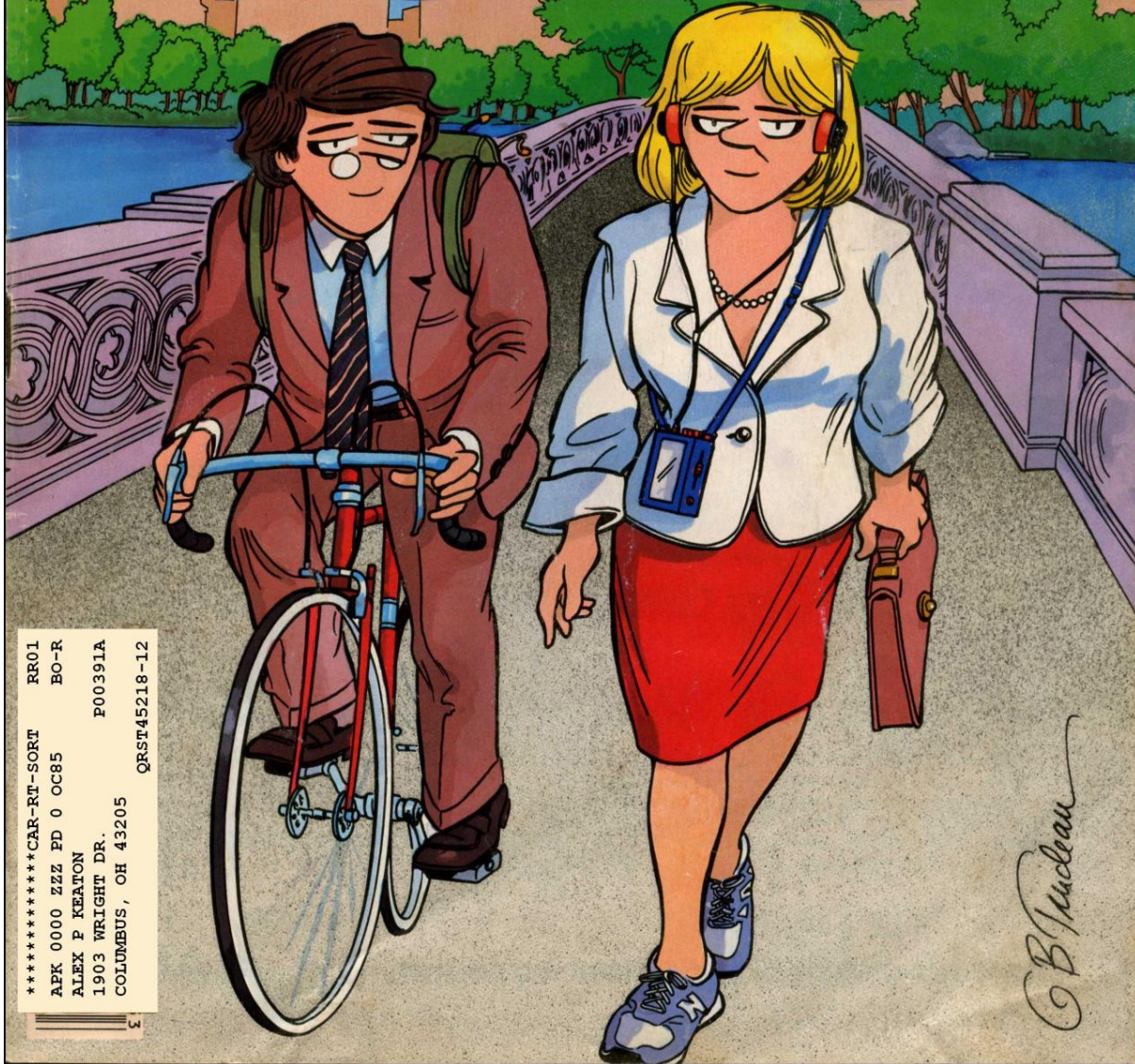


Newsweek

December 31, 1984 / \$1.75

ARMS
CONTROL
The Battle
Over Star Wars

THE YEAR OF THE YUPPIE



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“The Year of The Yuppie”

December 31, 1984

It is on the move again—that restless vanguard of the baby-boom generation, continually reinventing itself as it conquers the undefended decades of the 20th century. In unruly ranks assembled, its members marched through the '60s, then dispersed into a million solitary joggers, riding the crests of their own alpha waves, and now there they go again, barely looking up from the massed gray columns of *The Wall Street Journal* as they speed toward the airport, advancing on the 1980s in the back seat of a limousine. Just as predicted, economic reality has intruded on their Self-absorbed journey; but the unsettling news is that time has done little to dim their fervor. The banker who was horrified in 1968 when Columbia students occupied the president's office will not necessarily be reassured to discover that one of those students now has an M.B.A. and an office down the hall from him, and is full of plans for streamlining the headquarters staff. Anyone who worried that the self-indulgence of the Woodstock generation was sapping America's moral fiber is probably better off not knowing about the woman with \$1,200 worth of pots and pans in her kitchen who eats every meal in a restaurant.

And this was a very good year for them. It was a year in which a presidential candidate, Gary Hart, seemed to crystallize their own vehement impatience with the past—but, happily enough, one in which the candidate of prosperity actually won the election. It was a year in which Madison Avenue saluted their economic clout by elevating them to the status of telephone linemen as heroes of their own beer commercial. It was a year in which the aging hippies of Doonesbury returned to the comic pages after a two-year absence with \$20 haircuts and a new set of middle-class values. It was a year, also, in which Carrie Cook, a 25-year-old associate producer for a Boston ad agency, saw the value of her condominium go from \$65,000 to \$95,000, which means she made more money going to sleep each night than she did at work each day; a year in which Barry Leach, a 37-year-old painting contractor, hung ceiling fans in a onetime flophouse in a rundown industrial section of Milwaukee and turned it into "a mecca for social drinkers." Richard Ryan, a 25-year-old sports-marketing executive, took a two-week trip to Ireland, where he stayed in a manor house, and Lisa Diserio, the manager of special events for CBS Sports, discovered several new restaurants. Forty New Yorkers began working out at Definitions, a gym that caters to people who may *already*

belong to a health club, but want to spend \$600 a month in individual workouts designed to improve their most prized possessions, their bodies.

Catching On: It was the year, also, in which all these people finally learned who they were. The first person to give them a name in print may have been columnist Bob Greene, writing in March 1983 about the "networking" parties for businessmen and women which erstwhile radical Jerry Rubin was sponsoring at a New York disco. "One social commentator" (a euphemism for somebody Greene ran into at a bar) suggested that Rubin, who once marched at the head of the Yippies—the Youth International Party—was vying to become the spokesman for the Yuppies—the young urban professionals. The term caught on quickly after the publication last January of *The Yuppie Handbook*, which describes a couple so far ahead on the fast track that they take their cordless telephone with them to walk their Akita.

No one knows how many people there really are like that in the nation, although probably not many, or you'd be seeing a lot more Akitas on the street. The one thing that most experts agree on is that a Yuppie must be young; specifically, a member of the baby-boom generation, the 60 million products of the great surge in American fertility that took place between 1946 and 1964. But where to draw the line within that group is by no means certain. Using as a working definition an income of \$40,000 or more from a professional or management job, the California think-tank SRI International concluded that there were 4 million Americans between 25 and 39 who fit that description, and only about 1.2 million of those actually live in a city. They are more than three times as likely as other Americans to have an American Express card, twice as likely to engage in physical-fitness activities. This is the *creme fraiche* of Yuppies, an elite so small that you could fit them all, four to a car, in all the BMW's in America. 'Yumpies': For most practical purposes, though, that definition is absurdly narrow; a group so small, while it may be real, is of little value in political or marketing terms. Political pollsters lump together all baby boomers who went to college, or work in white-collar or technical jobs, and arrive at a voting bloc of more than 20 million. Midwestern pollster Wayne Youngquist prefers the term "Yumpies," for "young upwardly mobile professionals." This definition has the advantage of calling attention to the distinction between a Yuppie and a Preppy; a preppy, having been born at the top, is in no need of upward mobility. But it begs one of the most distinctive characteristics of that generation: the extent to which they have rejected the suburban values of their parents in favor of living where the action is -- even action as tepid by most

standards as shopping for cheese and exchanging business cards at a cocktail party. How could a Yuppie live in the country, where there are no health clubs? Where would he run?

Unfortunately, the glamour of this group obscures a more significant trend toward *downward* mobility among their peers. The Research Institute of America has found that median income for families in the 25-to-34 age bracket fell 14 percent (in constant dollars) from 1979 to 1983. "The more accurate statistical profile of the baby-boom generation goes like this," notes Gary Lawrence, a vice president of Decision Making Information, one of the pollsters for the 1984 Reagan campaign—"married couple living in an apartment in the suburbs, with 1 1/2 kids and 1 1/2 cars. He has a job as a sales rep, or in middle management; she works, too." From 1970 to 1983, while Yuppies were busy colonizing old warehouses and Victorian mansions in neighborhoods that had been forgotten for 50 years, the number of young adults who live at home with their parents increased by 85 percent.

But if Yuppies change the world, it will be through the force of example, not weight of numbers. Their strength is as the strength of 10, because they want it all so badly, a quality that doesn't show up in the statistics. The science of marketing has a long way to go to understand someone like Laurie Gilbert, a 28-year-old lawyer at the Disney Channel, who says she "would be comfortable with \$200,000 a year," and more if she has children.

Much of the energy and optimism and passion of the '60s seems to have been turned inward, on lives, careers, apartments and dinners. "We were upper-middle-class white kids who were used to getting what we wanted," recalls onetime Columbia radical James S. Kunen, now a lawyer and editor. "I really felt strongly about the strength of our will—that if we wanted the bombing stopped it would stop." That pretty much sums up the way another upper-middleclass white kid, Carrie Cook of Boston, feels about getting rich. This is partly the result of her discovery of the law of perpetual motion of real estate prices. Cook talks excitedly about the prospect of a \$30,000 profit on her condominium, and without dwelling on the likelihood that the cost of her next apartment will have increased proportionately. "I'm totally infatuated with the world of real estate," she says. "It makes me feel smart and it gives me more control over my life." But even real estate pales before the profits she imagines can come her way if she fulfills her fantasy, which is that someday she will be known as the woman who invented the Pet Rock of the 1990s.

Pointers: She is, if anything, more confident about her personal life. "There's no way I'm not going to work and there's no way I'm not going to have a family," she says. Success is a matter of picking up pointers, which she is doing all the time, even when she's having lunch with her boss. "We talk about day care and how to get a live-in helper," she says. "I'm having a chance to plan it now. By the time I'm 30 I'll have a solid background. I'll have more money, and money gives you more choices."

One reason for this confidence may be that she doesn't see herself as limited by her prospects in advertising. She has her investments, she does a little writing (she has submitted a script to "Saturday Night Live") and she conceptualizes in her spare time (a board game and a device for spreading suntan lotion are two projects under development), all adding up to a career that in an odd way seems virtually independent of her actual job.

This is a very common attitude among Yuppies, especially younger ones. "They all have enterprises on the side, typically a little something in real estate," says Rosabeth Moss Kanter, a professor of management at Yale and chairman of Good Measure, Inc., a Boston consulting firm. Yuppies are known, she says, "not so much by their willingness to work hard for the corporation, but their devotion to accumulating power and getting rich." This helps explain that unique Yuppie contribution to American culture, the networking party, in which social intercourse revolves around the exchange of business cards. Networks are informal associations of mutual friendship that cut across corporate lines to unite people of similar ages, professional levels and interests, principally money and sex. It encourages Yuppies in their independence from the corporation. Put 10 Yuppies in a room, and they'll come out with a Tex-Mex restaurant.

All this, of course, gives the lie to the facile notion occasionally expressed that Yuppies have merely resurrected the corporate-zombie culture of their fathers. At their best, says Rubin—who has been touring the nation with his old ally Abbie Hoffman in what is billed as a "Yuppie Versus Yip-pie" debate—Yuppies are challenging the ossified corporate structures, just as they once challenged the sacred traditions of academia, and forcing them into more imaginative solutions. "A lot of people are going into business who in the 1970s would have gone into public service," notes Kanter. "The whole thing has been turned around. Business is the place for people who want to make a difference." Apple Computer is everyone's favorite illustration of a company that thrives by encouraging the Yuppie virtues of imagination, daring and entrepreneurship. (To complete the list of charac-

teristic Yuppie traits, Kanter adds "slickness, glad-handing and articulateness.") Dr. Barrie Greiff, a former Harvard Business School professor and authority on the corporate culture, says Yuppies come "with very high expectations and a minimal degree of loyalty." He refers to an epigram from that Eisenhower-era classic, *The Organization Man*, to the effect that executives are all in the same boat, but nobody ever questions where the boat is going. "Yuppies don't want to get into any boat unless they know where it's going," Greiff says. "And even then many aren't sure."

One who isn't sure—but doesn't quite know what to do about it, either—is Rob Lewis, an associate with Holme Roberts & Owen, Denver's largest law firm. A little older than Cook, at 28, he is a little less sure that hard work and ingenuity alone will bring him everything he wants in life. He started out, after all, with a passion to be a regional planner in New England, virtuously stomping up to the town halls in his snow boots and flannels to do battle with the highway lobby. One year into grad school, he started to think about how dull a small town can be, so he switched to law school. "It wasn't because I wanted a million bucks," he says, with a trace of defensiveness; "I wanted a challenge. Once you get in that track, you start conforming to a rather narrow set of mores in order to excel." He would like to marry someday, but he is in the Yuppie bind of having to work hard to afford the kind of luxuries that make hard work possible: a Saab, vacations in the Orient, carte blanche at all the top health clubs in town. He has a feeling that if he had to spend his leisure hours cleaning out the basement instead, his 12-hour days at the office would seem a lot less bearable.

Sober: Yet for all their sometimes frenzied consumption, Yuppies can display a certain emotional austerity that keeps them from slipping on the jogging path of life. Lewis sees a therapist, although less for any specific problems than because he is driven "to be better, to excel," in accordance with the Yuppie Golden Rule: "If it ain't broke, improve it." Rubin grows defensive when the charge is brought up that Yuppies drink too much Perrier, pointing out that it does keep them sober. Yuppies are also less likely than the population as a whole to smoke, and Lewis adds that his Yuppie friends don't seem to take a lot of drugs. "They don't want their minds altered by introducing a substance that might lead them to question what they're doing," he says. The Yuppie attitude toward physical fitness emphasizes more utilitarian values than attracting the opposite sex. "Fitness is another way of signaling to people that you are serious," explains Joseph Barron, the 24-year-old banker who is president of New York's Definitions gym. Yuppies like to be taken seriously, even

about romance. Robert Elliot Young Jr., a 29-year-old public-relations executive with an Atlanta TV station, won't even screen a prospective girlfriend unless she's 25 or older, and has a job and an apartment; owning a car is a big plus. Gilbert met her second husband at a job interview in Los Angeles; the interview, unfortunately, was one of several that she had managed to schedule in during her honeymoon, so she had to go back home for a divorce. "I know it sounds shocking," she says, "but there are times in your life when you just have to go after what you want."

What Yuppies have discovered is nothing less than a new plane of consciousness, a state of Transcendental Acquisition, in which the perfection of their possessions enables them to rise above the messy turmoil of their emotional lives. They know that Beauty Is Truth, and Truth Is Beauty, which is why their most eloquent symbol is the Rolex watch, which has both. Of course, some Yuppies prefer to worship money in more traditional ways. One place they can do so is at the Yuppie church of the Rev. Terry Cole-Whittaker, the beautiful 44-year-old author of "How to Have More in a Have-Not World." BMW's crowd the parking lot of the San Diego hall from which Cole-Whittaker's message, "You can have it all—now," is broadcast to 19 cities in North America around the country. Her newsletter is sprinkled with testimonials from people who received miraculous intervention to help close a real estate deal or pay off their American Express bills.

Mobility: Even secular Yuppies frequently describe a kind of epiphany, a sudden realization that poverty might never live up to its romantic promise. To Amy Caplan, 30, the Eastern sales manager for CBS Radio, it came just weeks after she embarked on her longstanding dream of being a social worker, and found herself in the cheerless confines of a state home for severely retarded elderly men. She also got her first paycheck. "I realized that I would have to make a commitment to being poor to be a social worker," she says. "Eventually, I was able to shed the notion that to prove to everybody I was a good person I had to parade around as a good person by being a social worker." Ivan Krasner, one of the world's leading Yuppies—the \$250,000-a-year vice president of an equipment-leasing firm—saw the call of fate when his morning newspaper fell open to an ad seeking a "junior broker." At the time, he had a master's in philosophy and a job torturing trees into bonsai, a post of limited upward mobility even in Japan. To Liz Tankersley, 34, senior counsel for the Democratic staff of the Senate Commerce Committee, destiny beckoned from a refrigerator. The refrigerator belonged to friends she was visiting in Washington, and Tankersley, who came from a small east Texas town, stood dumbfounded at her first encounter with Brie cheese and pita bread. "I

saw things in the refrigerator the names of which I didn't know," she recalls now, nearly a decade later. "It was my first exposure to the expanded experiences of the planet."

How many lives have been shaped by that first taste of Brie: Brie ripened to the color of a week-old newspaper left on the radiator, brought just to the point at which the lasciviously bulging middle can be greedily scraped onto a cracker without getting any of the chalky white rind . . . a generation once notorious for discovering new ways to make itself feel good has, not surprisingly, found the habit hard to break. Yuppies are the first native American gourmet class since the robber barons ate themselves to death. But not even Diamond Jim Brady ever tasted the five kinds of mustard routinely stocked by Washington gourmets Norman and Raeanne Sandler, or a single kiwi fruit. Brady might have appreciated, though, the meal Lawrence Kent Woods II cooked for 10 couples this year, beginning with *escargot* in mushroom caps and ending with cheesecake and fresh blueberries—an event he modestly describes as "one of the hottest invitations in Atlanta," where he used to live. Woods is a classic Yuppie of the Southern-provincial style, which means, for instance, that he drives a shiny black Lincoln instead of a Volvo. One of his formative experiences was a college job at one of Atlanta's toniest wine importers. "When you see people come in and write a check for \$1,500 for four cases of wine, and two weeks later come back and do the same, there's a certain amount of incentive in watching that," he says. It led him, at 27, to his present eminence as one of the youngest regional directors of marketing in the nation's largest multisystem cable-TV operation. Unfortunately, the region is Birmingham, Ala., and he wondered if he could find the escargots to stuff into the mushroom caps; when he did, it led him to conclude that "Birmingham is much nicer than I expected."

Yuppies are still seeking the expanded experiences of the planet, only in a more systematic way, at gourmet supermarkets with the square footage of a K mart. A trip to Sutton Place Gourmet in Washington—popularly known as Sutton Pig—"is like an outing," says owner Jeffrey Cohen. Yuppies come armed with their favorite question: "What else do you have that's neat?" In Denver, a local grocery which had the good fortune to be situated between two Yuppie neighborhoods expanded this year into a \$2.5 million renovated warehouse, and immediately became chic enough to be a host at after-store-hours fund-raising parties. The keys to the Yuppie market, says Jane Dorsey of FBC Foods International, are attractive displays—"We have people buy things because they look good in the refrigerator, like Martinelli's apple juice"—and service—"This age group likes to be

educated about what they're eating." Price ranks last: "We carry a lot of stuff that's expensive as hell," she admits—"but people love it. Like raspberries. Are they really better than strawberries? They're real pricey, but we sell them like it's going out of style."

Busy: If raspberries are pricey at the market, they are pricier yet when the captain wheels a heaping bowlful to your table, spoons a few jewel like specimens into a crystal goblet and douses them with creme fraiche. Yuppies have created a whole new pastime of "competitive eating," which is not about quantity or speed, but status. "When I go to a new restaurant to do a review," says *The Washington Post's* food editor Phyllis Richman, "I inevitably find the same crowd of people have discovered it already." (She also can sense when that crowd is going to *stop* eating something. "When I saw white-chocolate mousse being served in a Hot Shoppe, I knew," she recalls.) Even equipped with Cuisinarts (preferably the Pro model) and microwave ovens (sometimes two), Yuppies are frequently too busy to cook their own dinners, or even breakfasts; Gilbert claims that she and her husband, Gary, have eaten at home only twice in the past year. By the same token, Yuppies don't always get out to the opera as much as they might like, with the result that the functions of nourishment and entertainment have become inextricably intertwined in their lives.

So central is the restaurant to the Yuppie life-style that a new cafe in a rundown neighborhood is often the very first sign of a Yuppie invasion. Like Barry Leach's oasis amid the warehouses and garages of Milwaukee's Walker's Point, which is full almost every night, although, as Leach puts it, "If 10 people other than winos actually live near here I'd be amazed." Yet how long can it be before hanging plants start appearing in the upper-story windows as well, and the real-estate section is full of ads for \$125,000 loft apartments with a view of the rail yards? The first occupants, if it runs true to course, may well be architects and artists with a need for the kind of interior space you can find only in old barns and old warehouses; but the advertising executive and the TV producer will soon follow, with the bankers and lawyers not far behind.

Gingerbread Mansions: It is happening right now in the Chicago neighborhood of Wicker Park, two miles from the already gentrified Near North Side and Lincoln Park. It has all the qualities that Yuppies dote on: architectural charm in its gingerbread Victorian mansions and gabled brick walk-ups, nearness to downtown, authentic ethnic bakeries and delicatessens just begging to be discovered, and the chance to make a killing by getting in early. "It's a lot of work, but it's all going to be worth it," says Michelle Deleon, a 26-year-old model who is restoring a three-story

building with her husband, Pablo, a graphic artist; "The only risk we're taking," Pablo adds, "is if something falls on our heads while we're doing all this work." One of the dangers of neighborhoods like that, of course, is that Yuppies sometimes love them to death, forcing out all the indigenous shops and residents that gave the place its charm in the first instance. As an example of what can happen when Yuppies get their teeth into a neighborhood, Lonn Frye, an early Wicker Park settler and community organizer, said he knew of cases in which Hispanic families were selling the stained-glass windows right out of their homes to Lincoln Park bar owners. "That," says Frye, "is the sort of thing we want to stop."

They are an earnest group, these Yuppies and they can accomplish a lot; that is, if they don't burn themselves out. You can, after all, stay on the fast track only so long, even in a \$125 pair of running shoes. (A good bone-shaking recession could make a lot of people change their minds in a hurry about the need to eat in the latest Bolivian restaurant.) Joanne Martin of the Stanford Business School predicts that the next decade will see "the biggest wave of midcareer crises this nation has ever seen"—and adds the somewhat ominous thought that "they're going to go into midcareer crisis with the same flamboyance with which they became hippies and Yuppies." But that seems to overlook the history of this generation, which is that they don't stay with anything long enough to be bored. Already, the people whose business it is to keep up with them—usually because they want to sell something—claim that a trend toward a simpler and more traditional life may soon take hold. Pasta & Cheese, the Yuppie Safeway, has begun selling pot pies, reports Carol Colman of Inferential Focus, an influential New York trend-spotting group. She infers that Yuppies may soon start abandoning their tony lofts and brownstone warrens for the very place they have spent the last two decades escaping: the suburbs.

You can visualize it now, can't you? Real estate values on Long Island will skyrocket, as Manhattan's trendy masses rush once again to be where the action is. They'll make a fetish of restoring the asbestos shingles on their tract houses, surrender weekends to scraping the rust from authentic backyard swing sets. They'll build brick barbecues as big as houses and sizzle steaks as big as hubcaps. Every so often they will sit back on their patios with a nice highball, and think back to those crazy '80s, and wonder: what really was the big deal about Brie, anyway?