

## Television: Brian Lowry

### The Boomer Century

(Documentary; PBS;  
Wed. March 28, 9 p.m.)

Produced by Alexandria Prods. and Generation Entertainment and presented by KQED San Francisco. Executive producer, Ken Dychtwald; producer-directors, Neil Steinberg, Joel Westbrook; writer, Mark Jonathan Harris; camera, Tom Inskeep; editors, Donna Andrade, Tony Black. 120 MIN. Host: Ken Dychtwald.

**A**fter TV Land took the once-over-lightly approach in its documentary "Generation Boom," PBS dives into the baby boomer issue with a clearer sense of purpose in this project shepherded by consultant Ken Dychtwald, who has long trumpeted the influence of those born from 1946 to 1964. "The Boomer Century" adopts a sweeping view of this generation — nearly 80 million strong, and unlike any before it — while giving relatively short shrift to its impact on media, where advertisers' preoccupation with young adults clashes with a boomer nation heading kicking, screaming and aerobicizing into its so-called golden years.

As exec producer and host, Dychtwald does a creditable job (barring some goofy flourishes, like



**Most members of the Baby Boom generation were children during the 1950s, a time of increasing prosperity for their parents.**

"leaping" from one sequence to the next) of capturing boomers' tremendous cultural clout, as well as the forces that shaped their collective mindset. It is, among other things, the first generation weaned on television, one whose trust in institutions was frayed by the assassinations of the 1960s and whose anti-authoritarian, rebellious tendencies found voice through music.

Boomers developed in stark contrast to their parents, for whom the Depression was the signature event.

"You have to see the boomer generation in opposition to the Depres-

sion generation, or you can't understand it at all," says author Erica Jong.

There's obviously a tremendous amount of ground to cover, from the importance of birth-control pills in the "free love" movement to women invading the workplace as equals to the self-improvement and self-actualization trends. Dychtwald also persuasively contends that the boomer spirit is one of creativity and entrepreneurialism, helping give rise to the explosion of technological innovations birthed so rapidly as boomers came of age.

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In the most pertinent public-policy section, the doc's closing portion tackles the challenges society faces as boomers grow older, considering their toll on health care and the economy, which could be exacerbated by the fact that they haven't saved money with the same discipline as their parents. This section also includes discussion about delaying retirement and the ethics of prolonging life.

On the down side, scant time is devoted to the manner in which the boomers are discounted and dismissed by Madison Avenue, which has too slowly come to recognize that boomers approach aging differently than any generation preceding them. Given how rarely this

disconnect is vented publicly, it seems like a missed opportunity in the near-ad-free environs of PBS.

A variety of boomers lend their voices to the program, among them White House spokesman Tony Snow, who somehow manages to sound irritatingly smug and dismissive even within this nonpartisan, mostly innocuous venue — questioning the group's legacy from the 1960s and '70s, which echoes in the movements of today.

Then again, while "The Boomer Century" is generally a smart and timely exploration of a demographic trend with broad implications, it's too bad that the media references aren't a little less innocuous — and more rooted in boomers' present and future than in their black-and-white past.

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