

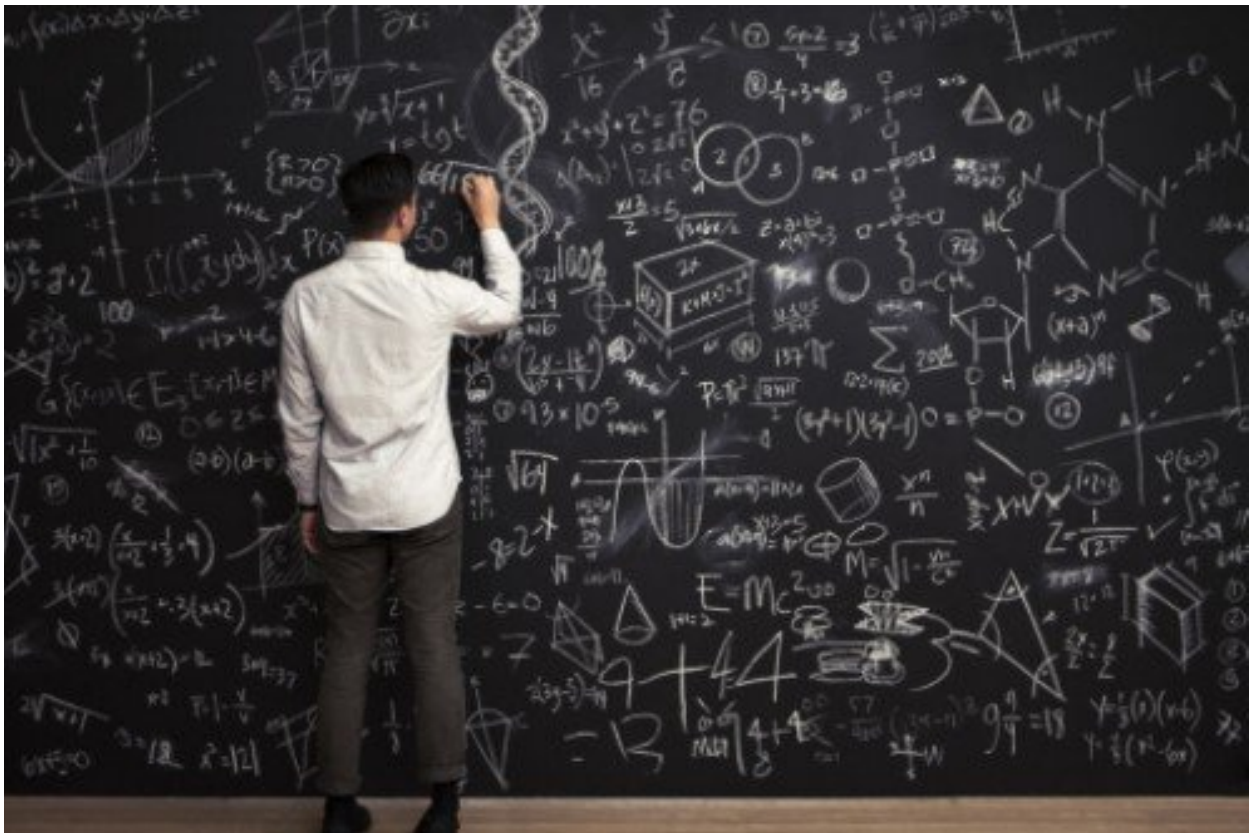
# Solving for X: How 10 Events Shaped a Generation

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Some people worried that the nickname 'Generation X' might depress or hinder those of us born between 1965-1979. They debated over whether the X meant Hopelessly Generic or if it meant The Unknown.

Our response? "Look at how everyone's talking about us!" And Generation X--that was Billy Idol's first band. As any Xer can tell you, Billy Idol's all right by us.

That generation is now between the ages of 34-47, old enough to give a report card to our schools, our

adults we became? Which events made us the way we are?



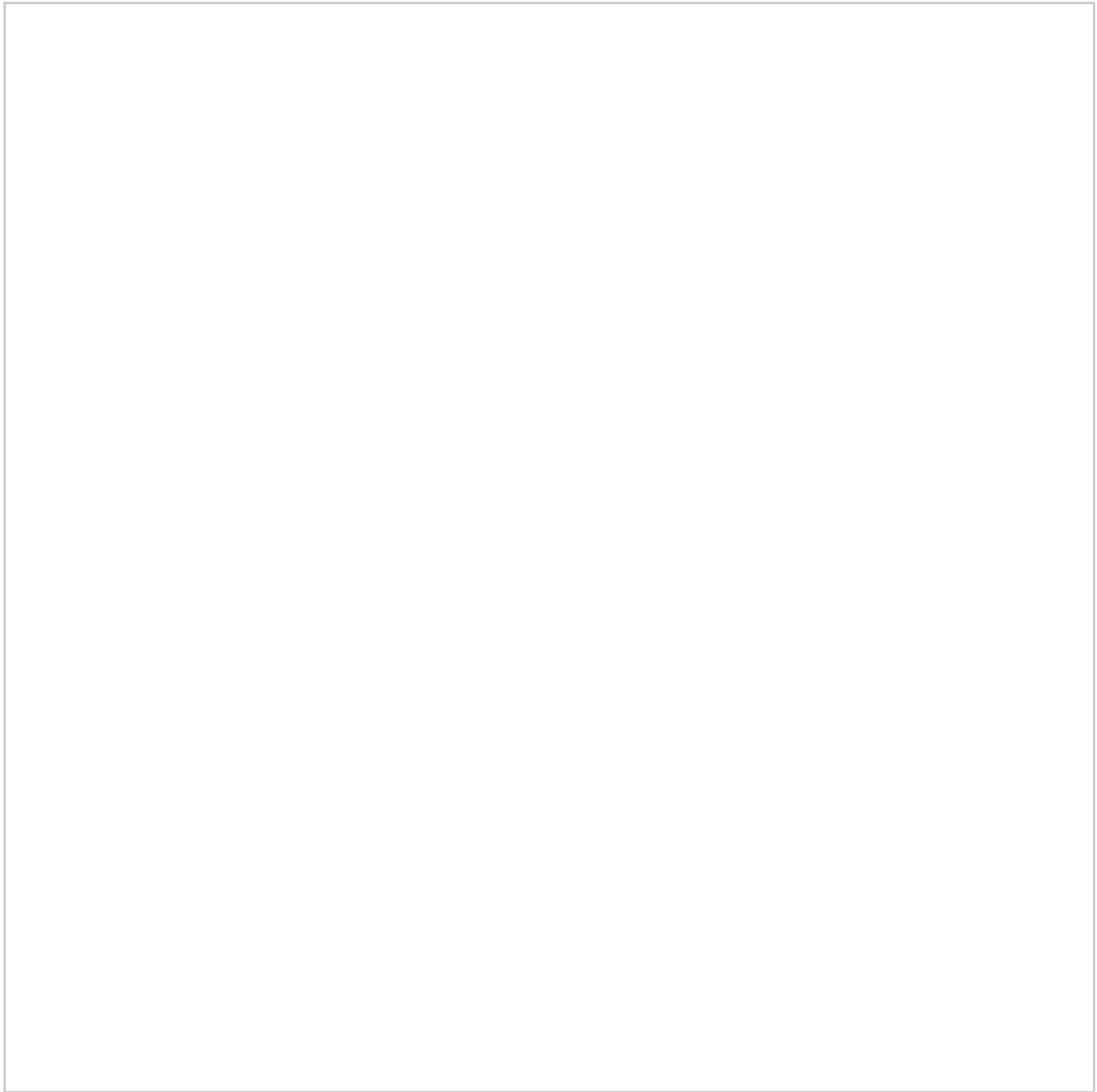
### **Vietnam 1965-1973**

American involvement in Vietnam's civil war lasted eight years and would prove to be the first time our troops had lost a war. Divided and diminishing support for the methods and motives of our troops resulted in an absence of a Homeland for soldiers still overseas and for those returning home.

An American public already frustrated with the length of the war (much of which was broadcast in graphic detail on the nightly news) questioned whether our country's primary interest was simply one of financial gain. Returning troops found it difficult to cope with the negative, often hostile reactions they received upon returning home.

American troops were completely pulled out by 1973 (after 58,000 American deaths and over 10,000 listed as Missing In Action) largely due to frequent and well attended anti-war protests.

In these, the early years of Generation X, we were watchers and listeners. In arguments across dinner tables, in songs played on the radio, in clever slogans chanted by protesters, we learned Americans didn't trust our government to do the right thing.



### **Sesame Street 1969**

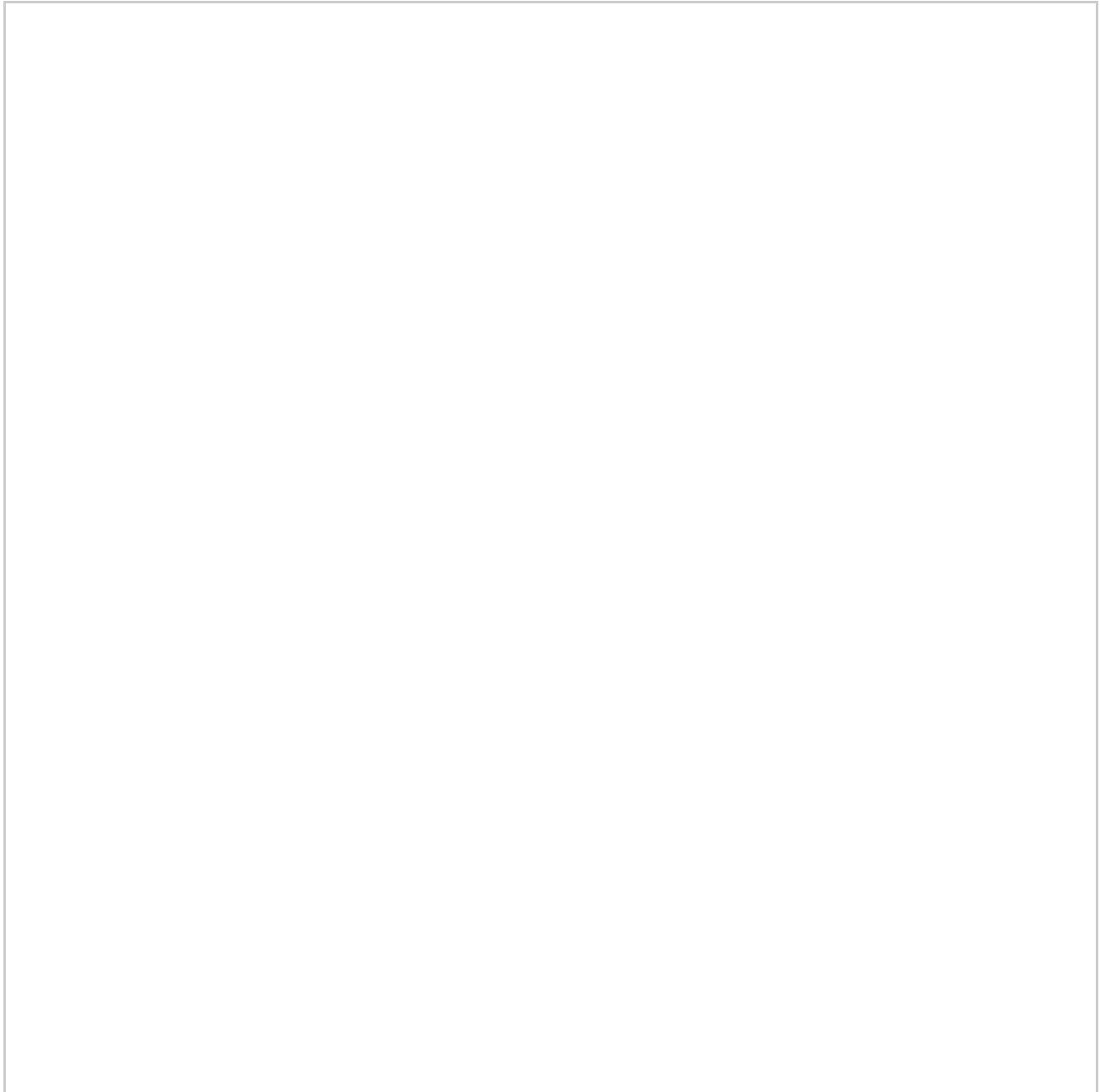
Generation X was the first generation to attend fully integrated schools from kindergarten onward. This no longer seemed to be unusual, as no matter where we lived, we'd been familiar with a multicultural environment on a daily basis, as seen on our TV sets. Some of our favorite friends were blue. Or green. And one of them was a six foot tall yellow bird.

Sesame Street premiered in 1969. On this strangely hip television show with its A-list of guest stars and muppet versions of social satire, kids learned about relationships, ethics, emotions and resolving conflict.

neighborhood" could be of mixed ages, races and cultures, and that everyone was equally important.

A 1996 survey found that 95% of all American preschoolers had seen the show by the time they were three years old. In 2008 it was estimated that 77 million Americans had watched the show on television. Still on the air today, it is a unique Gen X joy to share the show with our own children.

In 2012 Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney learned threatening to cut funding for PBS and "fire Big Bird" was a fight no wise politician would pick. Big Bird is ours and he stays.



it she would become known as Jane Roe and her case, Roe Vs Wade, resulted in a 1973 ruling that abortion was a fundamental right under the U.S. Constitution and that during the first trimester of pregnancy the decision should be left solely up to the woman and her physician.

This ruling divided a nation (both then and now) into two distinct camps: Pro Life and Pro Choice, with each side tending to have an all or nothing approach, unwilling to compromise lest their side lose everything.

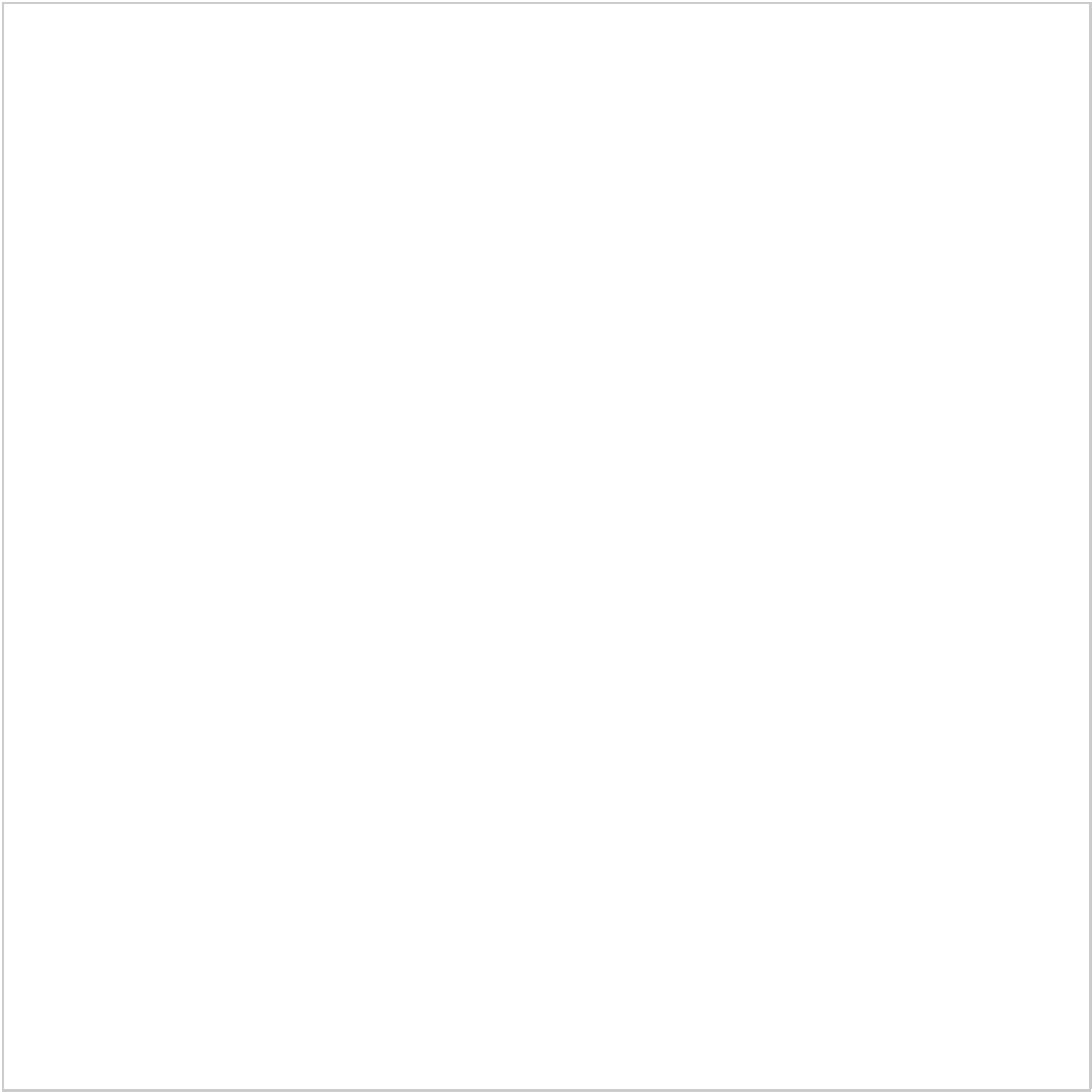
Much of the ongoing debate has focused on the question of exactly when an unborn child is considered to have viable life. This question has become harder to answer as medical advances have now made it possible for doctors to deliver a baby in the 24th week of pregnancy with 50% of those newborns thriving into a normal childhood.

Gen Xers have come of age in an era when the slogan CHOOSE LIFE could be seen on t-shirts, on the sides of buses and on billboards which often featured photos of fetuses. Babies already born could be seen advertising the political beliefs of their parents: some onesies read MY MOMMY CHOSE LIFE while others bore the slogan I WAS A CHOICE. Both Pro Life and Pro Choice demonstrators often brought their children along, many of whom were too young to read the signs they were holding. In some cases, opposition to abortion has resulted in violence: since 1974 there have been over 300 attacks of extreme violence (including arsons, bombings and murder) directed at abortion providers in the U.S.

Gen Xers have been inundated with the message that we must pick a side and actively and permanently campaign for or against it. Abortion is one of the many areas in which we have strong opinions and candidates can win or lose our votes by their position on this issue.

So how do we feel about Roe Vs Wade? According to a May 2012 Gallup poll, 51% of Gen Xers feel abortion is "morally wrong" but 52% feel it should remain legal.

As people on both sides of this issue remind us (pretty much every chance they get), those numbers could change any day.



## **Watergate 1974**

In 1974 Richard Nixon, facing impeachment charges involving obstruction of justice, resigned the presidency, becoming the first president ever to do so. Incorrectly believing the president was above the law, Nixon had used a variety of colorful methods to keep tabs on personal enemies and recorded numerous conversations about his activities. When told to turn these tapes over to the Justice Department, he refused, then delayed, then turned over only some, claiming the others had been burned or accidentally erased. 43 high ranking members of his staff received prison sentences for their involvement and Nixon

the words *crook president* and *liar* all in the same sentence. The adults we knew seemed to regard Nixon as a somewhat comic figure and Watergate to be a type of game.

We were confused at the way our parents could blindly overlook John F Kennedy's possible misadventures while seeming to enjoy focusing on Nixon's. Xers, born after the Kennedy era, never knew a time when the public felt love for a president. It is something we have tried but have been unable to imagine.

Because Nixon was our first example, we tend to assume all politicians are somewhat dishonest and vary only in which things they're dishonest about. Because we start off with this theory, we're less surprised when we read about the latest scandal. In many ways we have embraced the Nixon era slogan: Old crooks exit that way, New crooks enter this way.





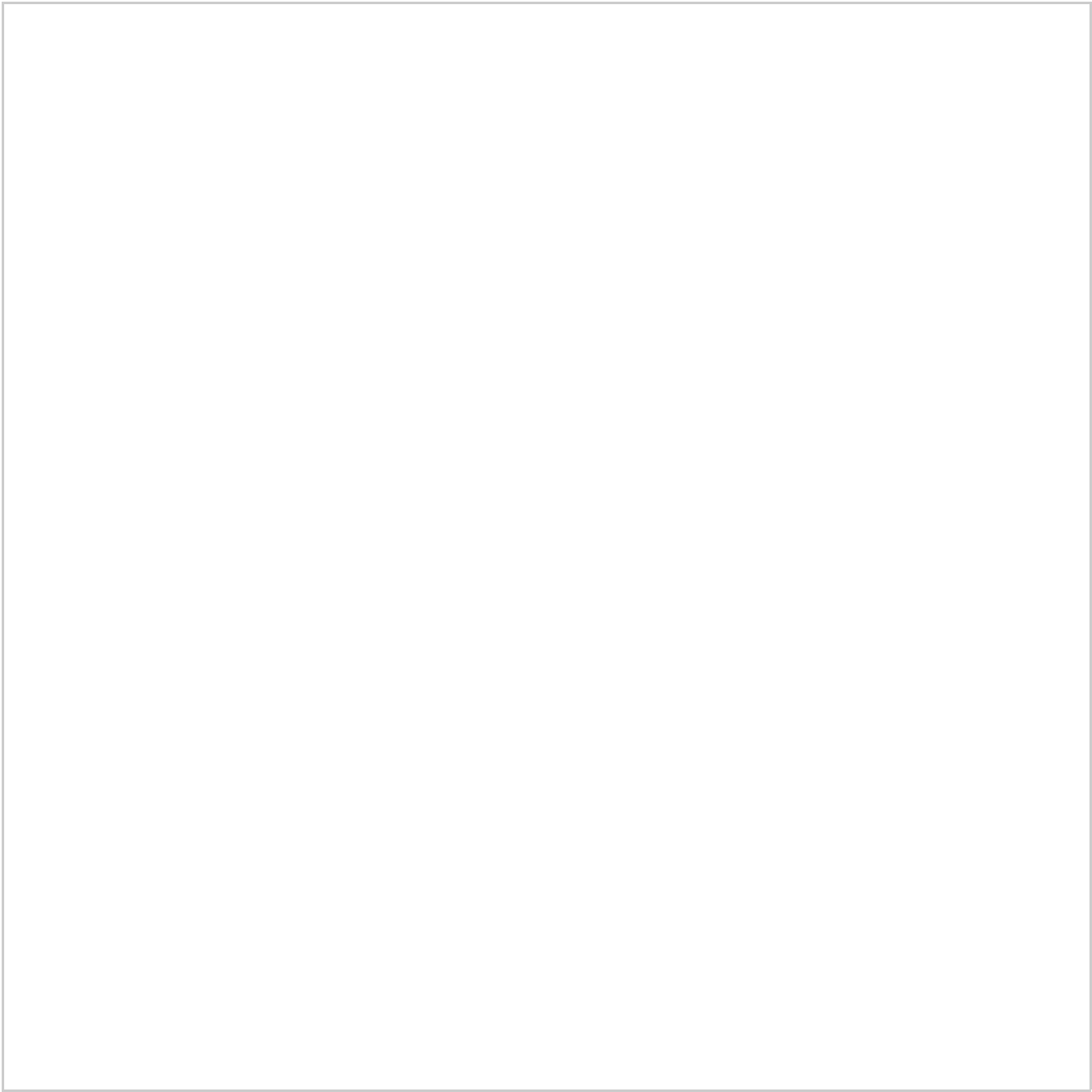
## Latchkey Kids 1970s

Before we were known as Generation X many people referred to us as Latchkey Kids. The nickname came from the housekey so many kids wore on a chain due to being home alone for part of each day, either due to both parents working or because they lived in a single parent home due to the high divorce rates of the 1970s.

Much debate has gone into why Gen Xers, a group hit especially hard by current economic woes are considered to be more content than our generational siblings, the Baby Boomers. Xers have accepted the fact that economically (right now and maybe also in the future) we can expect to have less. We value time and make decisions about work and family based on our personal priorities without feeling the need to compare ourselves to others.

Many Xers, raised in families where children were regarded as lesser members, have as parents adopted the Helicopter parenting style, always hovering and watchful. The entire family schedule often revolves around the child's extracurricular activities in a manner our own parents would not have tolerated, even if they'd been able to imagine such a thing. In regard to competition (athletic, scholastic, or any other kind) we tend to praise effort rather than result. When speaking to our children we are mindful of tone and word choice so as not to damage their self esteem.

It's possible, as so many Xers will tell you, this overscheduling and careful monitoring is necessary. It's also possible we do this to compensate for the nurturing we still wish we'd gotten ourselves.



**As of December 2013, 36 million people have died of AIDS**

### **AIDS Epidemic 1980s**

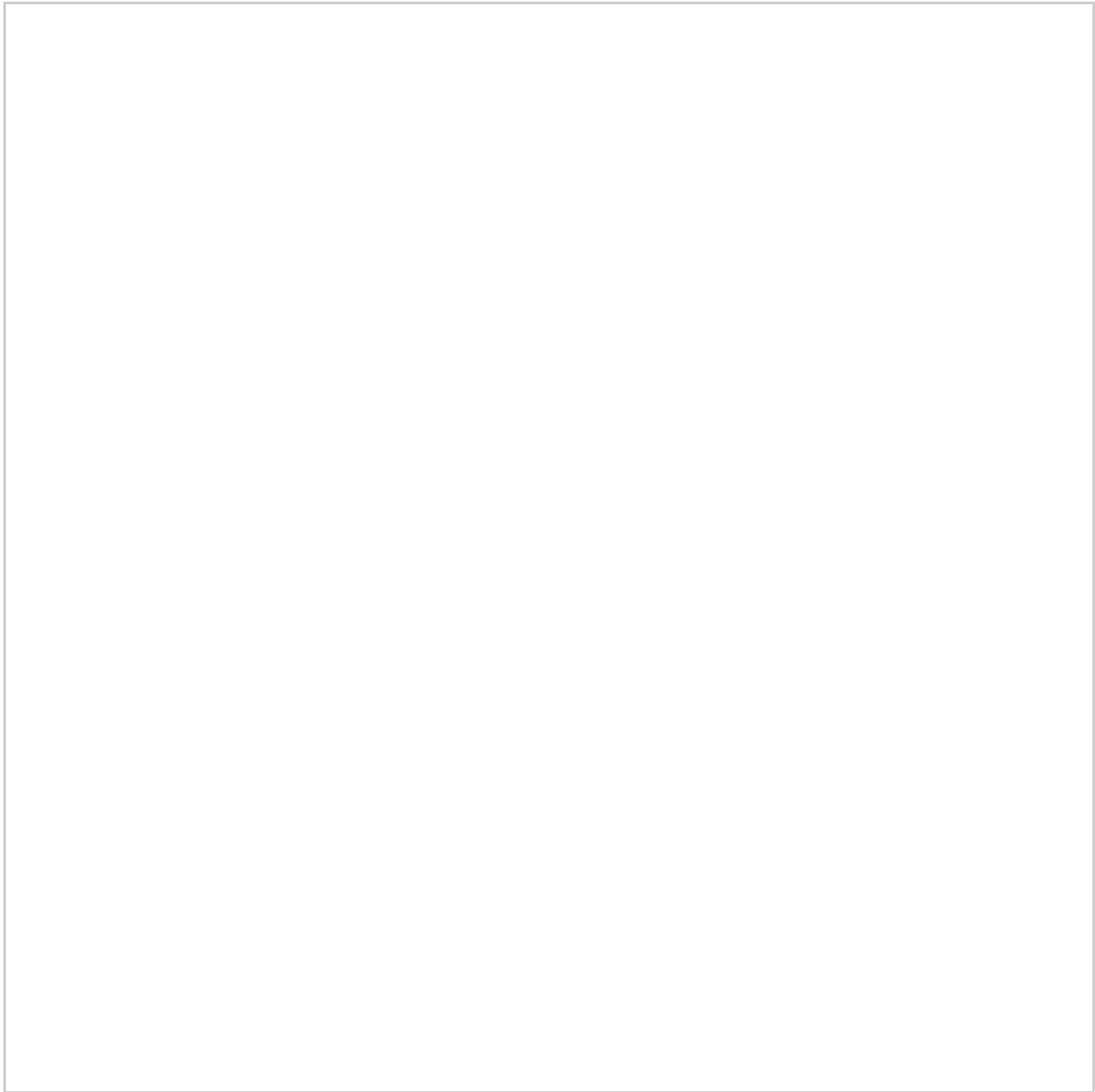
AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) was a disease spread by blood and bodily fluids which quickly reached epidemic levels in the 1980s. The shifting antigen virus HIV weakened the immune system, resulting in Karposi's Sarcoma or Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia, both of which led to death, usually

disease and because method of transmission was at first unknown sufferers were treated as pariahs. Latent (or, in some cases, overt) homophobia in America resulted in harassment aimed at gay men and members of some religious groups tried to find loopholes in their Bibles to justify blaming victims for the disease. Headway on the epidemic was made only when accurate information, funding and compassion were combined.

The epidemic led to a new openness in discussing sexual terms and one's own sexual history. It also led to civil rights protections for people regardless of their sexual preferences.

Gen Xers observed many otherwise intelligent role models displaying prejudice and a lack of basic empathy at a time when we were becoming young adults ourselves and deciding what kind of adults we wanted to be. We listened for, but did not hear, our president, Ronald Reagan, mention the AIDS epidemic or even say the word AIDS out loud until 1986 when over 20,000 Americans had died from it. We saw photos, published worldwide, of a gloveless Diana, Princess of Wales, holding the hands of AIDS victims and giving them embraces many others still feared to give.

Ultimately Gen Xers came to the conclusion that AIDS was no more or less than a disease that was killing people.



### **Madonna 1984**

Parents already concerned about sex education in schools hadn't seen anything yet. In 1984 a young woman from Detroit named Madonna appeared on American Bandstand and informed Dick Clark she planned "to rule the world".

Madonna doesn't make this list because of the number of albums she sold (200 million), movies she made (21), explicit coffee table books she created (one) or fashion trends she influenced (numerous). She doesn't make this list because she was the first singer to do full choreography while she sang or because

Although it should be noted, she did all of those things.

Madonna's most significant impact on Generation X was this: she suggested to a generation of young women that their sexuality wasn't something to hide but something to celebrate and something to use strategically to achieve personal power and fulfillment.

### **Rodney King 1991**

Just after midnight on March 3, 1991, George Holliday grabbed his Sony camcorder and filmed a group

fractured facial bone. Audible on Holliday's tape are the officers yelling racial slurs at King as they beat him with their billyclubs.

Holliday gave his video to KTCA TV and people all over the world watched what looked to be excessive use of force based on race. Many members of the African American community maintained blacks in America had long been victims of a separate set of rules regarding police and that the King video finally showed this to Americans of all colors.

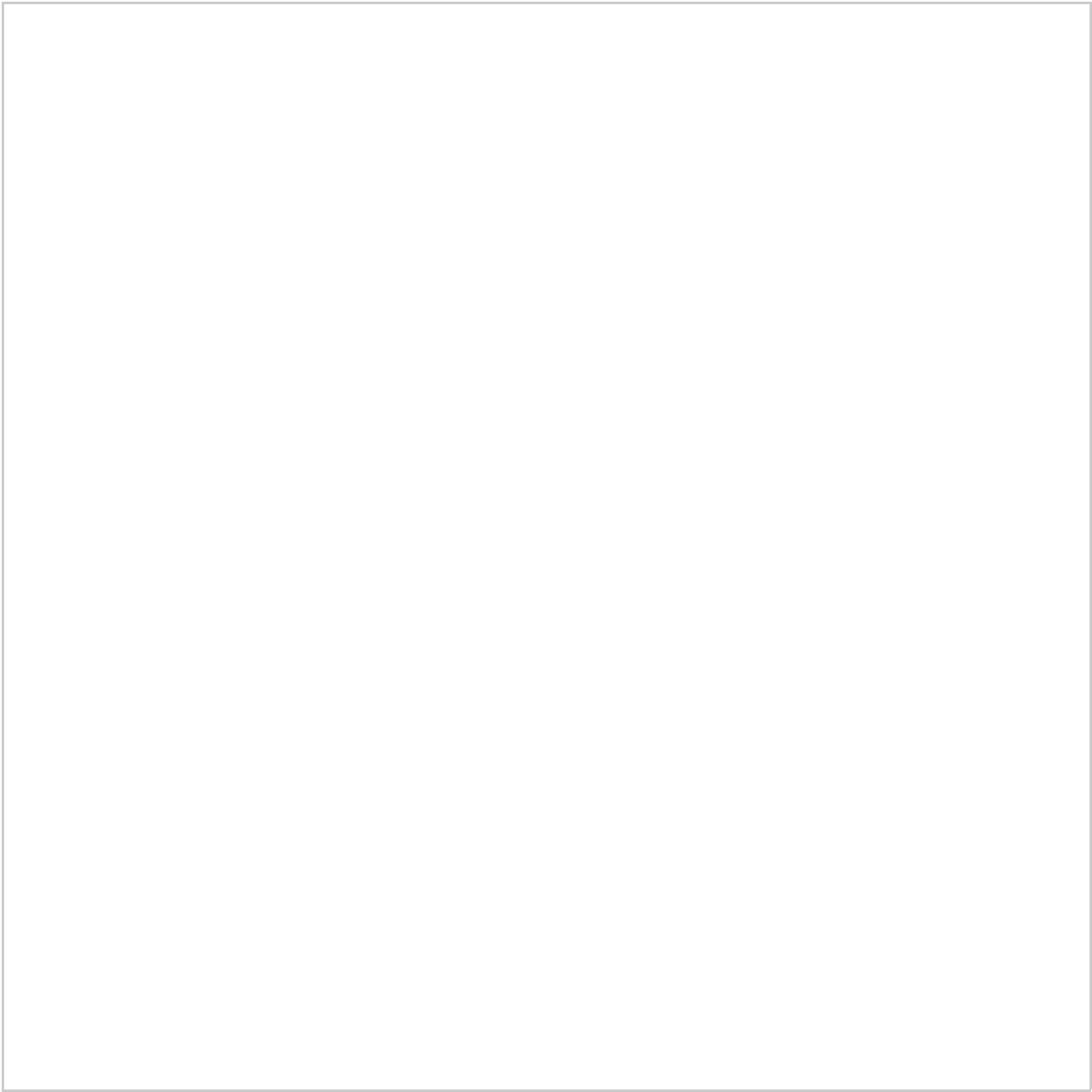
The four officers of the group who had participated in the beating were charged with assault with a deadly weapon and use of excessive force. Three of the four officers were acquitted of all charges. This verdict set off riots in several major American cities and focused mainly in L.A. where rioting resulted in 53 deaths, 2,383 injuries, 7,000 fires and damaged 3,100 businesses, costing 1 billion in financial losses.

In an effort to end the rioting it was a visibly injured and limping Rodney King himself who issued a plea to the public: "Can't we all just get along?"

President George H. W. Bush stated "...it was hard to understand how the verdict could possibly square with the video. Those civil rights leaders with whom I met were stunned. And so was I and so was Barbara and so were my kids."

The case was then re-tried by a Federal grand jury. Two of the four officers were sentenced to 32 months in prison and King was awarded 3.8 million dollars in damages.

The Rodney King case showed an already authority-wary Generation X that institutions such as the police department and the justice system could not always be relied upon. The video showed us that race could result in different treatment by authorities nearly three decades after the Civil Rights Movement. What had been seen could not be unseen.





**Number of school shootings in the U.S. since Columbine as of December 2013: 70**

## **Columbine 1999**

By 1999 Gen Xers were still for the most part enjoying an extended adolescence. If any one event forced us to step across the line into adulthood, it was the Columbine High School Massacre.

On April 20, 1999, two profoundly psychologically disturbed high school seniors came to their school wit

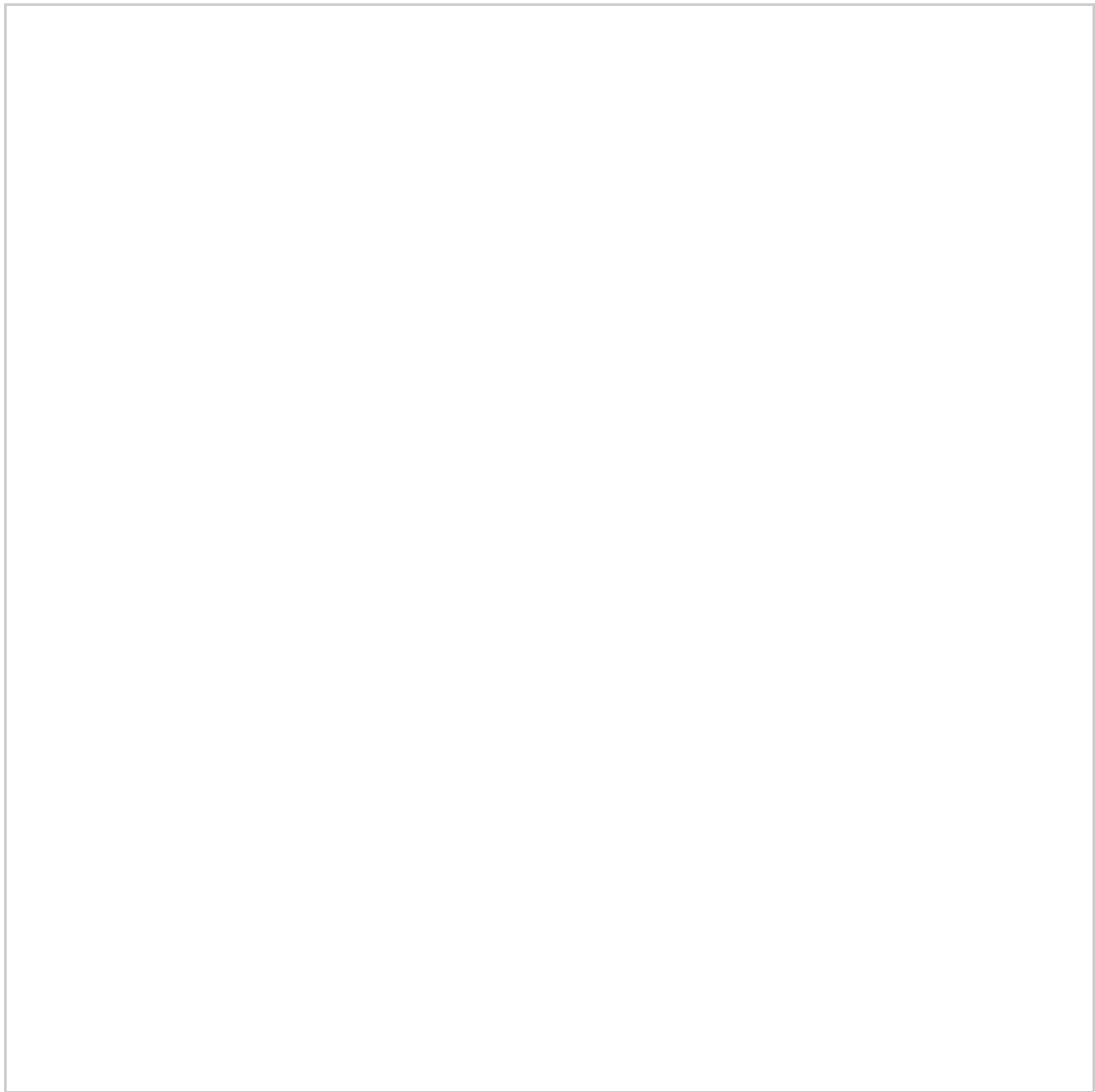
spree that left 12 students and one teacher dead. The seniors, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, had spent the previous year and a half showing red flags of potentially violent behavior and documenting, in homemade videos and on their personal websites, their planned attack on the school. The two boys ended their rampage by killing themselves.

When professionals were unable to get a clear answer as to why the shootings had happened, they could only assume it was an aberration, unlikely to ever happen again.

Xers, still stunned with the idea that a shooting could occur in the sanctity of a school (with a FT armed police officer on campus, no less) were further stunned to hear reports of subsequent shootings across the United States in elementary schools, middle schools, high schools and colleges, all seemingly without motive and with the overwhelming majority committed by a male under the age of 18 who would then turn the gun on himself.

School shootings have raised questions about the seemingly easy availability of guns in the U.S. as well as gaps in the mental health system. It is worth noting, we refer to the perpetrators as shooters because they aren't old enough to be called gunmen.

In the aftermath of the Columbine Massacre, we were left with many unanswered questions including when or if the term 'monster' should ever be applied to a child. In trying to reassure our children that adults make sure schools are safe our greatest challenge may be in having faith ourselves that this is true.



## 9/11

Which brings us to September 11, 2001, and the first terrorist attack on the mainland U.S. which involved our own, hijacked, commercial airliners and which killed 2,753.

It's too soon to tell what affect the 9/11 attacks will have on Generation X. Among Xers statistics show 98% of us remember exactly where we were when we learned of the attacks and 81% of us reported we were profoundly emotionally affected. Interestingly, only 55% of Gen Xers say the 9/11 attacks changed America in any significant way.

multicultural generation than any one that came before us: 22% of us are immigrants and 55% of us believe newcomers to the U.S. make our country stronger. We've adapted to the technology of our time--we are nothing if not adaptable--and know the world is getting smaller every day. We watch our leaders carefully and believe what we can see with our own eyes. We love our children. Over half of the 40 million kids under the age of 18 in the U.S. are being raised by Gen Xers.

As a group, we have hope. Whether because of the events we've seen or despite them, we feel we have reason to hope.