

Viva the Vital

Generational Smackdown: Boomers vs. All Comers

By Matt Thornhill

In the week since Barack Obama, age 46, became the presumptive Democrat Party nominee for president, defeating Hillary Clinton, age 60, to face John McCain, age 71, we thought we would see articles, columns and stories about race, sex and age. What has been surprising is the number of articles about how the Boomer generation doesn't have a horse in this Donkey vs. Elephant presidential race, and that means it is over for boomers.

We have been expecting a generational fall-out from this primary season, and it started a week before the final events with an op/ed in the *Los Angeles Times* by a Gen X columnist, Meghan Daum. Her piece, "The millstone of boomer milestones," takes Boomers to task for celebrating all the accomplishments of 1968, from the significant to the mundane. You can get a sense of her less-than-love-fest tone from this:

"So privileged is this group, they've been allowed to change generational labels the way they changed their (always 'groundbreaking') clothing styles. They've been known, in whole or in part, as the Dr. Spock Generation, the Free Love Generation, the Generation That Changed America, the Me Generation, Hippies, Yuppies, Bobos and, to certain members of Gen X, moronic aging hippie posers."

Her over-arching point is *"Enough with the 1968 nostalgia. It's time for boomers to stifle themselves."* The *LA Times* reported they got 114 letters to the editor (about five times the norm), almost all from boomers and all but six were negative.

Days pass, Obama clinches. Then the real anti-Boomer rhetoric appears. Last Wednesday, pollster John Zogby wrote "The end of boomerism as we know it," which asserts that we will not have any more Boomer generation presidents. (Despite being born in 1961, Obama lays claim to Generation X and McCain is a member of the Silent generation.) Zogby says that because the two initial front running candidates, Hillary and Rudy Giuliani, both boomers, couldn't pull it off, it's over for boomers. *"After 16 years, Americans have finally declared, state by state, caucus by caucus, primary by primary, that they have had enough of the Boomer generation in the White House."*

We're all for making big claims, but Zogby is clearly off his medication. Talk about an audacity of hope. Boomers are far from finished in presidential politics and everything else in America.

The following day brought a fascinating piece from a contributor to the Huffington Post, a Web site run by Arianna Huffington, the one-time conservative turned liberal. Called "A Note to Baby Boomers from the Millennials: Let Go of the Torch," and written by 22-year-old Elizabeth Cermak, a political major at UC Santa Cruz, its main point is that Obama's popularity among younger voters, under age 30, enabled him to defeat Hillary. As a result, all Boomers should realize it is time to get over *"...the*

notion that this is still your country to steer. It isn't, so get down off the soapbox and hand over the torch. You may think that we're wrong, but what my generation wants is clear and we deserve our parent's respect just as much as your beliefs did."

Being a Web site article, there are (at last count) some 33 comments on Cermak's manifesto. Do a search online and read through them. Almost all are from Boomers setting Ms. Cermak straight. For example: "Ah, yes. *I remember how I thought I knew everything in my 20's, too.*" And "Young women especially, like you, have it easy because of the advances gained by Boomers. Things you take for granted didn't even exist in the 60s and 70s. Take the time and learn your history, learn to appreciate the big picture before you try to push everyone else aside."

Two days later, one more shot across the bow at boomers. This time from another 22-year-old, T.J. Wihera, who penned "Millennials large and in charge" for the *Denver Post*. His opening line: "All right, baby boomers, let's get one thing straight: If I'm going to be paying for your Social Security, I'd like a lot less lip from you on the way in which I'm going to do it."

Ouch.

The generational fallout has turned into a pay-per-view smackdown. Maybe it is a good thing Boomers aren't in the presidential race this year. Being a Boomer appears to be a less-than-honorable label. What do you think?

Secretly, we wonder what they'll write when both candidates select running mates who are Boomers.