

Defining Xcons



Nevermind makes Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain a Gen-X icon in early '90s. On April 5, 1994, he commits suicide.



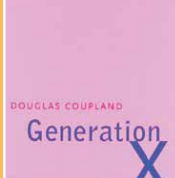
MTV becomes cultural phenomenon with shows such as *The Real World* and *Beavis and Butt-head*.



David Letterman premieres in 1982, giving young Gen-Xers a reason to stay up late.



Nancy Reagan coins "Just Say No" slogan; Pres. George H. W. Bush later declares "war on drugs."



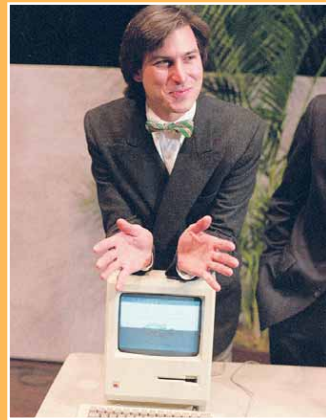
Douglas Coupland's novel *Generation X*, films like *Slacker* help define the young generation.



The Simpsons debuts in 1989. Rap and hip hop reach mainstream with groups like Run-D.M.C.



In the 1980s and '90s music and movies go digital.



TECHNOLOGY

Apple's Macintosh helps usher in era of truly personal computer.



Pac-Man and other popular video games turn fad into multibillion-dollar industry.



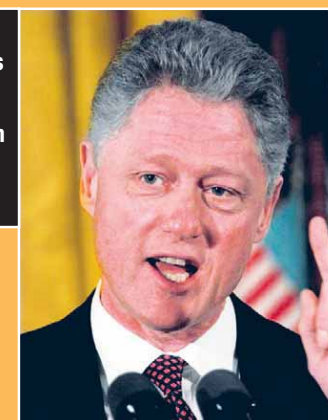
World Wide Web created, services like America Online help Gen-Xers log on.



Nelson Mandela leads the fight against apartheid in South Africa.



President Clinton's "inappropriate relationship" with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.



POLITICS



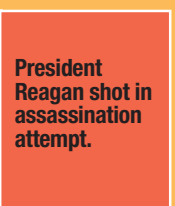
Gen-Xers' first war, the Persian Gulf War; Parental Advisory sticker on record labels part of censorship battle.



President Reagan shot in assassination attempt.



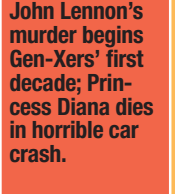
John Lennon's murder begins Gen-Xers' first decade; Princess Diana dies in horrible car crash.



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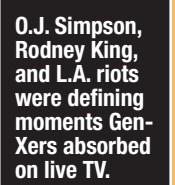
AIDS crisis, epidemic ushers in safe sex era.



Branch Davidians hold up in compound, most die in fiery siege; Oklahoma City bombing.



O.J. Simpson, Rodney King, and L.A. riots were defining moments Gen-Xers absorbed on live TV.



The Berlin Wall falls; Space Shuttle Challenger disaster is a televised tragedy that still haunts many Gen-Xers.



Y2K fears unfounded, while dot.com boom goes bust; the Columbine High School massacre.

EVENTS



able to Generation X in the 1980s and 1990s, the band's lyric was long ago co-opted by Baby Boomers as emblematic of their own passage through time. Instead, I offer a simple line from Cobain and Nirvana to encapsulate our generational experiences — an ironic lyric with more insight to Gen-Xers than any marketing scheme or media trope: "Oh well, whatever, never mind."

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8 area Gen X-ers reflect on life at middle age. See Page D-1.

Two decades of people, events, and trends that shaped Gen X-ers

By KIRK BAIRD
BLADE STAFF WRITER

How do you define a generation — one as often mislabeled, misjudged, misunderstood as Generation X? I suggest you start with the murder of John Lennon on Dec. 8, 1980, followed only months later by the attempted assassination of President Ronald Reagan, and end with the failed apocalypse of the Y2K bug on Dec. 31, 1999. That's a nearly two-decade run of iconic moments with bookends of death, tragedy, and an overblown

tech malfunction. And Baby Boomers wonder why we're cynical. Some of those milestones that shaped us in the 1980s and 1990s are included in the above illustration in the categories of culture, politics, technology, and events. And while we all shared in the heartbreak of 9/11 and the tumult of the Great Recession, the first two decades in the new millennium belong to those who came after us — the Millennials. The 1960s and '70s, however, belong to our parents. They were decades of transformation and social upheaval, followed by the excessive

celebrations of those new freedoms, and it was their children who most often shouldered the consequences of those years. Generation X, those born roughly in and between the years 1965 and 1980, are "latchkey kids" who grew up in an era of increasing divorce, safe sex and AIDS, and anti-drug crusades. We're also the first truly tech generation: We grew up with video games, came of age with the personal computer, jumped on the information superhighway when it opened and helped to drive the dot.com bub-

ble of the mid-'90s, only to watch it burst as the decade was ending. Like the Baby Boomers before us, our decades gave us an imprint and cultural identity through music (rap, grunge/alternative), movies (*Slacker*, *Singles*), TV (*MTV*, *The Simpsons*), and literature (*Generation X*). And like our parents, we lost some of our own icons far too soon (Kurt Cobain, River Phoenix). So how do you sum all this up? The Grateful Dead offered the line "What a long, strange trip it's been" about their experiences on the road. While that sentiment is appli-