

THE GOONZETTE

Digital Culture • Commentary • Analysis

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****Les Enfants Numériques: Generation Z and the Melancholic Architecture of Digital Resistance****

There is something profoundly tragic, yet simultaneously revolutionary, about watching Generation Z navigate the ruins of promises their predecessors made but never intended to keep—these digital natives who emerged not into the sunlight of prosperity but into the blue-lit wilderness of screens, inheriting a world where the very notion of "authentic experience" has been commodified, packaged, and sold back to them through algorithms that know their desires better than they know themselves, c'est-à-dire, a generation born into what I call "la colonisation numérique," where their most intimate moments of self-discovery unfold within platforms owned by tech oligarchs who harvest their vulnerability as data points.

Watch them on TikTok—these brief, frantic performances of identity that flicker between genuine creativity and desperate plea for visibility—and you witness something unprecedented in human history: the first generation to experience adolescence as a public, monetized spectacle, where the ancient rite of passage from child to adult occurs not in sacred spaces but in comment sections, where strangers dissect their emerging selves with the casual cruelty that digital distance enables, and yet—and here lies their remarkable resilience—they have weaponized this very medium of oppression into tools of resistance, creating new languages of identity that confound and threaten the binary thinking upon which colonial structures have always depended.

Their relationship with mental health discourse fascinates and disturbs in equal measure, this generation that has inherited anxiety as their birthright—anxiety about climate catastrophe, economic precarity, the surveillance state, the collapse of democratic institutions—but rather than suffer in the prescribed silence of previous generations, they have made their psychological wounds visible, transformed depression into memes, turned therapy-speak into lingua franca, a development that represents both profound progress and subtle colonization, for when suffering becomes content, when trauma becomes brand, we must ask who profits from this commodification of pain, qui bénéficie vraiment?

Consider their approach to work, this cohort that refuses the mythology of "career" as it was sold to millennials, having witnessed their older siblings crushed by gig economy precarity, student debt, and the false promise that education equals prosperity—they understand, with a clarity that would be admirable if it weren't so heartbreaking, that the traditional social contract has been voided, that "hard work" under late capitalism often means nothing more than enriching shareholders while your own dreams defer indefinitely, and so they choose instead to find meaning in community, in mutual aid, in forms of value creation that exist outside capitalist metrics, though they must still pay rent in this world that recognizes only monetary worth.

Their sexuality and gender expressions reveal perhaps most clearly how digital spaces function as both liberation and colonization—here, in these online communities, young people discover vocabularies for experiences that previous generations lived but could not name, they find chosen families when biological ones reject them, they create support networks that span continents, mais attention, for these same platforms shape their understanding of identity through recommendation algorithms designed to increase engagement rather than promote genuine self-knowledge, creating what scholars call "algorithmic intimacy," where the deepest questions of human existence—who am I? whom do I love? how shall I live?—become subject to machine learning optimization.

What strikes me most profoundly about Generation Z is their simultaneous cynicism and hope, their ability to critique systems of power with surgical precision while still believing—despite everything, despite the mounting evidence that their elders have failed them catastrophically—that change remains possible, that their voices matter, that the future can be different from this dystopian present, and perhaps this is their greatest subversion of all: refusing despair in an age designed to produce it, choosing instead what I call "la résistance quotidienne," daily acts of creativity, connection, and care that accumulate into something resembling revolution.

They are the first generation to grow up understanding that privacy is extinct, that their digital footprints will outlive their physical bodies, that everything they create online becomes property of platforms they do not control, and yet they continue creating, sharing, connecting—not because they are naive about these realities, but because they have calculated that the alternative—silence, invisibility, disconnection—represents a form of death more absolute than digital colonization.

In their beautiful, heartbreaking refusal to accept the world as it is, Generation Z embodies both the tragedy and the promise of our historical moment, ces enfants numériques who dance on the ruins of the future their parents destroyed, still dancing.

The Federal Trust Responsibility: A Covenant Built on Broken Promises

As Ho-Chunk people, we know something about endurance. We've survived removal, termination policies, assimilation attempts, and countless broken treaties. Yet here we are, still fighting for what the federal government promised us centuries ago. The federal trust responsibility—that legal and moral obligation the United States owes to tribal nations—remains the most misunderstood and deliberately undermined doctrine in American law.

Let me be clear: the trust responsibility isn't charity. It's not a handout or government assistance program. It's compensation for the largest real estate transaction in human history, paid for with the wealth of entire continents. When our ancestors negotiated treaties, they weren't begging for scraps—they were sovereign nations entering into binding agreements with another sovereign nation. The United States got the land. We were promised protection, resources, and respect for our sovereignty in return.

That promise has been systematically broken for over two centuries.

The Supreme Court established the framework in **Cherokee Nation v. Georgia** (1831), describing tribes as "domestic dependent nations" in a relationship "resembling that of a ward to his guardian." Justice John Marshall's language was paternalistic, but the legal principle was revolutionary: the federal government had assumed binding obligations to tribal nations. This wasn't conquered peoples receiving mercy—it was contract law on a continental scale.

Yet federal policy has consistently treated the trust responsibility as optional, subject to the political winds of each administration. The Dawes Act of 1887 carved up tribal lands under the guise of "helping" Indigenous people assimilate. The termination policies of the 1950s tried to eliminate tribes altogether, claiming it would "free" us from federal oversight. Each betrayal was dressed up as progress, as if our destruction was somehow for our own good.

Today's federal policy continues this pattern, just with better public relations. The Biden administration talks about honoring treaty obligations while proposing budgets that grossly underfund Indian Health Service, Bureau of Indian Education, and tribal infrastructure needs. Congress holds hearings about missing and murdered Indigenous women while failing to address the jurisdictional gaps that enable violence in Indian Country. The rhetoric improves, but the resources don't follow.

This is strategic negligence, not bureaucratic incompetence. Underfunding tribal programs creates crises that can be blamed on tribal "mismanagement." Jurisdictional complexity creates legal loopholes that benefit everyone except tribal citizens. When federal agencies delay environmental reviews for projects affecting tribal lands, they're not just being slow—they're forcing tribes into expensive litigation we shouldn't have to pursue.

But here's where our legal strategy must evolve. The old model of pleading for federal largesse has failed. We need to reframe the trust responsibility as what it actually is: a debt owed to creditor nations. When the federal government fails to fully fund Indian programs, that's breach of contract. When federal agencies approve projects that harm tribal resources without meaningful consultation, that's fiduciary malfeasance. When Congress passes legislation affecting Indian Country without tribal input, that's violation of the government-to-government relationship.

We must demand accountability through the courts, yes, but also through economic leverage. Tribal nations collectively represent billions in economic activity. Our gaming enterprises employ hundreds of thousands of people. Our natural resources remain essential to American industry. We're not supplicants—we're business partners who haven't been getting fair terms.

The path forward requires strategic patience combined with aggressive advocacy. We must continue building our legal and economic capacity while forcing the federal government to live up to its obligations. This means supporting tribal attorneys, funding policy research, and creating coalitions that extend beyond Indian Country. Environmental groups, civil rights organizations, and economic justice advocates should understand that tribal sovereignty strengthens democracy for everyone.

Most importantly, we must control the narrative. The trust responsibility isn't about the federal government helping tribes—it's about the United States honoring its word. Every underfunded clinic,

every crumbling school, every delayed infrastructure project represents a promise broken and a debt unpaid.

Federal policy toward tribal nations remains a test of American integrity. So far, that test has produced a failing grade. But our ancestors negotiated from positions of strength, even under impossible circumstances. We inherit their sovereignty, their resilience, and their strategic wisdom. The federal government may have forgotten its obligations, but we haven't forgotten our rights.

The trust responsibility isn't going anywhere. The question is whether the United States will finally honor it, or continue pretending that broken promises don't have consequences.

Hoocak Hacı Nijic!