



# X vs. Y



## A CULTURE WAR, A LOVE STORY

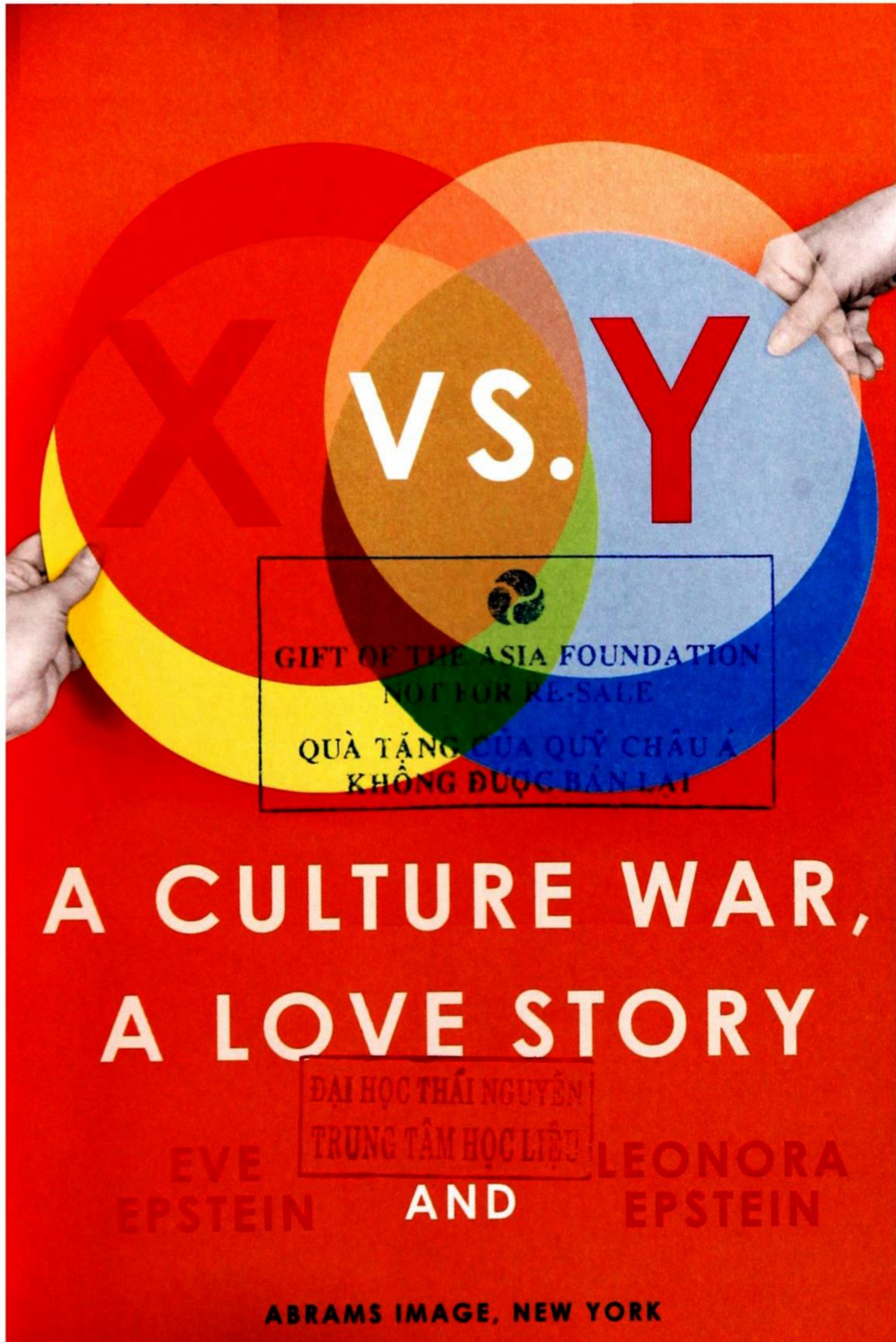


EVE EPSTEIN AND LEONORA EPSTEIN









X VS. Y

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KHÔNG ĐƯỢC BÁN LẠI

# A CULTURE WAR, A LOVE STORY

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ABRAMS IMAGE, NEW YORK



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## X VS. Y: WHICH IS WHICH?

ASK GOOGLE WHICH BIRTH YEARS DEFINE GEN X OR GEN Y, AND YOU'LL COME UP WITH A LOT OF DIFFERENT ANSWERS. IN OUR CONVERSATIONS, WE'VE TENDED TO TREAT GEN X AS FOLKS BORN IN THE MID-SIXTIES TO LATE SEVENTIES AND MILLENNIALS/GEN YERS AS PEOPLE BORN AROUND THE EARLY EIGHTIES TO THE LATE NINETIES. IN SPEAKING WITH FRIENDS OF BOTH GENERATIONS, WE FOUND A DISTINCT GRAY AREA WHERE PEOPLE BORN BETWEEN 1979 AND 1984 OR SO FELT EITHER THAT THEY WERE MEMBERS OF NEITHER GENERATION OR THAT THEY WERE IN A POSITION TO CHOOSE. MOST IN THAT POSITION CHOSE TO IDENTIFY WITH GEN X, BECAUSE WHEN GIVEN THE CHOICE BETWEEN DOC MARTENS AND FOAM FOOTWEAR, THE CHOICE SEEMS OBVIOUS.



## DON'T MESS WITH X'S

One of the many, many, many terrible things that happen when you get older is that you find yourself earnestly saying things you used to say in jest. Things like “I just don’t understand what the kids are wearing these days.” Or “What ever happened to *manners*?” Or “Could you turn that down?”

These outbursts of stodgy grown-upness are made weirder in my case by the fact that they’re addressed not to a bunch of nameless neighborhood hooligans but to my sister, Leonora, who happens to be fourteen years younger than I am. It’s a comeuppance I richly deserve for subjecting her to the unsavory predilections of my own Gen-X youth. She will likely never forget the disembowelingly loud Jesus Lizard show I dragged her to at the age of twelve (more on that later) or the time I shocked her to tears with my newly platinum hair or the parade of boyfriends whose dubious fashion choices ranged from Pocahontas braids to split-toe Nikes to the full late-seventies polyester regalia commonly associated with the Ernie/Bert crowd. And so the price I pay for all that is to hear myself grouching, grumpy-old-man-style, at her generation’s breezy penchant for casual sex or their upstart ways in the workplace or their inexplicable nostalgia for Jonathan Taylor Thomas.

That’s a big part of the reason I wanted to write this book with her: I wanted to hear, from her, what she loves about her generation, what she thinks makes them special. I wanted her take on the ideas, movies, books, and technologies that they love, and to know which of them helped make her who she is today. Because for all my grouching, I can’t deny that she’s grown up to be a pretty impressive person. She’s smart and funny and well rounded and understands Twitter a lot better than I do. And she’s not the only one: Some of my best friends are Gen Yers. They’re tolerant, enthusiastic, energetic, opinionated, and ambitious, and I expect they have a thing or two to teach the rest of us—if only we’ll stop complaining about how entitled they all seem for a minute.

Which is not, obviously, to say they’re better than us. The other reason I wanted to write this book was to explore the ways in which my generation is awesome. Which can be scary—not because we’re *not* awesome, but



because we are notoriously prickly about being identified as a generation. You might even say that's the number-one thing we have in common: We don't want to be part of a club that would have us as a member. We're hyperaware of how defining a group of people can go from being something descriptive to something normative, something that can all too easily result in the marginalization and exclusion of those who don't fit the profile. And we're wary of being placed in anything like a "demographic," which is really just a way for consumer brands to target and market to us. We're a suspicious breed, and I sort of love that about us. But I've also noticed that we, as people growing up in the same time, have loved and watched and embraced and bonded over some of the same things, and I like trying to talk about it in a way that reflects the meaningful, if fleeting, points of contact and community those shared loves have afforded us. And then I like to lord it over my sister when it becomes obvious that my generation is clearly superior. Because if there's one thing Gen Xers probably can agree on, it's that we have way better taste in music than they do.

I'm kidding, of course. Sort of. In fact, for all the things my sister and I have failed to see eye-to-eye on (Spice Girls, *Star Wars*, *Saved by the Bell*, Public Enemy/Herb Alpert mash-ups), there are just as many that we agree wholeheartedly about (Madonna, Nirvana, *Clueless*, Jay-Z/General Public mash-ups). This book is a celebration of all of it—from the icons and items understood by each generation to those we passionately share a mutual adoration for. It's a love letter to our own people, and to each other—and an acknowledgment that though we were never really young together, we are both doomed to a similarly attenuated adolescence brought on by a ravenous nostalgia for the artifacts of our youth.

And while the artifacts may differ at times, the enduring romance with them is the constant that draws us together, sparks our disagreements, fuels our shared celebrations, and delineates the deeper divide that separates us from our parents, who, with mostly good humor, shake their heads with puzzled bemusement at our rapid-fire pop-culture chatter and still beg us to please, for the love of God, turn down the music.



## BECAUSE Y

On a Friday night sometime in 1998, my best friend Geneva and I won the lip-syncing competition at the school dance. We'd spent a week choreographing a dance to S.O.A.P.'s "This Is How We Party" (unless you got the free CDs that came with the dELiA\*s catalog, you've probably never heard this Britney knockoff by a Danish pop band) and painstakingly transcribing and memorizing the lyrics, which, when they are as complex and poetic as "Du-bi-du-bi-du-bi-du-bi-du-bi-dub-du-dap-dap," is quite the undertaking. We even created coordinating outfits, dressing as cool snowboarder chicks with glitter lips. I have never won anything since that night (except for a free Garth Brooks cassette from under a Snapple cap I never redeemed), and so it might have been the best night of my life.

There is a distinct possibility that I may be one of those people for whom everything goes downhill after middle school. But if I peaked at age thirteen, I'm OK with that, because what I'm left with are memories that have become defining images of Generation Y, and I'm obsessed with them. So, I can tell you quite a bit about what it was like to be a girl growing up in the mid- to late nineties. Some key starting points: *Saved by the Bell*, Dr Pepper Lip Smackers, scented body glitter, layered haircuts, Clairol semipermanent hair dye. The zeitgeist was best expressed by sprawling out on your bedroom floor, eyes frosted with shimmery sky-blue liner, nails painted a Hard Candy silver, listening to the *Romeo + Juliet* soundtrack, thumbing through the dELiA\*s catalog, waiting for your parents to get off the phone so you could use the dial-up.

I am weirdly most nostalgic for the parts of me that read as stereotypical American teen I think because they make me feel connected and valid in a way that feels true and certain even though the last thing anyone wants is to feel like they're the same as everyone else. Although everyone really liked the concept of "The Real Slim Shady," so I'm not sure what that really says about how much we value individualism.

But for everything that feels distinctly Gen Y, our collection of likes didn't completely come out of our own culture. I feel equally defined by references that don't quite fit the Gen Y timeline. That's because they came from Eve, my coauthor and Gen X sister, who gave me the gift of Madonna 1.0, Daryl K, X-Girl, Björk, Betsey Johnson, Liz Phair, *Sassy*, and more.