



We enjoyed the special issue of *The American Enterprise* dedicated to Nashville (March/April), especially the articles on country music. We think Tennesseans may not realize just how far the country music bug has traveled: it's even made it to Yale Law School.

Yale's growing movement of country music lovers coalesces at a country-western bar and grill in nearby Southington. During our time at Yale, we have grown accustomed to spending at least one night a week listening to live country bands, tossing down ribs and a few beverages, and spending time with fellow students and locals.

It's not hard to see why so many people in Connecticut and elsewhere are attracted to the music. The true heirs to American popular music are in Nashville, writing some of the most haunting tributes to family and friendship, home and country, and love in all of its crazy manifestations since Berlin, Gershwin, and Porter.

We will soon graduate and leave here, but we can take comfort in the fact that the popularity of country music is growing and that we will never be too far from a special place in Southington.

We recently received very good news from one of our classmates who will also be leaving Yale. He plans to work in Nashville and has given us an open invitation to visit any time. Plans are already being made to visit frequently.

Mark Gerson and Sam McGee
Yale Law School

I enjoyed the January/February issue on Generation X, especially the differing views presented. But Peter Sacks' "Gen X Is Not OK" unnerved me. This was a typical slur on Gen Xers. As an educator, Sacks doesn't display the respect he seeks

from the students he instructs. Teachers must learn to communicate with their students in order to engage and teach them. Most Gen Xers are not "young men slumped in their chairs" with "looks of utter disengagement."

Should baby boomers ever decide to quit pointing fingers, apologizing, feeling guilty, and finally embrace the generation they have brought into this world, they may find that Gen Xers are willing to forgive, forget, move on, and lead productive, responsible lives.

Randy Wilson
Durango, Colorado

I was relieved to read the Gen X issue and come away feeling optimistic for a change about this country's future. As a public school teacher in Los Angeles, I witness firsthand the travails of young Gen Xers. I try to understand their pressures (far different from mine at that age) but often become disillusioned because of the many problems they face and will continue to face. This issue of *The American Enterprise* painted a clearer picture for me. Karl Zinsmeister (BIRD'S EYE) says it best: Gen Xers are "setting standards and appear to be the most creative and talented kids ever to enter the U.S. labor force."

This generation needs to be given a healthy dose of optimism if the nation is to have a prosperous and productive future. As a baby boomer, I feel I have the authority to chastise my own generation for its many flaws. With the limited time we have remaining, it is important to admonish and encourage our successors. It's the least we can do, considering how much we've already erred as role models.

Aubie Brennan
Santa Monica, California

The January/February issue on Generation X makes me feel so much better about my preparation for the future. Disdainful elders never seem to tire of looking down their noses at us, and frowning in disapproval.

They can despise us for the next 20 years, but by that time we'll all be on the same *Titanic* when Social Security finally goes under because of the societal leech that is the baby boom generation.

In marked contrast to the truly lazy generation, plenty of us Gen Xers are preparing well in advance for the financial upheavals of the future. We still have years of productivity left and will prove it by demonstrating prowess and flexibility in the work force. But then again, what do I know? I'm just a cynical, uneducated slacker.

Rob Best
Clermont, Florida

Why poke fun at those who believe in uncooked food (SCAN, March/April)? If you're going to attack the "frontiers of political correctness," you need a compass to identify meaningful targets. There's no call to condemn people simply because they have tastes and interests different from ours—which is what you did with the raw food advocates.

The problem with political correctness isn't that someone has different ideas, for that would make Galileo, Einstein, and Edison P.C. It's when others are forced to support someone else's ideas. If someone gets on a soapbox and urges employers to hire women, blacks, or gays, let him preach away. Maybe he'll influence our behavior, which is as it should be in a healthy marketplace of ideas. The evil comes when he turns to

politics and uses the government to force employers to hire women, blacks, or gays. That propels normally tolerant people to fight back to preserve their freedom of expression and action.

So far as I can tell, the uncooked food devotées have sought neither government subsidy nor governmental imposition of their ideas on others. And in this politics-besotted age, that puts them pretty close to the angels.

*James L. Payne
Sandpoint, Idaho*

Thanks for the recent issue on Nashville. I read the welfare article by Martin Wooster ("The Down & Out Are Headed Up"). It was just right. Stressing the stick while putting the carrot just beyond their reach seems to work great. Of course, some people have known that all along.

*Dan McMurry
Middle Tennessee State University*

I must admit that the Nashville issue didn't draw my attention initially. That should come as no surprise, since I am from New York City.

New Yorkers do think the world revolves around them. How very interesting it was to enter a different world, thanks to this issue. Those of us who come from the true urban lifestyle usually can't help but picture the Midwest and the South as one huge farmland and a variety of small towns. We've been raised to be oblivious.

I especially appreciated Richard Miniter's piece, "Why Do Boom Towns Boom?" As an entrepreneur, I know of the struggles one faces when dealing with the market and the changing moods of our economy.

It was extremely encouraging to read about how business survives in smaller American cities. One would never have known that Nashville is a metropolis in its own right. Such towns are self-made, and it is clear to me now that its residents have a great deal to be proud of.

I commend the magazine for a terrific job. The entire issue was well-rounded and a delight to read. I'm hoping native Tennesseans and other

southerners enjoyed it as much as this New Yorker did.

*Leo Zalfini
Queens, New York*

Your recent Gen X issue was very informative. It helped distinguish Generation X in ways unseen before. Still, I'd like to call attention to an issue that concerns me. As a married member of this generation, I'm paying more taxes now than when I was single. This must be what they call the "marriage penalty tax."

Had my wife and I decided to live together first, the federal government would have rewarded us with a nice tax return. But because we are a couple of Generation Xers from the old school, we decided to go against the grain and do the right thing, despite the tax incentives to do otherwise. As newlyweds, we advise the soon-to-be-married: Before you start saving for that down payment on a house, start saving for your first tax bill.

*Richard Obcena
Cadott, Wisconsin*

Kevin Hassett's article about the federal debt misses the point (SCAN, January/February). The notion that government should "invest" in "high-return projects" is just as scary when posited by conservatives as liberals.

We must realize that a debt is not a debt when the borrower has no intention of repaying it. When a government takes money it has no intention of repaying, it's a tax. The government extracts a tax in the form of new "borrowing" each year. Some years the tax is larger than others, and occasionally there's no tax at all.

We are in our present enviable economic position not because of the smart choices our government made but because our government largely leaves us alone to decide how we should best allocate our own resources. Hassett offers a choice between two countries where the government is funneling borrowed money—one into private investment with high returns, the other into subsidies of current consumption. Give me a country where the government

gets out of the business of funneling money altogether.

*Bob Consigli
Littleton, Colorado*

The DIGEST of March/April included a summary of my recent report on the 1872 Mining Law. I would like to expound on the main idea behind my research. The Mining Law of 1872 isn't as bad as many people think. In particular, environmentalists' claims that mining is unregulated are false. There are a number of federal laws governing the environmental impacts of mining, and both federal and state agencies require reclamation of mining sites. Furthermore, most public land in the West has been placed off limits to mineral exploration and development.

In order to mine at all, mining companies must have access to large areas of land, only a small amount of which is ever actually mined. The value of the 1872 Mining Law is that it allows companies freedom to explore and, once a discovery is made, to obtain secure property rights to the site.

*David Gerard
Political Economy Research Center*

Thank you for the outstanding and informative article on Tennessee's Families First program in the March/April issue ("The Down & Out Are Headed Up"). We were extremely pleased with the opportunity provided to us to discuss our welfare reform efforts. I appreciate the time Martin Wooster spent researching and writing such an accurate and thorough article.

In addition, I would like to express my appreciation to the editorial staff for the decision to devote a good portion of the recent issue to Nashville and our beautiful state of Tennessee.

*Commissioner Linda B. Rudolph
Tennessee Department of Human Services*

CORRECTION: In THE ECONOMIST in our March/April issue, Kevin Hassett described a work by Bruce Ackerman and Anne Alstott as a "book." It was in fact a draft manuscript of a book that will be published, with revisions by the authors, in 1999.