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Generational Names in the United States

Gen X, Millennials, and Other Generations Through the Years

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Generations in the United States are defined as social groups of people born around the same time who share similar cultural traits, values, and preferences. In the U.S. today, many people readily identify themselves as Millennials, Xers, or Boomers. But these generational names are a fairly recent cultural phenomenon and they vary depending on the source.

The History of Naming Generations

Historians generally agree that the naming of generations began in the 20th-century. [Gertrude Stein](#) is considered the first to have done so. She bestowed the title of Lost Generation on those who had been born around the turn of the century and bore the brunt of service during World War I. In the epigram to Ernest Hemingway's "[The Sun Also Rises](#)," published in 1926, Stein wrote, "You are all a lost generation."

Generational theorists Neil Howe and William Strauss are generally credited with identifying and naming the 20th-century generations in the U.S. with their 1991 study "[Generations](#)." In it, they identified the generation that fought World War II as the G.I. (for Government Issue) Generation. But less than a decade later, Tom Brokaw published "[The Greatest Generation](#)," a best-selling cultural history of the Great Depression and World War II, and that namesake stuck.

Canadian author Douglas Coupland, born in 1961 at the tail end of the Baby Boom, is credited with naming the generation that followed him. Coupland's 1991 book "[Generation X: Tales For an Accelerated Culture](#)," and later works chronicled the lives of 20-somethings and came to be seen by some as defining that era's young.

Did You Know?

Generational theorists Neil Howe and William Strauss suggested the name **Thirteeners** (for the 13th generation born since the [American Revolution](#)) for Generation X, but the term never caught on.

Credit for naming the generations that followed Generation X is less clear. In the early 1990s, the children following Generation X were often referred to as Generation Y by media outlets like Advertising Age, which is credited with first using the term in 1993. But by the mid-'90s, as buzz about the turn of the century grew, this generation was more often referred to as Millennials, a term Howe and Strauss first used in their book.

The name for the most recent generation varies even more. Some prefer Generation Z, continuing the alphabetical trend begun with Generation X, while others prefer buzzier titles like Centennials or the iGeneration.

Generation Names

While some generations are known by one name only, such as the Baby Boomers, names for other generations is a matter of some dispute among experts.

Neil Howe and William Strauss define recent generational cohorts in the U.S. this way:

2000 to present: New Silent Generation or Generation Z

1980 to 2000: [Millennials](#) or Generation Y

1965 to 1979: Thirteeners or Generation X

1946 to 1964: [Baby Boomers](#)

1925 to 1945: Silent Generation

1900 to 1924: G.I. Generation

The [Population Reference Bureau](#) provides an alternate listing and chronology of generational names in the United States:

1983 to 2001: New Boomers

1965 to 1982: Generation X

1946 to 1964: Baby Boomers

1929 to 1945: Lucky Few

1909 to 1928: Good Warriors

1890 to 1908: Hard Timers

1871 to 1889: New Worlders

[The Center for Generational Kinetics](#) lists the following five generations who are currently active in America's economy and workforce:

1996 to present: Gen Z, iGen, or Centennials

1977 to 1995: Millennials or Gen Y

1965 to 1976: Generation X

1946 to 1964: Baby Boomers

1945 and before: Traditionalists or Silent Generation

Naming Generations Outside the United States

It's worth remembering that the concept of social generations like these is largely a Western notion and that generational names are often influenced by local or regional events. In South Africa, for example, people born after the [end of apartheid](#) in 1994 are referred to as the Born-Free Generation. Romanians born after the [collapse of communism](#) in 1989 are sometimes called the Revolution Generation.

Sources

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