to an absence of wartime experience (quite mistaken in my judgment, given what a bureaucratic endeavor battle has become in the modern era). But a certain jaggedness is normal for any multi-author collection. There's enough good thinking and writing here to reward a reader's time.

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Mad Lib

BY STANTON PEELE

Madness in the Streets: How Psychiatry and the Law Abandoned the Mentally Ill
By Rael Jean Isaac and Virginia C. Armat, New York: The Free Press, 348 pages, \$24.95

Out of Bedlam: The Truth About Deinstitutionalization, by Ann Braden Johnson
New York: Basic Books, 259 pages, \$22.95

If you spend some time walking the streets of New York City or Los Angeles, you're likely to encounter at least one foul-smelling man in ragged clothing whose shuffling gait, incoherent ranting, and wild eyes suggest a confused and disordered mind. Or perhaps a woman in a housecoat and slippers, muttering to herself as she pushes a shopping cart filled with junk.

These are the conspicuous homeless, but are they typical? Are most Americans living on the streets crazy? If so, it seems plausible to suggest that their current state can be blamed on deinstitutionalization—the policy, begun in the 1960s, of removing the mentally ill from state institutions.

Madness in the Streets makes the case that the release of inmates from the large mental hospitals where they had been warehoused for years is the principal source of the apparent surge in homelessness in the United States. The authors view deinstitutionalization as the expres-

sion of a radical 1960s ideology. The policy was ill-founded and bound to fail, Rael Jean Isaac and Virginia Armat claim, because it mistook the nature of mental illness, its sources, and its cure. Isaac and Armat maintain that mental illness—particularly schizophrenia—is a sickness of the brain that is best dealt with through drug therapy.

In *Out of Bedlam*, Ann Braden Johnson casts doubt on Isaac and Armat's conclusions about the causes of homelessness and the nature of mental illness. She argues that deinstitutionalization put relatively few people on the street and that economic factors play a more important role in homelessness than mental illness does. She is also far less sanguine about the medical approach and focuses instead on community-based programs.

Both books seek to explain why deinstitutionalization has not accomplished what it set out to do: reintegrate the mentally ill into the community. For Isaac and Armat, the solution is to send the