

Generations Study Guide

Generations by Strauss and Howe

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Generations Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
People Moving Through Time.....	4
Life along the Generational Diagonal.....	5
Belonging to a Generation.....	6
The Four-Part Cycle.....	7
The Cycle in America.....	8
From Puritans to Millennials and Beyond.....	9
The Colonial Cycle.....	10
The Revolutionary Cycle, 1734-1825.....	13
The Civil War Cycle.....	16
The Great Power Cycle.....	19
The Millennial Cycle.....	22
The Past as Prologue.....	24
Completing the Millennial Cycle.....	25
The Beginning of History.....	28
Characters.....	29
Objects/Places.....	33
Themes.....	35
Style.....	37
Quotes.....	39
Topics for Discussion.....	43

Plot Summary

Passenger trains have a pre-determined route. As they proceed along this route, they stop at specific stations and then proceed to their final destination, by which time all passengers must disembark. This provides authors Strauss and Howe with the analogy to describe a continual and sequential progression of generations through American history. Passengers board the train as infants, proceeding to the next station of rising adulthood, then to the station of midlife and, finally, to the station of elderhood. The train completes its route when the elders have passed on. Behind this first train, another generation has boarded its own train, looking very different from the passengers of the train in front and from the next train to embark in another twenty-two years.

The hypothesis is clear: There are only four generational types—Idealist, Reactive, Civic and Adaptive, each with its own set of characteristics, behaviors, attitudes, and activities. These appear at approximately twenty-two year intervals, defining and re-defining the priorities of American society and participating in events in very specific ways. As four generations pass through time, a cycle is completed. America has completed four such cycles and is currently in its fifth and incomplete one. During each cycle, there are two social moments, a spiritual awakening, during which values are uprooted and revised, and a secular crisis, a ten-year period of upheaval having so far included a war. Based upon this generational march, Strauss and Howe are then able to make general predictions of the future track America will take as the current cycle completes itself.



People Moving Through Time

People Moving Through Time Summary and Analysis

There are four generational types that can be given more permanent labels - Idealist, Reactive, Civic and Adaptive. During times of crisis, Civics are moving into adulthood and Adaptives are children. During times of "spiritual awakening," Idealists are into adulthood and Reactives are children. When all four generations pass through their life cycles, a full generational cycle is completed. In American history, five complete generational cycles have occurred.

It also appears that each generational type alters its expression as its life cycle progresses. Idealists generally attack the senior generation's thought and institutions as it comes of age, then moves into a period of self-absorption during middle life and then into strict moralists as elders. Reactives become risk-takers but become much calmer and realistic as seniors. Civics are focused on establishing strong institutions and then are vehement defenders of those institutions as elders. Adaptives are more interested in conformity as adults but gradually embrace plurality as they age. Through the march of time, the activities and choices of these generational types, both good and bad, leave a heritage to the ensuing generations.

Life along the Generational Diagonal

Life along the Generational Diagonal Summary and Analysis

Cohort groups are not those that choose to be together, and they are permanent. They experience the same national and international events. This is what is known as "age location," - a generation that moves through time together. The groups develop common concepts of family, education, societal mores, etc. Moreover, the similarities of the same generational types throughout history are also evident.

If generations are placed on a graph, the vertical line holds the four generations in a constellation, the horizontal line holds the four twenty-two year periods. As each generation moves to the next level, it is like a train on a diagonal track, with a new generation coming on the track in a new train, and the oldest generation moving off the graph entirely. Thus, each generation moves diagonally, impacting three new generations, which enter the graph by the time it reaches elderhood.



Belonging to a Generation

Belonging to a Generation Summary and Analysis

A generation is defined as "a cohort group whose length approximates the span of a phase of life and whose boundaries are fixed by peer personality" (p.60). Length, for this purpose, means a phase of life of approximately twenty-two years. Thus:

Elderhood = ages 66-87, with a general role of being stewards, that is, mentors, values transmitters, and supervisors.

Midlife = 44-65, with primary role of leadership. These individuals are parents, teachers, and managers of organizations and institutions.

Rising Adulthood = 22-43, whose primary roles are work, starting families, serving under managers and testing traditional values.

Youth = 0-12, with a role of dependence. They are growing and learning, being protected and nurtured from rising adults and midlifers, as well as acquiring values.

The Four-Part Cycle

The Four-Part Cycle Summary and Analysis

Social moments in history are defined as eras, "typically lasting about a decade, when people perceive that historical events are radically altering their social environment" (p.71). There are two types of social moments. One is termed a secular crisis - an event or events which brings about changes in external behaviors and institutions. The other is a spiritual awakening, when internal values, attitudes, and behaviors are altered.

Superimposed onto this pattern are the actual characteristics of generational types - Idealist, Reactive, Civic and Adaptive, to complete a complex, but predictable, recurring cycle in the generational constellation. The cycles repeat themselves into four recurring patterns, which, as a whole, constitute the generational constellation:

1. AWAKENING ERA: Idealists are coming of age, and they set off a period of cultural growth and new ideals, challenging all traditional institutions and values.
2. INNER-DRIVEN ERA: Reactives are coming of age, and the dominant theme is individualism with ideals spread into different camps and secular problems put on hold.
3. CRISIS ERA: Civics are coming of age and unifying around a common cause or perceived peril.
4. OUTER-DRIVEN ERA: Adaptives are coming of age and there is conformity, stability and minor spiritual discontent.



The Cycle in America

The Cycle in America Summary and Analysis

The first generation in America is termed the "European Cohort Group" of 1584-1614—the Puritan Generation. Each cycle starts with an Idealist-type at the beginning and ends with an Adaptive group being born. The five cycles have been termed and described as follows:

1. The Colonial Cycle: Roughly 1584-1700. Puritan Idealists in elderhood; Cavalier Reactives as Midlifers; Glorious Civics as rising adults; Enlightenment Adaptives in childhood and emerging adulthood.
2. The Revolutionary Cycle: Roughly 1701-1791. Awakening Idealists in elderhood; Liberty Reactives as Midlifers; Republican Civics as Rising Adults; and Compromise Adaptives as children and emerging adults.
3. The Civil War Cycle: Roughly 1792-1859. Transcendental Idealists in elderhood; gilded Reactives in adulthood and midlife; and Progressive Adaptive as children and emerging adults. (Note: This cycle missed a Civic Generation)
4. The Great Power Cycle: Roughly 1860-1942. Missionary Idealists in elderhood; Lost Reactives as midlifers; G.I. Civics in emerging adulthood; Silent Adaptives in childhood and emerging adulthood.
5. The Millennial Cycle: Roughly 1943-present. The Boomer Idealist reaching elderhood; the Thirteenth Reactives as midlife adults; the Millennial Civics (perhaps) as Rising Adults; the last yet to be named.

From Puritans to Millennials and Beyond

From Puritans to Millennials and Beyond Summary and Analysis

How each generation is raised results in a common set of beliefs and attitudes toward their elders and society, and, as they grow into adulthood, to those generations that follow, including their own children. Because of the attitudes of parents and society toward children, each generation develops a respondent peer personality as follows:

Youth: Idealist children favor spiritual discovery and avoid teamwork; civics favor teamwork and practicality; reactives seek adventure and independence; adaptives are weak and drifting.

Rising Adulthood: Idealists tend to merge sex roles while civics draw clear distinctions between them; reactives tend to be risk-takers, while adaptives avoid risk and seek conformity.

Midlife: Idealists become increasingly pessimistic about their world, while civics possess increasing optimism; reactives tend to modify their behaviors, and adaptives veer away from conformity and become more active

Elderhood: Idealists focus on ethical principles; civics focus on practical achievements; reactives tend to live their senior years without as much comfort, while adaptives experience more comfort.

The Colonial Cycle

The Colonial Cycle Summary and Analysis

The four generations of the Colonial Cycle have been named Puritan, Cavalier, Glorious and Enlightened. In general, members of these groups were either born in Europe or America. Many immigrated to the American colonies as children and youth from a variety of socio/economic circumstances, which, of course, colored their experiences in America and determined how they viewed society and how they raised their own children.

Puritan Generation (born 1584-1614 - Idealist)

Youth and Coming of Age: As youth, this generation was born into a world of order, bustle and empire building. They were indulged and protected, beneficiaries of the good life. But, as adolescents, they began to see the world of their parents as Godless and immoral and rebelled against existing mores and institutions.

Rising Adulthood: Puritans were educated and driven. As Rising Adults, they built institutions still in existence today - Harvard University, towns surrounding a centered church, schools, printing presses, and a religiously-centered life.

Midlife: As midlife adults, an isolationism began to predominate. No longer seeking to change the entire world, Puritans looked inward, to protect and sustain their own communities. They became uncompromising and looked with disdain toward the young "Cavalier" generation moving up.

Elderhood: Puritans moved into their elder years understanding that crisis was upon them. Many of them were still alive to see the Restoration bring the Stuarts back to the throne of England and to witness grandchildren go off to King Philip's War against the Indians and participate in the Glorious Revolution against James II.

The Cavalier Generation (born 1615-1647 - Reactives)

Youth and Coming of Age: This generation was largely ignored by parents and elders, unless it was to be punished for wrongdoing or, if still in England, kidnapped and sold off into indenture in the tobacco fields of Maryland and Virginia. Many New England Cavaliers did go to Harvard, but also returned to England to escape theocratic strictness, returning to New England as mid-lifers.

Rising Adults: Occupations varied from silver smithing, trading and fur trapping, to farming. Land became the means by which Cavaliers could strike out on their own and get away from the towns of their elders. Some of them took to pirating and smuggling as a risky means to wealth. This was a group of risk-takers, whether it be on land or sea.



Midlife: Cavaliers faced a dark period for colonists. The Indian rebellion (King Philip's War of 1675) resulted in significant loss of life in New England; Bacon's Rebellion (Cavaliers vs. a Puritan governor in Virginia) was vicious and bloody; epidemics, the Glorious Revolution, and war with France all added to the discord.

Elderhood: This cohort-group witnessed continued rapid growth of the colonies and hoped that the worst was over. Those who survived lived through warfare, conflict and disease, and were old and "crusty." Only a few rose to wealth and prominence, and none was revered as a hero, though they had truly sacrificed to tame a wild land and protect their families.

The Glorious Generation (Born 1648-1673 - Civics)

Youth and Coming of Age: The Glorious were nurtured and protected by their Cavalier parents and told, by both parents and preachers, to do good works and promote societal health. They took this challenge quite seriously. In addition to the participation in Indian Wars and the Glorious Revolution, they ousted elder government and military leaders, assuming these positions at very young ages.

Rising Adults: Glorious members formed new political institutions and cleaned up the piracy and corruption of the Cavaliers. They developed community roots and promoted "peace and prosperity." Religion lost its mystical emotionalism in favor of reason.

Midlife: Glorious midlifers managed a colonial empire that was economically booming. Standards of living rose; everyone worked and enjoyed the fruits of prosperity; homes were larger, and private property rights replaced communal land ownership. By 1690, planters of the South began importing slaves to work their large tracts of land, and new laws were passed legalizing slavery as an institution, based upon race.

Elderhood: Old age arrived with the satisfaction of a job well done. America had grown to a million people and was clearly England's "jewel." Glorious members owned land and had saved; they had brought America, by sheer energy and hard work, to stability, wealth and reason, but they had difficulty understanding the younger Enlightenment generation, which seemed so willing to trade the material and the practical for values.

The Enlightenment Generation (Born 1674-1700 - Adaptive)

Youth and Coming of Age: As children and coming of agers, the generation was smothered and protected by their midlife Cavalier parents. By the late 1690's, however, they were criticized for being too "snooty" and effete, as well as for some rebellious behaviors, such as card-playing, tavern drinking and swearing.

Rising Adults: Coming from prosperous parents, Enlighteneds had the advantages of eventually inheriting wealth or marrying into it in an upwardly mobile society. Inwardly, something was missing, and they knew it. They embraced professionalism and humanitarianism and joined "societies" and "associations" without much call to action.



Midlife: All of a sudden, Enlighteneds were promoting riskier behaviors. They speculated on land, started new businesses, dabbled in poetry and philosophy and womanized to some degree. This was short-lived, however, as a new generation of youth, the Awakeners, had boarded their train condemning such behavior. Most Enlighteneds retreated in guilt.

Elderhood: As seniors, Enlighteneds felt ambivalent. They regretted their failures to make substantial marks on society and would gladly try to do so by mentoring and advising youngers, who would not let them. Above all, however, they favored peace and calm. Those still alive when the Revolution began still hoped for a compromise settlement that would avoid violence and bloodshed.

Enlighteneds were decent and accommodating but certainly dull. They attempted to maintain the status quo and did so somewhat successfully. Contributions include the notions of free press and due process, important components of the future Constitution.



The Revolutionary Cycle, 1734-1825

The Revolutionary Cycle, 1734-1825 Summary and Analysis

All four generations of the Revolutionary Cycle were on their trains at the beginning of the Revolutionary War. The Awakeners (Idealists) inspired the troops as elders (some actually led troops) and had shed their younger condemnation of their elders for a focus on civic duty, a concept preached to the generation below them. The Liberty Generation (Reactives, now mid-lifers) had scorn for their elders but had fought in the French and Indian War as foot soldiers and now attempted to instruct their youngers on the realities of war and destruction. They expected no praise or reward for their efforts and, indeed, received none as elders. The Republican Generation (Civics rising adults) fought in the trenches but saw the war as merely the beginning of a larger, more sustained drama, to include the establishment of a new democracy and the expansion of the country's territory. The Compromisers (Adaptive) were infants and young children, who merely observed the play of events and grew into adulthood with the understanding that their elders had "done it all" and their role was simply to accept and follow.

The Awakening Generation (Born 1701-1723 - Idealist)

Youth and Coming of Age: Awakeners were raised in relative affluence, protected from war and recipients of the pragmatic secular thought of their parents. The Great Awakening took place as they came of age and rebelled against the materialistic lifestyles of their elders, becoming religious zealots, taking over college campuses, holding huge open air revivals in the streets, and generally condemning the ungodly life of others.

Rising Adulthood: Awakeners left their towns with the purpose of "converting Indians, denouncing slavery, gathering separatist churches and founding communes" (p.161). They had no use for politics or governmental positions and saw the French and Indian War as "Armageddon."

Midlife: As Awakeners reached midlife adulthood, they began to turn the moral and spiritual principles outward, condemning the young liberals and expressing moral outrage at British treatment of the colonists. They urged unity among the colonies, spearheaded both the Boston Massacre and the Boston Tea Party, claiming that the bloodshed of war was preferable to evil tyranny.

Elderhood: Awakeners became the moral leaders of the Revolution, having turned their spiritual fury into political fury. Never, however, did they lose their moral fervor, maintaining that spiritual goodness was tantamount to life and slavery an abomination. They were crusaders, authors, and eventually statesmen who truly desired an America of holiness.



Liberty Generation (Born 1724-1741 - Reactive)

Youth and Coming of Age: As children, this generation was largely neglected, abandoned, and allowed to roam the streets at will. As teens, they were particularly unruly. Enlisting to fight the French was seen as a mutual benefit to parent/grandparents and to the youth as well. Unfortunately, this was not quite the adventure they thought it to be.

Rising Adulthood: By 1750, the Liberties were again back in the towns, engaged in all types of criminal activity. Those of Planter families simply partied away. Those who left for the frontier destroyed the balance of coexistence between settlers and Indians.

Midlife Adults: This rough and tumble cohort group saw clearly the dangers and the risks of the Revolution and yet were willing to fight to prevent British tyranny and to protect the rights of the individual. Although many were reaching 50, they nevertheless raised money to arm the troops, led them into battle, and taught guerrilla tactics to the foot soldiers. They finished the war exhausted, and many opposed the high ideals of the Constitution, claiming that idealized goals would not work.

Elderhood: The Liberties certainly participated in their new fledgling government, serving as the first two Presidents. Their values, however, were considered outdated, and society was losing its reverence for senior citizens, preferring to celebrate the young. Older Americans were seen as ineffective and dried up, not to be respected and loved, even though they had provided the leadership which resulted in a new country.

The Republican Generation (Born 1742-1766 - Civic)

Youth and Coming of Age: Adult treatment of children had changed drastically. Now, youth were protected, nurtured, well-fed, and educated in America as opposed to England. The curriculum was secular and practical. Before the age of 21, these kids were in the Revolutionary War, exhibiting amazing leadership. Once the war ended, they jumped into politics at local, state, and then national levels.

Rising Adulthood: Taking over government positions, the Republicans strove to build a national consciousness and to quell all vestiges of the Liberty behaviors. They pushed progress and definitive roles for men and women, ensuring that women remained at home to guard the family values.

Midlife: Under the Republican control of Washington, America increased its size five-fold. Prosperity rules, though there were rumblings of trouble. Slavery grew; Indians were castigated and decimated; disorder reared its head on the frontier. Then came the War of 1812, and the disgrace of a number of military commanders, along with the embarrassment of the White House burning. Many retired from government service, their invincibility shattered.

Elderhood: Republican influence began to wane as statesmen such as Jefferson, Madison and Monroe reached their senior years. They marveled at what they had accomplished and saw the "Great Experiment" of American democracy as a model for



the world. And the generation worried about the future, for young idealists were afoot, talking of passion and feelings, rather than reason and logic.

The Compromise Generation (Born 1767-1791 - Adaptive)

Youth and Coming of Age: children of this generation were raised to assume proper roles and to be "serviceable and obedient patriots" (p.186). They moved into adulthood without rebellion, without fervor, and without discord - a quiet conforming cohort-group. Instead, males proved their "manliness" by dominating women and slaves and by "romantic" dueling.

Rising Adulthood: Compromisers in their twenties and thirties looked to careers and professionalism during a time of prosperity for the country. Their paths were clear - dutiful, working husbands and fathers, feminine and subservient wives and mothers.

Midlife: Faced with a younger generation of idealists, compromisers attempted to become more attuned to the popular will through compromise and attempts to reach conciliatory agreements between very divergent groups. The result was to be damned by their juniors as ineffective and weak.

Elderhood: The politics of accommodation had not worked, and this generation entered their final years dismayed by the increasing fanaticism dividing the North and the South. Many lived to see the secession of the first Southern states. Scorned by both sides, the Compromisers brought their train to its final destination with fear about how history would treat them.

The Civil War Cycle

The Civil War Cycle Summary and Analysis

The Civil War Cycle was unique in that it had only three generations, skipping the Civic and thus having two recessive cohort groups in a row, and experiencing two social moments, the Transcendental Awakening (1822-1837) and the secular crisis of the Civil War (1857-1865).

1. Transcendental Awakening (1822-1837): This was a period of renewed interest in and excitement about religion and social progress. It spawned abolitionist organizations and introduction of new religions, and the beginnings of organized labor groups.
2. Civil War Crisis (1857-1865): Beginning with the Dred Scott Case, this secular crisis lasted until the end of the Civil War. Because there was no true triumph, existing generations were all damaged by the event.

The Transcendental Generation (Born 1792-1821 - Idealist)

Youth and Coming of Age: Transcendental children were nurtured and indulged. Many had private tutors who avoided the harsh tactics of previous educators. Early in their teenage years, they rebelled against fathers who were too reserved and organized, preferring quiet contemplation, reading and "solitude." Elders were attacked as ungodly and materialistic, as Transcendentals flocked to new religions and anti-slavery organizations.

Rising Adulthood: Focused on non-conformity, individualism and spiritual growth, Transcendentals flocked to Utopian compounds. Life became a serious quest for personal spiritual fulfillment, in both the North and South.

Midlife: The 1850's was a turbulent time for America, and the chasm between North and South widened. Eventually, the Transcendentals of both sides sent their youth off to war, believing their side to be right and just. Despite the devastation, both Transcendental governments refused to back down.

Elderhood: Transcendentals passed into their senior years with few regrets and content with their principles. The Gilded generation, however, swiftly voted them out of Congress and the Presidency. The aged Southern Transcendentals had no regrets either and mentored younger citizenry in anti-Negro activities.

The legacy of the Transcendentals was mixed. They aspired to lofty spiritual heights, created great literature and fought for emancipation. They did, however, cause horrific devastation to America, the pain of which would be felt for generations to come. Many of their lofty causes stagnated in reaction to the havoc wrought, as Gilded reacted to their own slaughter.



The Gilded Generation (Born 1822-1842 - Reactive)

Youth and Coming of Age: Gilders raised themselves. The poor became rowdy teens on risky frontiersmen. Many saw no need for college and pursued, instead, money. They worked in factories, fought Indians or went off to California. They were largely self-dependent and nonspiritual. When the Civil War broke out, many on both sides volunteered, but large protests to the draft were quite common.

Rising Adulthood: The initial years of the Civil War were more adventure than pain, but the latter years caused them to re-think the principles of their elders. "Afterward, while 55 year-olds declaimed over principle, 35 year-olds saw mostly ruined farms, starving widows, diseased prisoners, dead bodies and amputated limbs" (p.213). Eventually, northern Gilders tore away at Reconstruction and pushed their elders out of political office.

Midlife: Still focused on material success, middle-aged Gilders became Wall Street financiers and railroad entrepreneurs. Their Presidents were ineffective, and political power became more concentrated in state and local governments. As they moved closer to elderhood, they moved toward stricter moral standards, endorsing temperance and self-control.

Elderhood: Gilded elders were neither revered nor respected. Youngers thought them useless, using such terms as "Old Geezers" and "Old Fogies." Indeed, the Progressive William Osler, in writing about this generation, stressed, "the incalculable benefits" of "a peaceful departure by chloroform" (p.214).

The Gilders were neglected, used and abused. They grew into self-serving materialists whose economic growth and development benefited later generations, but whose laissez-faire policies negatively impacted large segments of future society.

The Progressive Generation (Born 1843-1859 - Adaptive)

Youth and Coming of Age: Education became compulsory, and schools were rigid and strict for Progressive youth in New England. The Civil War brought even more smothering from mothers who wanted to protect their children from the raging horror. This cohort-group came of age wishing to please their parents, adopting sound moral values and entering the mainstream world of work or college with cooperation and moderation.

Rising Adulthood: The industrial age demanded technicians and professionals, and the Progressives responded appropriately. Retailers flourished as well. Trade unions formed as did farmers' associations, all to promote general welfare and humane treatment of everyone. Finally, when the depression of the 1890's hit, they took more definitive action and installed Progressives in government positions at all levels.

Midlife: Progressives worked for child labor laws, the procedures of initiative and referendum, anti-trust regulations, and government commissions to regulate potential abuse by capitalists. Women became more active in feminist causes.

Elderhood: This cohort group entered elderhood during the "Roaring Twenties," the first generation to benefit from private pension funds. They embraced younger generations and attempted to emulate their zeal, though not too successfully. They reached their final station with a reputation for being a bit of a "muddled" generation.



The Great Power Cycle

The Great Power Cycle Summary and Analysis

The Great Power Cycle will forever be known for World War II and the atomic bomb. In fact, there were two social moments during this four-generation cycle of Missionaries (Idealists), Lost (Reactive), G.I. (Civic), and Silent (Adaptive).

The Missionary Generation (Born 1860-1882 - Idealist)

Youth and Coming of Age: Missionaries were a nurtured and indulged children and far better educated than their parents. Because fathers worked outside the home in factories, businesses and corporations, the major parental influence in their lives were the mothers. Religion became an activity for Sunday only, and the climate was hope and salvation, not damnation.

Rising Adulthood: As they moved into their thirties and forties, Missionaries tempered their views and actions, but continued to try to alter society. Their views, however, were disparate. Social Gospel was important to urban Missionaries, while White supremacy was the value of Southerners.

Midlife: Fearing that the younger "Lose" would lead a corrupt life, Missionaries began to press for legal validation of their principles. With gusto, they went after the "Lose," with hard prison sentences, deportation for "Bolshevik leanings," and Prohibition.

Elderhood: Elder Missionaries did not desert their earlier principles but accepted the end to Prohibition and Roosevelt's New Deal and acted as senior advisers in both domestic and foreign affairs. Many, in fact, remained in government positions long into their senior years.

The Missionaries supported and promoted important American ideals and principles. When they went to excess, younger generations were present to curb them (e.g. repeal of Prohibition). Moreover, it was this generation that propelled America into a position of world leadership, espousing values of humanism, democracy, and ethical leadership.

Lost Generation (Born 1883-1900 - Reactive)

Youth and Coming of Age: The "Lost" grew up unsupervised amid gangs, crime, bars, and drugs. Largely neglected, they entered the workforce early and spent what they earned. These kids did not find school relevant in a society that seemed to be unrealistically bent on ideals which had no basis in their reality.

Rising Adulthood: The twenties saw more than flappers, speakeasies, and loose morals. It was also a time of jazz from the Black community, strange new art, supermarkets, frozen food, shopping centers and automats, to support a new, faster-paced lifestyle.



Midlife: Sudden poverty stopped the Lost dead in their tracks - "a collective midlife hangover" (p.257). They gathered in Hoovervilles and stood in soup lines. Some joined the military in response to a call for preparedness, as Hitler armed Germany, but most were too disheartened from their World War I experience to jump into another military tour.

Elderhood: Pragmatic, cautious, and opposed to risk-taking, the Lost generation moved through their senior years. President Eisenhower played golf and proposed very little that was new. The goal was to show America as a respectable nation, whose people lead respectable lives.

G.I. Generation (Born 1901-1924 - Civic)

Youth and Coming of Age: Missionaries were determined to nurture a new generation of children who would be protected and healthy, growing up on vitamins, pasteurized milk and scout clubs. Schooling echoed ethics and citizenship and kept kids in classrooms much longer, promoting appropriate conformist behavior.

Rising Adulthood: Returning from the war, GI's were met with ticker-tape parades and legislation that allowed further education, good employment, and home ownership. They settle into a world of conformity, including a suburban home, a good job, women at home and television programs extolling the virtues of their lifestyles.

Midlife: The election of 1960 heralded the ascendancy of the GI generation to national control. Clearly, nothing was unachievable now - this was the generation of "thinker-doers."

Elderhood: GI Civics are living their senior years with activity and professed happiness, listening to their "swing" music and collecting pensions and social security. Those who are financially able, enjoy leisure activities; those who are not live less happily perhaps, but are certainly better off than the Missionaries at the same age.

The Silent Generation (Born 1925-1942 - Adaptive)

Youth and Coming of Age: children were over-protected during the Depression; every aspect of their youth were controlled by parents who adhered to advice of contemporary experts. After World War II, these teens became a "forgotten" cohort-group, as heroic soldiers were welcomed and bestowed with government gifts and a new generation of post-war babies were born and indulged.

Rising Adulthood:

As thirty year-olds, the Silents began to challenge the status quo, questioning the "exceptionality" of America, as Russia closed the gap in science and technology. Civil rights leaders and liberal Whites pressed the GI's for reform in the name of fairness; right-wing students formed the Young Americans for Freedom to challenge "big government."

Midlife: As midlifers, Silents began to ask what they had missed during their younger years, as they viewed the Boomers with some envy. Accordingly, Black activism took a decidedly more war-like approach, and entertainers began to form song lyrics expressing a more Boomer point of view (e.g. Bob Dylan and Paul Simon).

Approaching Elderhood: As Silents approach their senior years (as of 1991), they remain sandwiched between still ruling GI's and Boomers, who are ready and anxious to assume significant positions of power. As local state and national officials, however, they have managed to make America a more just and kind society.



The Millennial Cycle

The Millennial Cycle Summary and Analysis

As of the publication of this book (1991), three generations of the Millennial Cycle have boarded their trains - the Boomers, 13ers, and Millennials. Up until 1991, the cycle has been moderately peaceful and economically healthy. There are anxieties, however, to include a growing sense of lack of political strength, as growth in individualism and cultural fragmentation threaten common purpose, the challenges of an increasingly shrinking world, and the continued damage to our environment.

The Millennial Cycle has produced one social moment of spiritual awakening but has not yet had its secular crisis. The spiritual, or Boom, awakening came in the late 1960's, with riots, Vietnam protests, and general adherence to a counterculture of love.

Boom Generation (Born 1943-1960 - Idealist)

Boomers grew up as indulged darlings and were taught to be guided by principles. The principles they chose, however, were not those their elders had taught. They attacked most societal institutions with vigor, living within themselves rather than as parts of existing ones.

Youth and Coming of Age: Boomer children were raised on what many claimed to be "permissive" households, following the advice of Dr. Spock. Middle-class children, at least, grew up confident and assured that all of their needs would be met by mom or scientists, who found cures for diseases and developed household appliances that eased the tedium of housework, and televisions to provide entertainment right in their own home. To lower-class kids, poverty, poor schools, and crime were clearly visible, and their experiences created later anger.

Rising Adulthood: Boomers did not look to corporate America for their jobs nor did they accept the canned, frozen and fat food diet of their elders. Their energy was focused on physical fitness, natural foods, and nature itself. Preferring still a more isolated, independent lifestyle, they steered toward small businesses, home offices, and, barring that, insisted upon meaningful careers.

Thirteenth Generation (Born 1961-1981 - Reactive)

Youth and Coming of Age: 13er youngsters were largely considered a burden to their parents, who went off to work and play, indulging their own needs. Telling themselves that divorce would actually be better for their children, they split, re-married, brought home boyfriends, and "blended" families with no guilt.

Approaching Rising Adulthood: The ethic of 13er's appears to be one of survival. They are a splintered cohort-group of diverse financial circumstance, ethnicities, and sub-cultures. One they they share, however, is a realistic pessimism about the future.



Rising, adult 13er's are more apolitical, more pragmatic, and, in their own analysis, less emotionally attached to societal institutions. They have not seen participation in the political process as valuable, but do tend toward individual acts of kindness and generosity, believing that good deeds matter.

Millennial Generation: (Born 1982 on - Civic)

Born to both boomers and young adults 13er's, the Millennial generation is called such as society targets the year 2000 as the time by which societal ills will be crushed. The goals for this new generation include a 90% high school completion rate, child labor law enforcement, a smoke-free groups of adolescents, and a cadre of civic-minded conformists, all working together.



The Past as Prologue

The Past as Prologue Summary and Analysis

What a generational cycle view of American history shows is "when and why different generations apply different standards in working toward progress" (p.349). And what each generation views as progress actually keeps us balanced, so that materialistic, outward-looking cohort groups are followed by those seeking spiritual and inner growth. Thus, the cycles can be seen as spirals, with attitudes, values, and social moments repeating themselves as Americans continue to move forward.

Constellational eras are defined by which generation is in each position of the cycle, and each era type has a typical "mood." To establish a pattern or "mood," it is necessary to strip away the institutions and chance events, and get down to the social indicators that truly define generalized moods.

An Awakening Era occurs with youth reactives, rising adult Idealists, midlife Adapters, and elder Civics. During this time, the focus is on inner life. The arts are innovative, and people experiment with new lifestyles. It is difficult to rally the nation behind a common goal. Wars are uncommon but, when they do occur, are not overwhelmingly supported (e.g., Vietnam).

Inner-Driven Eras contain Civic youth, Reactive rising adults, Idealist midlifers, and Adaptive elders. There is personal satisfaction with idealists who now have a much lower tolerance for the risky behaviors of the Reactives. While personal well-being is sought, secular problems continue to be ignored. The family becomes a bit more stable and there is a movement toward greater protection of children.

A Crisis era puts Adaptives in youth, Civics in rising adulthood, Reactives in midlife and Idealists in elderhood. There is a growing sense of impending danger and a mobilization for the common good. Wars which require personal sacrifice and consensus are likely, efficiently managed by Civics and fought by angry Reactives.

The Outer-Driven Era sees youthful Idealists, rising adult Adaptives, midlife Civics and Elder Reactives. With the secular crisis over, there is an overriding sense of community and conformity, and there is widespread secular and scientific progress, as well as an emphasis on institution building. Family solidarity begins to weaken as adults start the shift toward less protection and structure.



Completing the Millennial Cycle

Completing the Millennial Cycle Summary and Analysis

By 2003, America will reach its Inner-Driven peak. As surviving G.I.'s will be out of the picture, Silents completely in elderhood, Boomers in midlife, 13er's in rising adulthood and Millennials all born. This will replicate the 1920's, when an Idealist midlife generation clashed with their Reactive youngsters. Idealist Boomers will attack the self-centered 13er's with vengeance, and 13er's will strike back, accusing their elders of being unrealistic. Elder Silents will watch with discouragement as Boomers accuse them of being too soft. Movement into the Crisis Era will begin about 2010 with growing concern about secular problems. Silents will continue to contend that the meanness of the Boomers is unwarranted and that fairness must be the goal. 13er's are beginning to tire of the "party" and looking for a more responsible path to follow. Millennials are in college promoting friendship and cooperation.

The Millennial Cycle will come to a close when the next generation of Idealists board their train, and the remaining Boomers pass out of the power and influence position, beyond elderhood. The trend toward longer life spans, moreover, may alter the generational constellations, so that, in the future, five generations may be in play, as a cohort-group passes beyond elderhood and remains alert and active.

The current G.I. generation is passing beyond elderhood and looking toward Silents and Boomers to offer continued support. Much earlier, it was assumed that the resources would be available, but this is not the case. Beyond the Boomers, families became smaller, leading to a smaller work force to contribute to elder financial needs. At the same time, elders are living longer, and normal inflation continues.

The Silent generation is in elderhood, as of 1991, and enter the phase of their lives with an affluence never before seen but appear to be only moderately able to enjoy it. Typical of Adaptives, they feel guilt about their affluence and the fact that the 13er kids will never achieve the same financial health nor live up to the high standards of the Boomers.

As is the case with all Idealist generations, Boomers will move into midlife having gone from hippies to yuppies, and will now assume the role of moralizing intolerant and demanding adults. Starting with local communities, they will work their way up through local state and national public institutions. Two factors will bear scrutiny as Boomers get well into midlife. First, will be their attitude toward self-aging. If large numbers of Boomers focus on remaining "young," they could upset the important balance between themselves and younger 13ers, and the response to a crisis could be less effective. Second, there is the threat of the split between the more evangelical and the "new age" factions.



Boomers will reach elderhood during the Crisis Era of 2004-2025, and will respond with typical righteous fury to the precipitating event. Whatever the outcome, the Boomer sense of morality will resonate in the minds of all youngsters who go through the crisis. When the crisis comes, Boomers will respond in a frenzy, blaming the mistakes of the previous era's leadership and pressing it into a global concern, attempting to define how other nations must behave and supporting any government which is right, no matter what type of government it may be. American government as well will change, becoming far more authoritarian and tightening the reins on individual rights.

Projecting the 13er's

Some Boomers will still be alive when the next wave of Idealists reach coming of age and rising adulthood. They will most likely applaud the midlife Millennials (Civics), their children, who are "doing and building." But as well, they will look with nostalgia at the young Idealists, re-living their own "rebellion" vicariously. As early adults, 13er's will be alienated and angry and express these emotions in risky behaviors and artistic works that their elders find incomprehensible. Diverse ethnicity and urban poverty and crime will take its toll on 13er's in the form of hate crimes, gangs, drugs, illegitimate births and unemployment. Once the early risk-taking is over, 13er's will take solace in their families and protect their children, many marrying late and resigning themselves to two-income necessity. As the 13er's pass into midlife, the terrible tensions with Boomers will ease, and they will both begin to realize the essential symbiotic relationship that exists between them. Boomers are the leaders who will temper their behaviors, and 13er's are the realists who will temper Boomer idealism. By the age of fifty, Reactives will have "come into their own," ready to tackle task responsibilities, holding to their realistic approach to life and exhibiting kindness and generosity. They will excel in business and military leadership positions; they will accept the secular crisis and prove to be worthy assumers of responsibility for resolving it. Their challenge will be "reigning in" the Boomers, whose zeal could push the nation to catastrophe. The credit for triumph, however, will go to Boomers; conversely, the blame for failure will fall on the Reactives.

13er's will enter elderhood in an Outer-Driven Era. As seniors, they will be neglected, both by Boomers, who have already severely reduced their retirement benefits, and Silent parents, who have little to leave them. Their solace (and pleasure) will be in seeing their youngsters do well and in assuming national leadership roles. In these roles, they will reduce debt and focus on secular institutions of progress.

Projecting the Millennials

Millennials are merely children (1991), and cyclical history tells us that this is the coming Civic generation, cooperative, team-spirited builders, who work hard in school and have much-improved behavior compared to their elder Reactives Protected by parents, and regulated by Boomers, there will be clear lines of right and wrong, and far less flexibility in responding to criminal behaviors.

As rising adults, Civics will experience the predicted secular crisis and endure any resultant hardships well. They will be disciplined and duty-bound, reaping praise and

reward from their Boomer elders. The Millennials, however, will be around for a much longer time than previous Civic generations, a huge number remaining alive to see the turn of the twenty-second century, and, from a late twentieth-century perspective, one can only imagine what amazing things and events this generation shall experience.

The Beginning of History

The Beginning of History Summary and Analysis

Any American alive today shares an intimate relationship with his or her same generational types of the past and the future. Each has shared and will share the same behaviors and attitudes, the same fears and child-rearing approaches, the same criticism and praise of other generational types. Each has seen and will see a spiritual awakening and a secular crisis in the same constellational position and has and will respond in the same characteristic manner.

The cyclical march of generations offers one important concept or lesson, and this is that each cohort group makes critical contributions to human development that keep a culture balanced over the long term.



Characters

Idealists

The idealist cohort-group is born as a secular crisis is ending. As children, they are nurtured and indulged, the fawns of Civics and Reactives, who have seen the crisis through and who want to protect these youngsters from the reality of the world, particularly its painful parts. They approach coming-of-age with stark criticism of their elders, particularly the institutions that the elders have built, a criticism which can often result in behaviors, attitudes and activities which shock the adult world. Idealists, however, are looking for spiritual self-discovery. Elders fear they have been far too permissive, but the criticism and rebellion launch an important social movement—a Spiritual Awakening. As they pass into the emerging adulthood phase of their lives, Idealists become uncharacteristically narcissistic, developing an attitude which is rather selfish and activities which promote their own well-being over the well-being of society as a whole. There is some breaking into factions at this point, as individualism is preferred; some enter professions that allow them to function independently (attorneys, doctors, teachers, etc), while others strike out on their own as entrepreneurs. By midlife, this group is beginning to be a bit more cohesive around moral principles, but again fragments between traditional spiritual principles of established religions or "new age" spiritual principles, which are seen as a bit aberrant. One group generally dominates, and, as Idealists move into elderhood, they become the moral force of society, condemning behaviors and attitudes they once trumpeted as youth. The most famous Idealist groups during American history thus far are probably the Transcendentalists during the Civil War Cycle and the current Boomers of the Millennial Cycle.

Reactives

Reactives are "forgotten children," neglected and not nurtured in childhood by Idealists and Reactives. They raise themselves, particularly those in poverty, or are given lessons in the "real world" by authors, teachers, and, more recently, television and movie writers and producers. Because of this early lifestyle, Reactives seek independence and adventure at a much earlier age than their same-age peers of other generations. In rising adulthood, Reactives become staunch risk-takers and unconventional artists, feeling alienated from a society that views them as "bad" and worthless. The clash with elders is particularly intense with the Idealists who are moving into a period of much more moralistic focus. As they move into midlife, however, Reactives mellow somewhat, becoming more pragmatic about their situation, and begin to focus on the importance of families and, particularly, their children. As well, they begin to show important skills, such as identifying needs, moving quickly to solve problems, and being objective when necessary. They prove to be excellent leaders in the secular crisis, which occurs during their midlife period. In war, Reactives become the officers who lead their younger Civics into battle, and do so quite successfully. They will also achieve great works in the business world, as pragmatic and dynamic executives,



leading youngsters in scientific and technological progress. If the secular crisis ends in triumph, Reactives will not reap the acclaim and rewards; those will go to the Idealist elders who provided the moral leadership. If the secular crisis ends badly, however, Reactives will be blamed. Reactive seniors will not be respected or revered, but again neglected. Their focus will be on their children, who they see doing well and in leadership roles, which will focus on secular progress. Easily recognizable individuals of this generational type are the generals of the Civil War and World War II.

Civics

Civic children grow up after a spiritual awakening, highly protected and nurtured. The focus on their upbringing is cooperation, conformity, community service. Societal mores are governed by Idealist elders, so there are clear lines of right and wrong, and far less flexibility toward mischievous and criminal behavior. While there are certainly differences between the early-born and last-wavers of this generation, they will generally be more cohesive and unified relative to common goals and actions. As rising adults, they will rally around the leadership of Reactives during a secular crisis, and become good "foot soldiers," no matter what type of secular crisis is faced. They will enthusiastically support a war declared by Idealists and lead by Reactives; they will work tirelessly to solve any economic crisis, and they will solve environmental problems through science. As midlife adults, they will begin the tasks of building or revamping secular institutions, assuming leadership roles in business and government. Civics are appreciated by all other generations, perceived as smart "doers"; their senior years will continue to be active and busy, sustaining what they have built and achieved. Unfortunately, there is a rising group of Idealists coming to attack all that they have achieved, and they pass away worried that they have not left enduring endowments to their nation. Politician Franklin Roosevelt and John Kennedy were Civics.

Adaptives

Adaptives can best be described as the "pleasers." They grow up in an America in crisis, one that has no consideration for sensitivity, pluralism, or sense of fairness. Because there is a crisis, these children are protected and almost suffocated in adult attempts to shield them from the ugliness of the real world. They move into rising adulthood avoiding risky behavior, and conforming in an attempt to emulate their elders. Moving into midlife, Adaptives begin to focus on conciliation and arbitration, as a spiritual awakening era dawns. They search for negotiated solutions, seeing levels of gray rather than the black and white conflicts between younger Idealists and older Civics. They stress sensitivity, fair-play and compromise as the elder years approach, and stress conciliation and reduction of conflict. Often, they are criticized as procrastinators, unwilling to meet issues head-on with strong stands. As elders, they generally experience a loss of influence and less respect. Adaptives include leaders such as Woodrow Wilson and Walter Mondale.



Dominant Generations

Dominant generations include the Idealists and the Civics, those generations that are generally characterized by strong-willed, active Americans. Although each focuses on very different activity (Idealists on spiritual values and Civics on secular institutions), both are considered the stronger of the four. Idealists are formidable proponents of a new spiritual movement, while Civics are focused on building the best secular society possible.

Recessive Generations

These two generations, Reactives and Adaptives, are placed in the generational lineup to respond in some way to the behaviors, attitudes and activities of the two dominant generations. Reactives dismiss and turn from their Idealist elders, becoming the "bad" kids but providing the "can do" muscle during secular crises which Idealists precipitate. Adaptives respond to civic elders by attempting to emulate them, but, due to their overprotection as adults, come to rely on compromise and conciliation as answers to conflict and issues.

Generation

For purposes of this text, a generation refers to a cohort-group, born in the same era, approximately a twenty-two year period, and moving through life phases together, developing a "peer personality" and engaged in activities which result from this personality. There are four types of generations in America, each with its own set of attitudes, priorities, and actions.

First and Last Wavers

As children of a specific generation are born over a twenty-two year period, those born during the first part of the phase are named "first-wavers" and those born in the latter half of the phase, "last-wavers." While the generation initially divides into factions, one of these factions usually prevails, and the peer personality is thus formed.

William Strauss

Co-author of the book, *Generations*, Strauss is a graduate of Harvard and has served as an attorney, White House staffer, and adjunct professor at Notre Dame. In addition to his academic works, Strauss is also the director of the Capitol Steps, a satiric theatrical group.

Neil Howe

Co-author of the book, *Generations*, Howe is a frequent writer on current issues and holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from Yale University. Among other activities, he has been the editor of a magazine and a research director for a national foundation.



Objects/Places

Youth and Coming of Age

That period of life from birth to age 21, during which children are nurtured and protected or ignored and neglected, dependent upon the generational type of their parents and grandparents.

Rising Adulthood

That period of life roughly between ages 22-44, when a cohort-group begins to be a "force" in the generational cycle, asserting their dominant peer personality.

Midlife

That period of life between 45 and 65, during which a generational group assumes leadership roles and begins to influence younger generations.

Elderhood

That period of life from 65 until death, during which leadership roles are still assumed in some measure and a generation begins to look toward mentoring and leaving endowments for future generations.

Spiritual Awakening

An era in each generational cycle during which dominant Idealists rebel against the status quo and launch an aggressive push toward new values and ethical behavior.

Secular Crisis

An era in each generational cycle during which the nation faces a major military, economic, or environmental situation/crisis and during which Idealists provide the impetus, and Reactives lead Civics in a unified attack/resolution.

Inner-Driven Era

A period of time during which the focus is on attitudes, values, and morality.



Outer-Driven Era

A period during which American society is more focused on external institutions and stability.

Awakening Era

An approximate 10-year period of time during which there is a lashing out at society's institutions and attitudes and a call for a new moral era.

Crisis Era

Occurring once about each 86 years, an approximately 10-year period in which America faces and resolves a major crisis.

Peer Personality

The common characteristics shared by each generational type.

Age Location

The place at which a generation sits relative to other generations at a given time in history.



Themes

Generational Cycles Recur Throughout American History

American society is comprised, at any one time, of four generational types - Idealist, Reactive Civic and Adaptive - each with its own nurturing experience, attitudes, beliefs, activities and responses to events. These generations move through their own life cycles, and as one passes away (after its elder years), that same generational type is then born again. Each generational type develops a dominant "peer personality" as it moves through youth, early adulthood, middle age and elderhood, responding to the personalities of their elders, and leaving their own "stamp" for younger generations.

Each complete cycle is approximately eighty-six years in length, the result of four generational types passing through their life cycles. As a generational type passes through elderhood, it looks back upon its "stamp," moreover, in the hope that it has left some endowment for posterity but realizing that coming generations will certainly alter their institutions and values. Because these cycles follow the same recurrent pattern, we can analyze their progression throughout history, thus gaining an understanding of the advent and conclusion of events and societal issues, and, as well, use these patterns to predict generalized future societal trends and events.

Generations move up through four phases of their life cycle - youth and coming of age, rising adulthood, midlife adults, and elders, each step taking approximately twenty-two years. Whenever this "generational constellation" moves up a notch, a new generation is born, and dominant behaviors and attitudes change. This continual movement is healthy because it allows society to continually "balance" itself, focusing on the secular or the spiritual, upon retooling existing institutions or building entirely new ones. The cycle, then, allows a type of pendulum swing, which maintains, over time, progress with some continuity.

There is a Correlation Between Recurring Generational Cycles

Major events throughout our history, with only one exception, have occurred during specific generational lineups. Secular crises have included the Glorious Revolution, the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the combined Depression/World War II event. All but the Civil War occurred during the same constellational lineup, with Idealists entering elderhood and Civics coming of age. The Civil War was early, and, because of this, ended badly. Likewise, the five spiritual awakening eras, beginning with the Puritans in the 1630's, began as Civics were entering elderhood and Idealists were moving into rising adulthood. This correlation of lineups and events allows at least a generalized prediction of the times and types of social moments to occur in the future.



Further, this insight allows a far more extensive and in-depth merger of two separate approaches to a study of history. One approach studies generations as separate entities without analysis of the order of generations and their critical interrelationships. By adding the second approach, that of analyzing the age location of each generation, and thus the impact of generational lineup, historical patterns become far more clear.

Generations Have Unique Qualities, Positive and Negative

History has both good and bad endings, and generations, like individuals, leave legacies of both varieties for posterity. Our ancestors have provided significant endowments in the form of democratic institutions, successful victories over tyrants, railroads, highways, technology, and threats. As well, we have inherited exploitation of minorities and the poor, extermination of Indians, Japanese internment camps and horrific economic conditions. Unfortunately, in the midst of their building, revamping, risk-taking, procrastinations, and values conflicts, individual Americans do not often think about the impact of their behaviors on the progress of civilization. Collectively, however, generations do consider their endowments, for better or worse, and their leaders speak to the importance of these legacies. Each generation begins its endowment activity as it enters rising adulthood, attempting to either fulfill or challenge the perceived endowments of the elders. By midlife, a generation is making its own contributions; by elderhood, it is pushing to finalize endowment activity, but often finds a neglect of these contributions by younger mid-lifers. For example, the elder Adaptives of the late 1930's and early 1940's, who had established a legacy of social justice and pluralism, saw that legacy erode as America moved toward war, curtailing a number of freedoms and interning Japanese-Americans once the war began.

Based upon its peer personality, a generation looks upon appropriate endowments quite subjectively. Civics are proud to leave new institutions and technology, Idealists, improved values and religion, Reactives, liberty and triumph over adversity, and Adaptives, social justice and pluralism. As in other facets of the generational cycle, this continual shifts ensures a continuing balance, so that no one generational endowment remains dominant over any other.



Style

Perspective

As with all appropriate research, Strauss and Howe have begun with an hypothesis that there are only four generational types of Americans, and that these types are born in an orderly, sequential pattern throughout American history. From this perspective, they proceed to march through history, naming and describing each of eighteen generations within the context of the events and moods of the historical periods in which they grew from children to senior citizens.

Certainly, the authors have made an excellent case in support of their hypothesis because the research is so thorough and the evidence so carefully and accurately presented. As well, they attempt to merge other theoretical perspectives into their own, in order to demonstrate that their perspective virtually "ties them all together." Aberrations, that is, events that arrive either too early or too late, are explained as the occasional exceptions related to human behavior, which cannot be scientifically controlled.

Although the evidence is compelling, and repeated in almost exhausting ways throughout the text, a student of history might object to the subordination of some events when they do not "fit" the proposed patterns. The Vietnam War, for example, is not classified as a secular crisis, though it certainly fit many aspects of their definition of one. Nonetheless, the work is insightful, academically fit, and provides a fascinating means by which one may make general predictions about America's future.

Tone

It is often difficult to establish a mood or tone in a text that is as academic in approach as this one. A first reading, in fact, leaves the student somewhat emotionless, having been bombarded and a bit overwhelmed with data and detail. As well, an initial impression of fatalistic predestination is apparent, as the authors provide the proof that each generational type will proceed to impact society in the same manner that its ancestral types have. It appears that there is little that can be accomplished to derail this progression, moreover, because the behaviors, attitudes, and activities of each generational type are preordained, no matter what the chronological context may be.

A second reading of significant portions, certainly the sections related to our future, however, provide fodder for both optimism and pessimism. The authors appear to be making a plea for moderation as these new generations of the Millennial cycle face grueling political, economic, social, and environmental challenges, all with the potential to destroy an America that has progressed so far. Irresponsible, untempered activity of Idealists without enough moderating influence of pragmatic Reactives could be fatal. On the other hand, if we are to look at our history as the great teaching tool for our future,

and proceed with caution and temperance into that future, we can look with optimism toward the balance of generational shifts which will sustain us.

Structure

As an academic text, focused solely on American history, the organizational structure of *Generations* is necessarily chronological, but thematic in its approach as well. The authors begin by stating their hypothesis quite laboriously and forcefully, using the preface and the first six chapters to do so. At this point, the reader has been given enough data to understand the bulk of the text, which is the thorough description, chapter by chapter, of the four completed generational cycles and the one as yet incomplete cycle in which we currently live. The third section of the book focuses on the future, as the authors attempt to make generalized predictions of the social moments (spiritual awakening and secular crisis) still to come and of the challenges that future generations may face if America is to survive and thrive. At this point, the text becomes more theoretical, because, as the authors clearly state, no one can predict with accuracy the specific nature of the social moments, or the impact of an elder generation which now lives and remains influential far beyond earlier ones. Indeed, it is now presumed that perhaps five generations may exist in future generational constellations. Part of the effectiveness of the work lies in the continual reference to past generations, as each cycle is presented, in order to demonstrate the truly common characteristics of each generational cohort-group over time. While this necessarily lengthens the work, it is a necessary organizational factor if one is to grasp the full meaning of the book's themes.



Quotes

"Because the peer personality of each generational type shows new manifestations in each phase of life, and because it is determined by the constellation into which it is born (a pattern that is forever shifting), the ongoing interplay of peer personalities gives history a dynamic quality. How children are raised affects how they later parent. How students are taught affects how they later teach. How youths come of age shapes their later exercise of leadership - which, in turn, substantially defines the coming-of-age experiences of others. This push and pull between generations moves synchronously with other alternating patterns in American history: for example, between periods of public action and private introspection, secularism and spiritualism, cultural suffocation and liberation, fragmentation and consensus, overprotective and underprotective nurture of children." (p. 32-33)

"Almost by design, America's present-day social institutions accentuate the power of age location. The more tightly age-bracketed the social experience, the more pronounced the ultimate cohort identity. From kindergarten through high school, almost all pupils in any one classroom belong to the same birthyear. In nonschool activities like Little League and scouting, children participate with two or three-year cohort groups seldom exceeding five years in length. As modern adults age into midlife, their friendships typically widen into longer birthyear zones. But their cohort bonds remain strong. Most retain contact with "Big Chill" circles of like-aged friends, with (or against) whom they measure progress at each phase of life. High school and college reunions remind alumni of their cohort bonds - how each class remains, in important respects, different from those a few years younger or older. Over the last few decades, cohorts have even been retiring together in their early to mid-sixties. Like all status designations (including sex, race, and profession), cohort-group membership forges a sense of collective identity and reinforces a common personality.(p. 49)

An important coincidence lies at the heart of American history, a coincidence familiar to most historians. The timespans separating the four pivotal events of American history almost exactly match. Exactly eighty-five years passed between the first Confederate shot on Fort Sumter and Pearl Harbor Day. Back up the story, and note that eighty-five years also passed between Fort Sumter and the Declaration of Independence. (Or, as President Lincoln noted, "Four score and seven years" separate the first Fourth of July from the Battle of Gettysburg.) Back up still further, and note that another eighty-seven years passed between the Anglo-American Glorious Revolution of 1689 and Independence Day. Preceding the Glorious Revolution by a slightly longer period - ninety-nine years - was the epochal victory of the English Navy over the Spanish Armada.(p.88)

Unlike an episode of secular crisis, when a real-world threat triggers disciplined collective action and sudden institutional change, an awakening is driven by sudden value changes and a society-wide effort to recapture a feeling of spiritual authenticity. The focus is not on institutions, but on the spirit. And the moment is not essentially public or collective (though it may spark crowds, hysteria, and violence), but personal



and individual. An awakening brings to rising-adult Idealists what Robert Bellah has called "a common set of moral understandings about good and bad, right and wrong, in the realm of individual and social action." During the Reformation and Puritan Awakenings, these new "understandings" arose almost entirely in terms of religious dogma. Ever since, the focus has shifted by degrees toward the radical "isms" of the modern age. The underlying psychology of the awakening conversion, however, has remained much the same through subsequent centuries." (p. 93)

"Unlike other cycle theorists, we make no claim that our generational cycle can predict which party will win that election, or whether a stock crash or war will occur in this or that year. Cycles that aim at such accuracy never work over time. Sooner or later, they don't even come close, because the historical observer who obsesses over accuracy typically refuses to examine the underlying (though imprecise) dynamics of social causation. The person who tries to predict when each ocean wave will break on the shore gets nowhere, but the person who thinks about high and low tides - well, he just might come up with a theory of considerable predictive power. We liken our theory more to the tide analogy. That is why we phrase our conclusions about the past (and visions of the future) not in terms of specific years, but in terms of constellational eras and generational phases of life." (pp. 106-07)

"Without question, Americans today have the Missionaries to thank for lifting America to its present-day status as a great global power. America still lives by the visions they glimpsed. In foreign policy, the very term 'foreign aid' was invented by elder Missionaries (Herbert Hoover and Herbert Lehman), perhaps recalling those classmates on Mount Hermon who first set their sights on 'The Evangelization of the World in This Generation.' At home, the term 'Great Society' was similarly popularized by elder Missionaries (James Truslow Adams and Fiorello La Guardia), perhaps recalling that youthful image of Bryan - 'the bard and prophet of them all,' wrote Vachel Lindsay - who claimed that 'a nation can be born in a day if the ideals of the people can be changed.' In 1948 at age 83, art critic Bernard Berenson defined 'culture' as 'the effort to build a House of Life...that humanistic society which under the name of Paradise, Elysium, Heaven, City of God, Millennium, has been the craving of all good men these last four thousand years or more.' Franklin Roosevelt had something similar in mind when he described his 'Four Freedoms' just nine months before leading America to war. 'That is no vision of a distant millennium,' he explained. 'It is definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation.'" (p. 246)

"In 1949, Fortune closed its report on the new crop of college graduates by asking whether they will be 'so tractable and harmonious as to be incapable, twenty or thirty years hence, of making provocative decisions?' Today, forty years have passed, and many have since rephrased that question in the present tense. The nation still looks to what Greene terms "fiftysomethings" to comment and mediate, but not to lead. Americans of all ages, Silent included, have repeatedly turned back to G.I.s for a steady hand, and forward to Boomers for new values. And so the Silent have arrived on the brink of elderhood - still feeling 'out of it,' observes Benita Eisler, 'sitting ducks for having our bluff called.' Although they continue to wait for a turn at the top, they notice how younger leaders have appropriated their call to 'conscience' and older leaders their



'kinder and gentler' rhetoric. Having given so much to others, the Silent are beginning to wonder whether their own generation may yet have something new to offer. Or whether instead their greatest contributions have already been made." (pp. 283-84)

"As Boomers begin entering midlife, a schism has emerged between mostly fortyish modernists and New Agers at one edge, and mostly thirtyish traditionalists and evangelicals at the other. Each side refuses to compromise on matters of principle - believing, like anti-abortionists Bill Tickel, that 'it's just easier to have blanket absolutes.' This values clash reflects an important bipolarity between the generation's first and last waves, whose differences have been widely noted by pollsters and marketers. At one end, the 'victory' and 'hello' babies of the middle to late 1940s were born almost entirely to G.I.s not long after the peak years of parental protectiveness. At the other, the babies of the conformist late 1950s were parented mostly by Silent just as that protectiveness was giving way, and came of age at the point of maximum freedom (some would say chaos) in adolescent life. To date, last-wave Boomers have fared worse than first-wavers in educational aptitude, financial security, and self-destructive behavior; first-wave Boomers have fared worse in marital stability - partly because they married earlier. (G.I. cohorts showed precisely the opposite trends, from first wave to last.) But measured by inner-life standards, the two ends of the Boom feel equally serene." (p. 304)

"Thirteeners, not Boomers, were America's true 'children of the 1960s.' And, especially, the 1970s. An awakening era that seemed euphoric to young adults was, to them, a nightmare of self-immersed parents, disintegrating homes, schools with conflicting missions, confused leaders, a culture shifting from G to R ratings, new public-health dangers, and a 'Me Decade' economy that tipped toward the organized old and away from the voiceless young. 'Grow up fast' was the adult message. That they did, graduating early to 'young adult' realism in literature and film, and turning into what American Demographics Magazine has termed 'proto-adults' in their early teens (where, two decades earlier, Boomers had lingered in 'post-adolescence' well into their twenties). At every phase of life, 13ers have encountered a world of more punishing consequence than anything their Silent or Boom elders ever knew. Consider the 13ers' matter-of-fact approach to sexuality, yet another trait that has brought adult complaint. First-wavers were just reaching puberty when adults were emitting highly charged sexual signals in all directions. At the time, sex education was unabashedly value-neutral, empty houses provided easy trysting spots, and their parents were, as Ellen Goodman describes them, 'equally uncomfortable with notions that sex is evil and sex is groovy.' With adults having removed attitudinal barriers against the libido, 13ers have begun re-erecting age-old defense mechanism: platonic relationships, group dating, and a youth culture (reminiscent of Lost-era street life) in which kids watch out for their own safety and for the physical integrity of their own circle of friends. Unlike Boomers, 13ers are coming of age knowing where the youth euphoria of the late 1960s actually led. As Redlands College's Kim Blum puts it, 'the sexual revolution is over, and everybody lost.'" (pp.321-22)

"The Millennials show every sign of being a generation of trends - toward improved education and health care, strengthening families, more adult affection and protection,



and a rising sense that youths need a national mission. A two-decade animus against children, of course, cannot reverse itself overnight. Polls in the mid-1980s still showed adults more self- than child-focused in behavior, though less so than a decade earlier. Divorce and abortion rates are stuck at high levels, if down a bit from their early-1980s peak. Thirteeners are delaying parenthood even more than Boomers at like age, but are showing a greater commitment to making marriages last. Sex, violence, and alcohol and cigarette advertising in the media remain accessible to small children, though the proportion of R-rated films has been falling and the standards for PG ratings have stiffened. American elementary schools are still underfunded in comparison with those of other developed nations, but tax revolts against their fiscal base are gradually cooling off. Massive federal budget deficits continue, albeit with more evidence of adult guilt over the burdens they will someday impose on today's children. Overall, the arguments of those who stress more values, more structure, and more protection in the child's world are strengthening, from one year to the next, while the arguments of those who disagree are losing ground." (p. 341)

"'For ourselves and our posterity.' The Preamble to the United States Constitution includes these five words, a summons to treat the present and future as partners in human destiny. When reading (or writing) history, we naturally digress from remembrances of others to imagine future remembrances of ourselves. Just as we are all heirs of ancestors we mostly admire, so too are we all ancestors to heirs whose admiration we should wish to earn. Reflecting on the story of America's eighteen generations, we realize that all of us alive today were once 'posterity' in the dim vision of times gone by. And, perhaps, we will remind ourselves of our sacred obligation to act as kindly toward the future as ancestral generations once did toward us." (p. 427)

"Controlling the Boom may indeed emerge as the 13ers' most fateful life cycle mission. This will be the generation best able to deflect any Boomer drift to wars and apocalyptic visions. In an age of rising social intolerance, the very incorrigibility of midlife 13ers will at times be a national blessing. The task of preventing disaster may well fall to life- and liberty-loving 50 year olds, pockmarked by hard experience, to tell zealous Boomers to 'get real,' to find canner solutions that pose fewer risks or that do less to erode personal liberty. A 13er may someday be the general or Presidential adviser who prevents some righteous old Aquarian from 'loosing the fateful lightning' and turning the world's lights out." (p. 416)



Topics for Discussion

The authors do not identify World War I or the Vietnam War as secular crises. What is their reasoning for this? Do you agree with their reasoning, or do you believe that they are tweaking historical events in order to make history fit their hypotheses? Support your opinion.

The Civil War Cycle skipped a Civic generation. If there had been a Civic generation, what do you think would have changed about Reconstruction, given the basic characteristics of this cohort group?

Other historians have hypothesized that all of history, including American history, can be seen as the pendulum swing/conflict between human desire for freedom or security. Can this hypothesis be reconciled with the hypotheses of the authors of *Generations*? If so, how? If not, why?

The "Adaptive" generation of the Great Power Cycle produced some of the most powerful civil rights activists in our history. How could these individuals have been part of a generational type which is characterized by conformity and the desire to maintain institutions of the former Civic generation?

Given the authors' proposed pattern of social moments, when should the next secular crisis occur? If the war in Iraq is seen as a secular crisis, how does this affect the basic hypotheses of the authors? If this is a true secular crisis and it came too early, what are the potential outcomes, according to the authors?

If the authors' views of historical generational patterns and social moments are accepted, and if they act as a guide to foretell future events, what might be the context in which the next "spiritual awakening" occurs? What might be the results of such a "spiritual awakening?"

According to the authors, the Millennial generation will become significantly better educated than other cohort-groups in its constellation and effectively close the achievement gap in comparison to Asians and Europeans. As well, it will become a strong Civic cohort-group, committed to re-defining and building American institutions. Does this appear to be the case? Support your position with specific factual information.