

Introduction

Generation X gained fame simply by following the Baby-Boom generation onto the stage of youth decades ago, a stage Boomers created and made the center of the nation's attention. Generation X was everything Boomers were not—small in number, cynical rather than idealistic, they were expected to make their way easily through life because of the swath Boomers had carved. But it did not turn out that way. Generation Xers have struggled to compete with the masses of Boomers ahead of them and the large Millennial generation that follows at their heels. Perhaps no generation has been hit as hard by the housing crisis as Generation X. Now they face a dismal job market, especially as Boomers postpone retirement. The sixth edition of *Generation X: Americans Born 1965 to 1976* tells the sometimes grim story of the small generation spanning the ages of 32 to 43 in 2009.

Although their numbers are small, lifestyle dictates that Generation X is a vital part of the nation's commerce and culture. People in their thirties and forties are in the crowded-nest lifestyle. They are supposed to be moving up in their careers, their incomes should grow, and their spending should climb because of the expenses of children. *Generation X: Americans Born 1965 to 1976* shows how Gen Xers are coping with these demands and what to expect in the future.

Generation Xers are a diverse segment of the population, with minorities accounting for a large share of the whole. One issue binds together this diversity: cutthroat competition in the job market. While other generations are facing the same issues, getting ahead is proving more difficult for Generation X because they do not have the power of numbers. Only 16 percent of Americans are Gen Xers, while 25 percent are Boomers and another 25 percent are Millennials (see the Population chapter). Perhaps because they are overshadowed by others, Gen Xers are suffering economically. The percentage of men aged 35 to 44 who have worked for their current employer for 10 or more years has plummeted (see the Labor Force chapter). The median income of men aged 35 to 44 is lower today than it was in 1990, after adjusting for inflation (see the Income chapter).

It is not easy to study Generation Xers. Few government surveys focus on the generation, and the ages spanned by the members of the generation make it difficult to tease them out of the government's traditional five- or ten-year age categories. To analyze Gen X lifestyles, then, most of the tables in *Generation X: Americans Born 1965 to 1976* approximate the generation. Single-year-of-age data are shown when they are available, but five-year age groups are most common. When five-year age categories are shown, Gen Xers can be included in the 30-to-34, 35-to-39, and 40-to-44 age groups depending on the year for which data are presented. In a few tables, data are available only for much broader age groups, forcing a more general analysis of trends among the middle aged.

Whether Generation X age groups are exact or approximate, however, the results are clear. Generation Xers are struggling as they search for financial security. *Generation X: Americans Born 1965 to 1976* is your guide to how well they are doing.

How to use this book

Generation X: Americans Born 1965 to 1976 is designed for easy use. It is divided into 11 chapters, organized alphabetically: Attitudes, Education, Health, Housing, Income, Labor Force, Living Arrangements, Population, Spending, Time Use, and Wealth.

The sixth edition of *Generation X* includes the latest data on the changing demographics of homeownership, based on the Census Bureau's 2008 Housing Vacancies and Homeownership Survey. In the Health chapter, you will find up-to-date statistics on health insurance coverage, as well as new data on the use of alternative medicine. The Income chapter, with statistics from the 2008 Current Population Survey, reveals the struggle of so many Americans to stay afloat. *Generation X* presents labor force data for 2008 and includes the government's labor force projections, which show falling labor force participation rates in the age group as the recession took hold. It contains new data on the health of the population, including updated estimates of the overweight and obese. The Census Bureau's latest population projections are also included in the book, and show the imminent decline in the number of 35-to-54-year-olds as the age group shrinks with Generation X. The Wealth chapter presents estimates of household wealth from the Federal Reserve Board's 2007 Survey of Consumer Finances, and reveals the financial status of households just as the housing bubble burst and the recession began. New to this edition is an Attitudes chapter with data from the 2008 General Social Survey that compare and contrast the perspectives of the generations.

Most of the tables in *Generation X* are based on data collected by the federal government, in particular the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the National Center for Education Statistics, the National Center for Health Statistics, and the Federal Reserve Board. The federal government is the best source of up-to-date, reliable information on the changing characteristics of Americans. By having *Generation X* on your bookshelf, you can get the answers to your questions faster than you can online. Even better, visit www.newstrategist.com and download the PDF version of *Generation X*, which includes links to an Excel version of every table in the book, which will enable you to do your own analyses, put together a PowerPoint presentation, etc.

Each chapter of *Generation X* includes the demographic and lifestyle data most important to researchers. Within each chapter, most of the tables are based on data collected by the federal government, but they are not simply reproductions of government spreadsheets—as is the case in many reference books. Instead, each table is individually compiled and created by New Strategist's editors, with calculations designed to reveal the trends. The task of extracting and processing raw data from the government's web sites to create a single table can require hours of effort. New Strategist has done the work for you, each table telling a story about Gen Xers—a story explained by the accompanying text and chart, which analyze the data and highlight future trends. If you need more information than the tables and text provide, you can plumb the original source listed at the bottom of each table.

The book contains a comprehensive table list to help you locate the information you need. For a more detailed search, see the index at the back of the book. Also at the back of the book is the glossary, which defines the terms and describes the many surveys referenced in the tables and text.

With *Generation X: Americans Born 1965 to 1976* on your bookshelf, an in-depth understanding of this influential and struggling generation is at hand.