Talking Bout My…

I ran across an innocuous-yet-aggravating-anyway argument on the Twitter machine this week.Say not so! In this instance, a member of one so-called Generation™ took offense at someone from another Gen™ who claimed that theirs was indeed the best of all possible G™s – because look at all the wondrous innovations theirs could claim – while the other G™s were a bunch of wankers due to their inclination to war, racism, laziness, lousy taste in music/film/etc., and other particulars. The exchange was lively, generally pointless, and, as these things do, escalated into name calling of all sorts.

Naturally, because I am a reserved and mature individual – a proud member of Boomer II™ – I waded right in and reasonably informed the lot of these GenXYZ whiners that their claims and counters were all pure bollocks, that the whole idea of individuated G™s was a load of horse pucky contrived by consultant types who wished to sell their keen genius to gullible commercial enterprises who would *leverage* this deep insight in hopes of extracting hard earned cash from downstream marks more credulous than themselves. So grow up, ya damn punks.

Whereupon my hard-earned insight was met with a volley of contumely. Can you imagine? Call me Cassandra.

In one of my earlier incarnations c.1995-2015, I played dress-

up as a marketing savant, the better to bring home the proverbial bacon. This often meant suffering endless presentations on how best to move product by targeting the characteristics of one G™ or another. A shapeshifting farrago of bullshit spun from a few malleable observations, the knowledge gleaned is of a piece with clickbait listicles and articles that purport to tell us how *WE* feel about some prevailing trend/crisis/fad, and the seven weird tricks we can use to get rich/find love/forestall death/&c.I saw a teaser this week for 7 tricks that will help me “avoid death.” Color me dubious.

Imagine the scene: One or more (tag team presentations were the rage for a while, until these fell from favor in response to the keen realization that one dancing bear was cheaper than two) experts would offer compelling arguments as to which G™ we should be paying attention in that moment, and how we might *craft our message* to best emphasize our sincerity to whichever G™ held the greatest cash extraction potential at any given moment. Here we were assured that Cohort A responds to such and such, while Cohort B is completely different, except for those ways in which they are exactly the same, and that the most important thing to remember is the critical importance of *authenticity* in our efforts to ensure this or that G™ that our product/organization most truly reflects the *closely held values* that are paramount to whichever G™ (or G™s) we sincerely aim to convince.

My memory is rife with garrulous women (almost always women) bedecked in shoulder padded blazers and decorative scarves, punctuating their exhortations with an array of dynamic hand gestures and zesty half-turns of their upper torso.The better to emulate a billboard for realtors and chiropractors, reckon.

Who wants to succeed TODAY?

Naturally, I was eager to report back to my superiors the critical intel I had derived on the company dime, the better to justify my ongoing existence in the corporate ecosystem. I catalyzed a broad range of strategic initiatives to instantiate and effectuate win-win scenarios to actualize upsides to all inspirited parties. Many a noun was verbed in this bedazzling display of communicational derring-do.

At root, Gen™ discussions inevitably assert a we/they formation: “They” are like this, or “We” are some such way. It asserts a claim – often, an accusation – based upon broad generalization, not unlike “Blacks are like” or “soccer moms are like” or “Lithuanian hockey players are like”. Suffice to say that any message that leans on such tired generalizations is safely disregarded. At best, it is a transparent blandishment to detach you from your money. At worst, it is supplemental fuel for the slice/dice alienation machine that dominates modern discourse.

This categorization is typical.

Generation

Gen Z

Millennials

Gen X

Boomers II

Boomers I

Post War

WWII (The Greatest)

Born

1997 – 2012

1981 – 1996

1965 – 1980

1955 – 1964

1946 – 1954

1928 – 1945

1922 – 1927

Current Age

10 – 25

26 – 41

42 – 57

58 – 67

68 – 76

77 – 94

95 – 100

If nothing else, the notion that groups spanning 15 years in age (Gens X, Millennial, and Z) share meaningful commonality is transparent poppycock. It is silly to suggest that a Gen X born in the late 60s has more in common with one birthed in 1980 than with an early-60s Boomer baby. Or that a Millennial born in 1995 is more akin to one sprung in 1981 than with a Gen Z popped out in 1999. Despite the boatloads of survey metrics and sales figures and so on, conferring personality traits on a vast population based on date of birth is nothing more than another flavor of astrology, based on year rather than month, propped up by whatever anecdata are at hand that can be twisted to satisfy an ordained outcome.

I find it interesting that the so-called Greatest Generation spans a slim five years, a timeframe that might provide some useful insight but complicates the life of the erstwhile marketing slick in search of the most commercially motivating least common denominator.

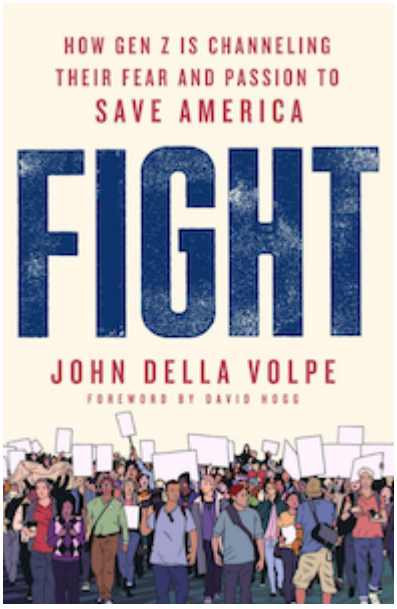
I was surprised to discover that the Boomer cohort has been split into Boomer I and Boomer II aggregations, the original 18 year span clearly too broad to explain anything. Alas, the 17-year PostWar group has not been afforded such fine grained definition, likely because i) population dwindling and ii) that cohort has never been seen as ripe for plucking as the Boomer-and-beyond crowds. Well, until Fox News came along, anyway.

Perhaps it is the inevitable dwindling of the first Boomers that led the market-minded savants to split the target

audience. Whereas early Boomers are now the prime demographic for things like Hoverround scooters, reverse mortgages, and over-heated conservative rage monkeys, the late Boomers are seen as both flush and determined to buy ALL the toys, while also spending freely on pharmaceuticals big and small to forestall the inevitable dwindling that stands in wait. (Or so the profiles would lead us to believe.) Oh, yeah. Big on the rage monkeys, too.

Boomer II has also been dubbed Generation Jones, another gambit by marketing sharps to turn a buck You can buy the book or hire the firm of that name to help you *fashion your strategies*, as they say.; and a handy hook for pundits on deadline to hang 800 words about not much. Generational astrology places me squarely in the middle of Gen Jones, which suggests I don't much care for the Beatles, resent the Boomer I gang because I missed all the free love, and other such simplifications. (And yes, I aver that my depiction is itself an over-simplification of a much more nuanced and textured exegesis of bovine offal.)

Despite the popularity of "OK Boomer" memes, it appears at long last that us Boomers are no longer the generation most responsible for that gigantic shit show 2022 represents. Nope. The worm has turned. It's those lousy Gen X and Millennial slackers are the ones to blame. If things are to improve, it is up to those stalwart Gen Z warriors to save the day.



Another sharp with a book

In a recent column at LitHub titled “Can Generation Z Save America? (And Should They Have To?)“, this author demonstrates in a few hundred words the depth of this charade.

Should they have to? Should any generation bear responsibility for leaving the world in better condition than they inherited it? And is “saving America” really the most important problem facing the world anyway?

Then there is this trenchant insight.

> *The oldest Zoomers…are old enough to have voted for or against Donald Trump in two presidential elections.*
>
> *Della Volpe, LitHub, 1/20/22*

Golly. They are beginning to vote! That changes everything!

Sure, the majority of this cohort voted against the most abjectly unfit candidate this nation has ever seen. Gen Zers are on the whole more progressive than not, but not monolithically so; this is standard for any so-called “youth cohort” going back at least to the 60s. The “youth of today” is always going to upend the gameboard within the next election or three, you just wait. It just never seems to come

about, and soon enough your Gen™ is the target of the next generation's ire and resentment.

The other Gen Zers, fully on board with marching authoritarianism, are not going away; if history is guide, their number will swell over time as the betrayals of becoming an adult under resoundingly inhumane social arrangements take their toll. As to the presumed permanence of Gen Z progressivism, I point to the legions of my cohort who peddled Revolutionary Worker tracts in the late-70s-early 80s, who marched against nuclear proliferation and the extremes of the criminal Reagan administration, and who are now as likely to be MAGAbots as anything.

The old Churchillian canardNot really one of Winstons's bon mots, but rather that of an obscure 19th century French academic, Anselme Polycarpe Batbie. of 'If You Are Not a Liberal When You Are Young, You Have No Heart, and If You Are Not a Conservative When Old, You Have No Brain' is oft wielded, typically by those wishing to justify abandoning the generosity of their youth in favor of blinkered self-interest. People in this society tend to grow more conservative as they get older. This is not inevitable to human nature; more likely it is a process of fear and retrenchment as time plods on and the hopefulness of youth gives way to the crushing reality of surviving late-stage capitalism.

No matter where one finds oneself on the trajectory of time's arrow, there is and always has been a generation gap and two extremese of attitude towards the younger generation. It's either "damn kids these days" or "the kids are alright". My own view is that the young upstarts are damned fine, as fine a group of humans as you could ever hope to meet. At the same time, I recognize that a huge percentage of Gen Z is damaged, tormented, filled with self-doubt/loathing as many of my time were, with a considerable portion of rabid authoritarians, fascists, and neo-Nazis. In other words, not at all different

now than any time since the U.S. became an imperial power.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

From the agonies of the Depression and the sacrifices of WWII, to the soul-crushing conformity of the post-war era and the social upheavals of the 60s and 70s. From the specter of nuclear holocaust to the resurgence of purely corporatist governance around the globe, environmental decline, climate change, and so on. Feudal serfdom, Black Death, Christian Crusades and Inquisitions, rampant disease, starvation, gruesome wars, &c. Things have been Fucked Up and Shit (FUAS™) for as far back as we can see.

But it seems that every generation must see their own struggles as *sui generis*, as somehow worse than it ever has been before in the history of forever. In this, they are correct. And also wrong and missing the point.

The struggle has been real for as long as time is recorded.

History is a catalog of FUAS™, with a broad exemption for the select few throughout history who lord it over the masses. The ability of the select to maintain their status has always rested upon an arsenal of carrots, carefully bestowed to instill ambition among the lessers, and sticks, indiscriminately wielded to instill fear among same. But the greatest weapon the top dogs have is the ability to create divisions among the mass of people whose core interests diverge sharply from the swells and overlap almost completely with each other. Dividing the underclass into subsets, and then turning them one upon the other, loads the hard work of maintaining an empire on those upon whom the empire lies heavy.

Check the subtitle of that LitHub article. "John Della Volpe Wonders If Demography Can Save Democracy" is a forehead slapper typical of the genre.

No. The answer is no. Just. Fucking. No.

Demography has no agency, no collective will. It is mere counting and sorting, a chimera propped up by statistical and anecdotal evidence of questionable utility. But sure, let's set an impossible expectation and divert the polity from recognizing that, if democracy is to be saved, it will require a epic display of communitarian effort and solidarity across all ages, genders, races, and classes. "Let those kids handle it" won't cut it, just like we can't count on Black women to save us, or The Squad, or Bernie, or or or….It is up to all of us.

Generational definitions are manipulations, several among many that get repeated enough to become 'common sense'. These flatteries, designed to appeal to base emotion, are fundamentally tools for moving widgets. But they also serve a more pernicious purpose as part of the rampant flattening of citizenship and community.

Too many of us appear desperate to be told who and what we are, eager to accept the kind of labeling nonsense that the Gen™ hucksters serve up in shiny packaging. But we also see it elsewhere: in party affiliation or devotion to one or another sportsball (game or team). In our identification with one religion over another, and the antagonisms that arise even (especially) when the differences are so slight. Vax and anti-vax. Regional identification and prejudice. Stones or Beatles. Paul or John? There is not end; the quark will never be found.

The impulse to belong to one tribe or another may be the most dangerous infection we face today, and unlike COVID there is no vaccine. The slice and dice machinery is uncanny in its ability to ferret out fissures. It makes us all less appreciative of both the individual differences that make each member of any tribe unique, but to the actual, meaningful commonalities we share within and without our alleged tribe. This reliance on conferred identity flattens, makes us

numbingly similar under the guise of superficial difference. And comfortable in our received identity, we begin to see significant cultural variations as threats to be defended against. And here lies the real danger, as fear turns to aggression and of fantasies of dominance and purity.

Writer Ted Gioia is best known for his music criticism and histories. (His *Music: A Subversive History* is a real banger for anyone interested in the social. Highly recommended.) But on his blog, *The Honest Broker*, he often branches off into other realms. Today, as I was struggling to wrap this essay, he published a piece about philosopher Byung-Chul Han that included this observation:

> *"It was once fashionable to opt out from the groupthink and reconstruct your own life in a free-spirited or even openly dissident way. But the groups and power brokers have gotten less tolerant of dissent nowadays, and it's harder to find a space for self-invention outside their purview."*
>
> *Ted Gioia, The Honest Broker, 1/24/22*

I cannot fully agree. The 'groups and power brokers' have never been particularly fond of self-invention beyond narrowly prescribed guardrails. Self-invention and self-realization are threats to the prevailing order, and the machinery in place to set the seal on bland conformity is relentlessly efficient. And pretty much anything that feels transgressive in one generation (long hair, tattoos, rainbow hair coloring, clothes made of U.S. flags) will be quickly flattened into yet another commodity that trades its signification as rebellion for that of consumer obediance.

At root, this is my objection to the Gen™ industry's role in a broader campaign to determine who we are so we don't have to put in the effort. It is a mechanism of the Great Flattening machine – an array of large and small instruments ranging

across political parties, bread and circus sport extravaganzas, music streaming algorithms, blockbuster movie hegemony, Wordle, TikTok influencers, &c. – that aims to turn us into reliable and docile consumer drones.

When we all do and like the same things, this slouching beast declares, we will all be happy.

Then we can all fall in line for authoritarian rule, because at least the trains will run on time while we all watch the Super Marvel Universe Bowl together.

_____

DISCLOSURE: If you click on a book recommendation here it will take you to the Indiebound website where you can purchase the book from your favorite independent bookseller. I2B will get a slim cut of the action if you buy when you click over from this site, and it is better for the author and the bookstore, too. And it's way better than sending your money to Bezos.

The Further Adventures of Stanwyck – Your Necessary Diversion from the Ascension of Il Douche

Hello legions. It’s been a while.

Today marks a transition. Obama to Trump. This is a damnably bitter pill to swallow.

FFS

I barely slept last night. When I did sleep, I dreamt of a three-headed beast terrorizing me and my family. A little too on the nose, really.

Whaddyagonnado?

Here’s a mild palliative, a little something something that might amuse you. Bitter Southerner ran my piece about the Art Basel Miami Beach fair last Tuesday. It was nicely received, with a fair amount of enthusiasm about my trusty sidekick, Stanwyck. (If you haven’t read it yet, go ahead on: you have even more good fun to distract you from reality.)

Here’s an outtake, a part of the tale that did not make the final cut. Consider it lagniappe. Hope it makes today’s harsh medicine easier to take.

The All American Event Attenders

At the lower end of Ocean Drive are hordes of easily recognizable rubes from away – like me! – prime targets for aggressive shillery. Smart people walk down the beach side of Ocean Drive relatively unmolested, but the landward sidewalk is a treacherous gauntlet of garish sidewalk cafes, each with its own bass-heavy soundtrack, volume set to stun, and a stadium’s worth of neon and LED lights programmed to trigger seizures, all the better to help the customer realize how much fun she is or should be having. Employees – buff and exhibitionist – entice innocent wanderers with touts for two-for-one specials and all day happy hours. Thus did I find myself in front of a half-gallon of something that tasted vaguely like after-shave. It was delicious.

At this other end of the barfly spectrum, we found our bliss in a bucket-sized liver-ripper called the CoronaRita. It is apparently a favorite of some creature named Snooki.

Definitely NOT Stanwyck

What’s in it? So glad you asked. Dump a can of citrusy soda, a can of frozen lime concentrate, and 12 oz. of crap tequila in a plastic fishbowl. Garnish with two upended bottles of Corona and a couple of jumbo straws. This drink makes the Hurricanes on Bourbon Street seem quaint.

Judgement: 12 shots of tequila and two beers in one serving, the CoronaRita is the ugliest enticement to vomitous excess I have ever seen.

I ordered one immediately.

The Bourbon Street analogy is apt. There is equivalent desperation at play among both employees and their marks. The vendors occupy some of the most expensive real estate around, and even at $42 for a jumbo fruity liquor drink, survival hinges on serving vast amounts of event-attenders vast quantities of near-toxic comestibles. The marks are themselves determined to have fun, dammit. The exchange is relentlessly

logical.

Stanwyck ordered a martini, naturally, slightly dirty. Eighteen bucks. A bargain. It came in a red plastic martini glass. She was Not. Fucking. Amused.

“Drink up,” I slurred cheerily, certain that her ether stash was close hand.

Stanwyck glared. If looks could kill.

“You drink it. I got my pride,” she says. And she does, you know. She does. She dumped her plastictini into my drink bucket. “When are we gonna see some art, anyway? Watching you drink that thing might be performance…but it pure sure ain’t art.”

Everybody’s a critic. I went to work on my fishbowl – with martini booster – straining to ignore the glare of sheer hatred Stanwyck was throwing my way. It was Kigali all over again.

The rest of the night was a blurred swirl of Bosch-like hallucinations. More. Bigger. Louder. Splashier.

There was the Corona Electric Beach Party, with special guest DJ Matoma (yeah, I don’t know either), just steps from our café. Security looked lax. I crawled atop The Clevelander Hotel’s poolside roof to join the shimmy-shimmy dancers in their matching yellow spandex outfits.

The moment YN was seized by the terpsichorean muse

The crowd roared approval, but the bouncers frowned on my lithely gyrations. Cazart! Miami Beach might have a reputation as a fun-loving place, but the choke holds from those ruffians tell another tale.

I awoke near dawn amongst the other rough sleepers in Lummus Park. I was no more than 75 feet from my hotel. My pockets were emptied and my shoes were gone. This was where Stanwyck had left me to my fantods. Damn her.

While Your Narrator slept, Stanwyck claims that Heidi Klum dared her to arm wrestle Venus Williams at the *Miami Beach Magazine* gala. She sipped bubbly out of Pitbull's slippers at the Dom Perignon bash. The Bombay Sapphire Gin shindig, the Perrier party, the Perrier-Jouët soirees. She says she got into them all.

I sez she's a liar. She smiles quietly to herself. Over a

breakfast of eggs, sausage, and, for me, another CoronaRita, she flashes her phone. Pics of Stanwyck and Paris. Stanwyck and Sarah Jessica. Stanwyck and Madonna! She knows a move or two, that Stanwyck.

One more. Stanwyck and Clooney.

Damn her.

A Typically Hackneyed End of Year Sum It All Up Post

Hey kittens! It's been far too long since I dropped some knowledge here in the bloggy vineyard. The wait for knowledge will, alas, continue, but there are a few things to talk about as we wrap up the 2016 calendar.

First off, and maybe biggest: we've (you and me) amassed a little more than $4000 towards my travel expenses for the Uganda/RUTF project. Massive gratitude to everyone who donated, and big props to pal Doug Blackburn who put together a terrific piece for the Tallahassee Democrat to give this project wider exposure.

As of last week, we are targeting mid-February for the

journey. We had hoped to go in October, then November. We are at the mercy of the NGO we are traveling with and the conditions on the ground in Africa. I am about to crawl out of my skin with anticipation.

AND IF ANYBODY NEEDS TO RING UP A LAST MINUTE TAX DEDUCTION,
please click here
and drop a little coin in the kitty.
Fully tax-deductible, and all for a good cause.
You'll feel so much better if you do.

It's been quite a year in the vineyard, even though the blog frequency has been, uhm, infrequent. Mea culpa. Life has been full, and I've had the great luck to place two pieces in The Bitter Southerner in 2016, one of them included in their Best Stories of 2016 roundup. Attention ho that I am, I am extremely proud and honored, especially when you think of the consistently amazing writing they serve up all year long.

The ridiculously long piece on New Orleans and the Panorama Jazz/Brass Band and the merely-absurdly long piece on Hearty White were true labors of love. The opportunity to stretch out and tell stories about places and people that I love is one of the year's great blessings for me. Hard to thank the BS crew enough, especially Chuck Reece, for letting me ramble at length. And now there's another piece in the pipeline for the Bitter crowd, one that will be either longer or shorter than the Hearty piece, but definitely shorter than the NOLA ramble.<fn>btw, I've started looking at how I might expand the NOLA material into a book. Anybody knows a publisher or a deep-pocketed benefactor, please send her my way.</fn>

And bigly: Judy invited me to collaborate on her new Comma project. Look at me, Ma! I'm in the Academy!

I'm also deep into the research on the Uganda project and have begun sketching out some fiction projects that are either short stories or novels or perhaps a multi-volume epic that

will make me richer than George JK Rowling Martin.

Hey, kidz! Let’s get interactive. Take this poll to help me decide which fiction project to tackle first.

[Total_Soft_Poll id=”2″]

Vote. It’s important.

On top of all that, some fairly challenging and satisfying corporate ‘ho type work that has been fun and rewarding. Hey, a guy has to eat.

And on top of that topper, a couple of really cool music projects in the first half of the year kept me hopping. Most notable of these was the Edgewood Big Band project led by my pal Jeff Crompton (pictured up top). Fortunately, this beast will rise again in 2017, with at least one ATL performance already on the books.

Here’s a taste of EBB in action. Really excited about this next go round.

There’s more over at Jeff’s SoundCloud page if you get the hankering.

So, yeah, I’ve been as busy as a one-armed wallpaper hanger with the hives. And the blog has suffered neglect. But I’m back, bitches. Plans for the next year include regular visits to the vineyard. I hear we have a new Preznit to look after.

Other plans for the year? They’re yoooooge, the best plans anyone has ever had, you really aren’t gonna believe them. Suffice to say it means lots of scribbling, lots of string tickling, and lots of walking.

We may be in a world of hurt with the Orange Haired Thin Skinned Pencil Dick in charge, but there is still Shit. To. Be. Done.

Who’s with me?

I Like Big Books

A quick update to my pining legions.

The Reader is on a roll. Seventeen books read since Christmas, and almost every one of them a real corker. Two more underway, plus a fourth sojourn through *Infinite Jest*.<fn>Somebody come pull me out if you don’t hear from me for a while. I’ve tied a rope around my waist just in case.</fn> Here’s a quick consumer guide to fuel your bibliophilistic indulgence.

I’ve already told you about Jane Mayer’s superb *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*. I’ll say this again: if you hope to understand the current political divide in the U.S., you have to read this book. For example: if someone introduces himself as the Distinguished Professor of Prosperity and Individual Freedom<fn>Which I actually experienced recently.</fn> and your Koch-radar doesn’t start ringing alarm bells, you need this book. Desperately. Just read it already.

Alert fans of the blog have also “enjoyed” my take on the latest Don DeLillo, *Zero K*. His best since *Underworld.*

Given the drought of original thoughts in my head, you’ll get a chance to “enjoy” my musings about many of these books in

the coming weeks. Here are the potential victims of analytical spasm:

Brief History of Seven Killings, Marlon James

All the King's Men, Robert Penn Warren

Down and Out in Paris and London, George Orwell

The Orphan Master's Son, Adam Johnson

The Dream of Perpetual Motion, Dexter

The Invisible Knight, Italo Calvino

The Sellout and *Tuff*, Paul Beatty

If Beale Street Could Talk, James Baldwin

Wind Up Bird Chronicles, Haruki Murakami

Essays, Wallace Shawn

Creative Clash/Rise of the Creative Class: These were homework for my super-secret work as a double-naught. Provocative, but who cares about neo-urbanism?

Sense of Ending, Julian Barnes

First up will be *On Immunity: An Inoculation*, by Eula Biss. I just finished this one, and it sent me scurrying back to the shelf to pull down and re-read Woolf's *On Being Sick* and Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor*. Biss's meditation begins in the vax/anti-vax conflict and moves outward into broader ruminations on how the ways we think about disease – and the language we use to describe it – have implications that go beyond physical health itself. It fits in well in the long lineage of which Woolf and Sontag are a part. Look for this one later this week.

And yeah, sure, a naggling concern about illness and disease

is probably also connected to Your Narrator’s incessant propulsion towards decrepitude, disintegration, and senescence. Get off my lawn.