

The Fourth Turning.

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A quarter century past its sell-by date. A force-fit to the past which has shown very little predictive power.

The authors have applied their template of four turnings within a saeculum – long lifetime – to five centuries of Anglo-American history. They have several names for the four turnings. Moreover, each of the four is given a unique name within its saeculum. Those that applied at the time of its 1998 publication were.

Turning-----	Unique name-----	Birth years
Prophet (Idealist) -----	Missionary -----	1865–1886
Nomad (Reactive) -----	Lost Generation -----	1886–1908
Hero (Civic) -----	G.I. Generation -----	1908–1929
Artist (Adaptive) -----	Silent Generation -----	1929–1946
Baby Boom -----	Prophet (Idealist) -----	1943–1960
Gen X, 13ers -----	Nomad (Reactive) -----	1961–1981
Millennials -----	--Hero (Civic) -----	1982–2004
Gen Z -----	Artist (Adaptive) -----	1997–

Here is their short characterization of the most recent of them:

Boomers-The indulged Prophet children of Highs, born in the aftermath of one Crisis, foment the next Crisis upon entering elderhood.

Gen X-The abandoned Nomad children of Awakenings become the pragmatic midlife managers of Crisis.

Millennials-The protected Hero children of Unravelings provide the powerful young-adult soldiers of Crisis.

Gen Z (to 2010)-The suffocated children of Crises come of age afterward as Artist youths.

These characterizations apply about as well as astrology. The fourth turning crisis predicted for 2005 has not yet come. The millennials were neither terribly protected, nor did they ever become heroes. They were the passive victims of many passing fads – whole language, self esteem, finding Ophelia.

The present crisis – if there is one - is being fomented by of all people my own Silent Generation, Biden and Pelosi. Forty years behind their time, it was absolutely not foreseen by this book.

What else did the authors miss?

Many changes are linear, or secular. Evolution has favored certain peoples in certain times. Egyptians, then Sumerians and Phoenicians at the end of the Bronze Age. Greeks and Romans in classical times. Arabs at the end of the first millennium. Byzantines then Ottomans. Chinese and Indian dynasties. Indirect evidence suggests that personal qualities such as intelligence rose in these populations only to crest and fall.

As Ed Dutton writes in [At Our Wits End](#), in the period covered by this book the average intelligence within the Anglo-American population fell by as much as fifteen points. If there was any periodicity to the fall, it is better explained by the much longer cycles of civilizations, described by Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* and Dutton's [The Past is a Future Country](#).

The authors miss a geographical dimension. A great many changes (divorce, drugs, the sexual revolution) have swept out of California, up and down the coasts, then through the US to Western Europe and the rest the world. As a case in point, though all four are millennials, my Ukrainian wife is of a much more conservative mindset than my grown children.

The authors make no mention of the ethnic changes in the United States. In particular, immigration around the beginning of the 20th century led to what Yuri Slezkine has called [The Jewish Century](#).

This highly intelligent group was at the forefront of the "long march through the institutions" that radically changed the intellectual life of America. There were "turnings" even within their numbers. First came the tailors and shopkeepers, then the movie and music industry titans, then the academics, then the anarchists cheering on BLM, gender dysphoria and the like. It appears likely to end with their reluctance to have children or raise them Jewish. Whatever the case, their cycle deserves mention, and is out of sync with the cycles that Howe and Strauss describe.

A related, apparently one-time factor is the overwhelming angst that the atom bomb lay upon the land as the late Silent Generation and early Boomers came of age. Mort Saul, Lenny Bruce, and Tom Lehrer made nihilists of us all. It deserved to be woven into the fabric of their argument.

The authors predicted a rebalance favoring community over individual values, a turnaround in the decline of American schools, improvement in relations between the races, greater involvement in government and improvement in our governance. All wishful thinking that has not come to pass.

Certain personalities appealed to the authors well enough to be quoted often and at length. Mario Cuomo and Bill Cosby turn out to have been unfortunate choices. William Raspberry, writing endlessly on race, is more of an apologist than an oracle. William Bennett, whose kid was in my son's Cub Scout Pack 666 meeting at the National Methodist Church, was hardly a man of the people. He always had an entourage of heavies keeping his distance from us hoi polloi. His Book of Virtues did not reflect the man I saw.

Strauss and Howe write that they did "community deeds under adult supervision." Yeah. Those millennial kids grew up to be snowflakes, traveling to expensive places (Nicaragua, Haiti and Peru, in my kids' cases) to do a minimum of work and cynically collect the community service ticky marks needed for graduation.

Of the millennials they wrote:

"In the 1990s educational buzzwords offer collaborative (rather than independent) learning for regular (rather than ability grouped) kids who must be taught core values do good works and meet standards with zero tolerance for misbehavior. The new 3Rs are rules, respect, and responsibility. **No! They were lazy and indulged.**

"Teen coupling will become less starkly physical and more romantic and friendly. **No! The hookup culture reigned.**

"Adoption or marriage will become more prevalent among those who become pregnant? No! **Neither one, by a long shot.**

"Binge drinking and teen gambling will decline? **No. And drug use rose.**

"This generation will build a reputation for meeting and beating adult expectations? Dr. Cook called on the class of 2000 to be more drug-free, smoke-free, and sexual disease-free high school graduates than their predecessors. President Bush summoned them to be graduate first in the world in mathematics and science achievement." **No. This was the "failure to launch" generation.**

As the father of three millennials, teacher of many more, and observer of the whole generation, I know how it was. This is not a "hero" generation by any stretch.

Below is a quote from the book predicting what we would see by today, 2023. I have bolded the predictions made by others that the authors pooh-poohed and predicted (*second paragraph below*) would not come to pass, but which seem very evident to me. In other words authors Strauss and Howe appear to have been

more wrong than right. In my opinion they were right only in predicting stronger government, more centralization and worse conditions for the elderly. Not a very good batting average.

And what about today? Forecasters are still making the same mistakes. Best-selling books envision a postmillennial America of **unrelenting individualism, social fragmentation**, and weakening government—a nation becoming ever more **diverse** and decentralized, its citizens inhabiting a **high-tech world of tightening global ties and loosening personal ones**, its **Web sites multiplying and its culture splintering**. We hear much talk about how elder life will improve and **child life deteriorate, how the rich will get richer and the poor poorer, and how today's kids will come of age with a huge youth crime wave**.

Don't bet on it. The rhythms of history suggest that none of those trends will last more than a few years into the new century. What will come afterward can be glimpsed by studying earlier Unraveling eras with similar generational constellations—and by inquiring into what happened next.

As Casey Stengel said, Predictions are hard to make, especially about the future. These authors had to stretch to make past generations fit their model. The forecasts they made based on their model are worthless. The book is an interesting read in that it forces the reader to reflect on the ways in which many disjoint elements of our past fit together. Thanks for that. But do they fit the fourth turning paradigm? Not very well.