

# **The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy Study Guide**

**The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy by Strauss and Howe**

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# Plot Summary

The Fourth Turning is a book that initially appears to concern history and prophecy. The book gives a history of various social movements and uses the structure of these movements to make predictions about the social upheavals of the next three decades. However, it is also a work of sociology and philosophy. The authors believe that human history is divided into cycles or 'saeculum' and they attempt to show that intellectuals in fields as wide-ranging as history, literature, economics and biology have discovered these cyclical patterns. The 'saeculum' vary in length depending on culture, but in the Anglo-American World appear to occur every eighty to one-hundred years. The saeculum are divided into four cycles (division into four cycles is characteristic of most historical divisions of time). Each age is called a 'turning.' The first turning is a 'high,' a period of cultural unity and achievement, the second turning an 'awakening' where the values of the old order are challenged. The third turning is an 'unraveling' during which institutions weaken from the challenge of the second turning. And the fourth turning is a 'crisis' where a new order replaces the old order.

Each saeculum is composed of an interaction between four generations, each of whom has a personality archetype. The archetypes are - prophets, nomads, heroes and artists. Prophets are indulged children, self-centered crusaders as young adults, focus on moral growth as mid-lifers and become wise as elders. Nomads are unprotected as children, grow up as alienated adults, 'mellow' in midlife as they become pragmatic and they become hardened 'post-crisis' elders. Heroes grow up protected in reaction to the failure by society to protect the child nomads; they are team players during a crisis, and acquire energy and hubris in mid-life. They then become great elders who the younger generations fight to overthrow. Finally, the artists are overprotected during the crisis, are sensitive as young adults, become free yet indecisive mid-lifers and become 'empathic' elders. These cycles of generations occur during a saeculum, with one of each generation being born, passing through life, and dying between crises.

These two elements - generational archetypes and turnings - function together to form a cyclical pattern of social change. The authors believe that currently the 'GI generation' or the World War II generation are the elder heroes of the 1990s (the book was written in 1997), the 'Silent generation' (those born during the depression and WWII), are the artists of our time, the Baby Boomers the prophets, the 13ers or 'Generation X' the nomads, and the Millenials (post-1982 children) are the new heroes. This age-ordering of generations occurs only during a third turning, which foreshadows the crisis period of a fourth turning.

The book has three parts. The first outlines the book's major concepts and encourages the reader to understand time as cyclical rather than linear. The second part illustrates the most recent first, second and third turnings in American history. It makes some general observations about the historical structures of fourth turnings and some predictions about how the next fourth turning will unfold. In the third part of the book, the authors teach us how to prepare for the fourth turning.



# Chapter 1, Winter Comes Again

## Chapter 1, Winter Comes Again Summary and Analysis

The Fourth Turning is a book that "turns history into prophecy." It argues that American history is cyclical, coming in four seasons or periods. Today (1997) we feel as if the country is unraveling. People are uneasy, aimless and adrift. The authors suggest that this is because we are moving into a new period of American history. There are four 'turnings' in the life of each people across its history. The First Turning is a 'high' - the people of this generation strengthen civic institutions and work together. New civic institutions replace the old ones and old values are abandoned. The Second Turning is an 'awakening' or an era of spiritual rebirth. The civic order, which was once widely lauded, comes under attack from a new system of values. The Third Turning is an 'unraveling'. Individualism grows strong and the time is downcast. Institutions weaken as the new value system replaces the old value system. Finally, the Fourth Turning is a 'crisis' or saecular revolution. The new value system takes over and the cycle begins anew.

In American History we can see many of these cycles. The most recent cycle or 'saeculum,' the first turning is located in the post-World-War II period of the 'liberal consensus' during the Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. The second turning was the 'consciousness revolution' of the 1960s and '70s and the 'tax revolts' of the early-80s. The third turning are the current 'culture wars' or the battle that began with Reagan in order to fight off the new value system of the '60s and '70s. This is a period of drift and decay which American society now endures. The authors believe that between 2005 and 2025 we will experience a fourth turning that can go in either a good or bad direction.

Next the authors argue that these cycles can be found further back in previous eras of American history, the 1760s (which led to the American Revolution), the 1850s (by the Civil War), the 1920s (by the Great Depression and World War II). We are heading for the next great change.

The authors believe that we have lost the proper philosophy of time. In history, we have seen three great philosophies of time: chaotic time, cyclical time and linear time. In chaotic time, 'history has no path', and in 'cyclical time' history repeats itself with only temporary progress. Finally, linear time is the conception of time that sees gradual progress extending forever into the future. Americans are stuck in a conception of linear time and must recover the insights of cyclical time. Linear time brings hope but it 'cuts us off from the eternal'. We never expect catastrophe. Many Americans now believe in chaotic time, rather than linear time, but cyclical time is the correct conception. Generations must be understood as represented within each stage of the cycle. The lost generation (born between 1883-1900) was composed of 'cautionary individualists.' They were replaced by the 'G.I. generation' (born between 1901-1924) who brought the

United States to global dominance. The 'Silent Generation' (1925-1942) merely fine-tuned civic institutions. The 'Boom' generation (1943-1960) believed in the primacy of the self and believed the moral order empty and Generation X or 'the 13th generation' (1961-1981) is a culture of malaise and self-discovery. We are looking towards another generation.

These generations correlate to certain personality archetypes. 'Prophet' generations are born during an era's 'high,' whereas a 'nomad' generation is born during an era's 'awakening'. A 'hero' generation is born during the 'unraveling' and an 'artist' generation is born during a 'crisis'. Generation X is the nomad generation, the 'Millennials' are the hero generation; the Boomers are the 'prophet' generation, whereas the 'Silent generation' are the artists.



# Chapter 2, Seasons of Time

## Chapter 2, Seasons of Time Summary and Analysis

The second chapter delineates the idea of 'seasons of time,' illustrating cycles in history that Americans might learn more about what is in store for them. The chapter opens with the story of the tragic fate of the Etruscans, who knew that history was cyclical and were replaced by the Roman Empire, which was in turn replaced by Medieval Christianity. The Romans were fascinated by the Etruscan idea of the 'saeculum' or periodic cycle. This idea can be found within American culture as well. Americans continue to acknowledge a Christian cycle of death and rebirth every year. Throughout all major cultures and religious historical cycles are acknowledged. These cycles differ but follow several rules. First cycles are circular, which represent their 'perfect and unbreakable' repetition. Second, these circles are comprised of phases, practically always four of them. Third, at some point on each circle there is a 'great moment of discontinuity.' The circles require rebirth through recreation, and these circles repeat themselves over times of similar lengths.

This 'saeculum' or periodic history has occurred throughout Western history. There are cycles of war in the works of many historians. Arnold Toynbee's cycle was one of 'war and peace' and includes four cycles with an overture at the beginning: The Italian Wars, Philip II's Imperial Wars, the War of Spanish Succession, the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars and World Wars I and II. The authors review historical theories of this sort among other historians as well. Each view contains the idea of a 'crisis' which marks the death of one saeculum and the birth of the next.

Revitalizations are thought to be divided into saeculum. Here are five 'revitalization movements': The Protestant Reformation, The Puritan Awakening, The Pietist Awakening, The Evangelical-Utopian Awakening, and the New Age Awakening. The Anglo-American world has crises which include The Wars of the Roses crisis, the Armada Crisis, the Glorious Revolution crisis, the American Revolution crisis, the Civil War crisis, and the Great Depression and World War II crisis. Saeculum in the United States are fairly regular, lasting 80 to 100 years.

# Chapter 3, Seasons of Life

## Chapter 3, Seasons of Life Summary and Analysis

Seasons not only occur across generations, they occur within generations as well. Each generation repeats this four part cycle and causes it to be reflected in future generations. Some cultures have invented the concept of 'acting according to your season'. Generations have behaviors appropriate to their place in history.

The authors begin illustrating their thesis with the general cycle of life: childhood, young adulthood, midlife, elderhood and late elderhood. Children are supposed to grow, young adults are supposed to be vital, midlifers wield power, elders lead and transfer values and late elders are dependent on society and remember the past. Generations, when they pass through a crisis, produce a kind of institutional memory that is reflected through the next cycle of generations. The authors illustrate this with the case of World War II. World War II led to a kind of cultural confidence that was attacked by the youth of the 1960s and '70s.

A question arises: if these cycles are so clearly observable history, why don't people recognize them more often? In response, the authors point out that many have recognized these historical cycles, particularly with the invention of the concept of the generation. Many in the past 150 years have sought to refine this concept of a generation. We can identify generations by determining the length of a generation, looking for a common location in history and place. One can look for common beliefs and behaviors among that generation and look to its perceived membership within a certain generation. The authors illustrate the discovery of generations with the 1992 media discovery of 'Generation X.' Usually when the generation reaches young adulthood, they come to be recognized. We have new generations every 17 to 24 years. Each generation experiences each period of the cycle at different but tightly correlated stages of development. If a first generation experiences young adulthood with an awakening, then the second will experience childhood as an awakening. The third will come of age during a crisis, and so on. The generational archetypes (prophet, nomad, hero and artist) are reflected by this ordering that they experience. Thus, generations form 'constellations' of a sort. The authors further illustrated this point with various historical archetypal systems of thought. They discuss, to give one example, the old classification of bodily fluids into the four humors and Jung's classification system.

Generations often define themselves against the shadow of the generation two steps prior to them. Prophets understand themselves against Heroes, for instance. Thus the cycle of archetypes is formed between opposing generations in the circle. The Millennial generation will define itself in opposition to the Boom Generation, Generation X against the G.I. Generation. History reflects this fact as well. The authors draw on examples from the Book of Exodus and Greek Epic literature. These cycles of generations have the most causal force in present-day America than almost any other time in history.



# Chapter 4, Cycles of History

## Chapter 4, Cycles of History Summary and Analysis

The chapter opens by arguing that Mt. Rushmore represents the four archetypes - nomad, hero, artist and prophet. The fact that they are together on Mt. Rushmore is no coincidence, because the four archetypes function together to produce civilizations and historical cycles.

Chapter 4 explains the American saecular cycle. It arises in the beginning of Anglo-American modernity, with a clash of powerful personalities in the Wars of the Roses and the Protestant Reformation. Heroes and Prophets produced American Civilization in five generations - Shakespeaere's Elizabethan generation, John Winthrop's Puritan generation, "King" Carter's Glorious generation, Jonathan Edwards's Awakening generation and Thomas Jefferson's Republican generation. These represent the generational cycles of 1600, 1640, 1690, 1740 and 1790 respectively. American civilization after its founding has representatives of the archetypes among its famous figures. Jonathan Edwards and William Lloyd Garrison were prophets; John Adams and Dwight Eisenhower were nomads. Jefferson and Reagan were heroes, and Jackson, Woodrow Wilson and Colin Powell are artists.

The authors next describe the interaction between turnings and archetypes. In the first turning - the high - the elder prophets die, nomads become elders, heroes are in their mid-life, artists are young adults and new prophets are born. The second turning - the awakening - occurs when the elder nomads die, the heroes become elders, artists entire their midlife and the new nomads are born. The third turning - the unraveling - occurs when the elder heroes die, the artists become elders, the prophets are mid-life, nomads enter adulthood and the new heroes are born. Finally, in the fourth turning, the elder artists die, the prophets become elders, the nomads are midlife, the heroes are young adults and the new artists are born. The most recent first turning is reflected in the confidence of the post-World-War-II period, the '60s generation, the second turning, the culture wars, the third turning and the authors predict that economic and institutional collapse will occur in the fourth turning.

There are various 'rhythms' in American history that reflect the turnings - these are variations in 'social indicators'. Examples of social indicators include wage growth, social mobility, political activism, birth rates, and marriage age and so on. The authors demonstrate the rhythms of the turnings within politics, foreign affairs, the economy, family and society, population, social disorder and culture. They give examples of intellectuals in each field that recognize these rhythms. However, these rhythms raise a concern: if societies have rhythms, what are we to say about free will and the role of accidents in history? The saeculum, the authors respond, does not govern events, only a people's reaction to these events, and these reactions allow the rhythms to continue. The rhythms do not represent determinism, but they do make some events highly probable.



The chapter ends with a review of all the concepts that have been introduced so far, represented with a series of historical charts.



# Chapter 5, Gray Champions

## Chapter 5, Gray Champions Summary and Analysis

Chapter 5 is only a few short pages. It introduces us to the concept of a 'gray champion' or an elder prophet who marks a period of great peril. Gray champions bring the Fourth Turning to a climax. When a time period has elder prophets, midlife nomads, young adult heroes and child artists, it will produce revolutionary change. We should expect the coming of a new gray champion. The third turning has brought improvements in living standards, but we should expect things to decline. The authors then transition to the next part of the book by looking towards prophecy.



# Chapter 6, The First Turning, American High (1946-1964)

## Chapter 6, The First Turning, American High (1946-1964) Summary and Analysis

Chapter 6 begins Part II of the book, which is more prophetic and less explanatory than Part I. It describes in detail the patterns of the saeculum in the first turning, the period ranging between the end of World War II and the Kennedy Assassination. Present-day Americans have an image of this time as a 'high' due to old, classic television and 'nostalgia' movies which we can still recall. This age was an age of American dominance and confidence in their institutions. The American family was beyond question and generated the suburban lifestyle. Americans, due to their confidence, became conformists, materialistic and developed a philistine culture.

There are many first turnings in Anglo-American history - Tudor Renaissance (1487-1517), Merrie England (1594-1621), Augustan Age of Empire (1704-1727), Era of Good Feelings (1794-1822), Reconstruction and Gilded Age (1865-1886) and American High (1945-1963). These eras represent the construction and ossification of a new social order. Crisis ends and the dust settles. The archetypal patterns run as follows: the old prophets die and the aging nomads become the new elders. The effect is to slow social change, due to the nomads' exhaustion from revolutionary change. The heroes become mid-life and are upbeat, dreaming of constructing a bright future. The artists become young adults, helping the heroes in aid during social calm, and new prophets are born, but are spoiled by the indulgence of their parents.

In this period the 'Lost' generation became elders. They had been hit hard by the two world wars and the Depression. They stayed 'gritty but solid' during this time but were worn down. They aimed at security of social life, not great change. By the Kennedy assassination, most of them were nowhere to be found. The GI generation entered mid-life and were the dominant power elite. No heroes in history controlled so much of the world. Growing up in the 1920s, the heroes had a sense of cooperation, but were exceedingly obedient to an authority they trusted. They were not terribly spiritual but focused on the things of this world. The Silent generation became young adults, those who were born in the '30s and '40s. They got the GI bill and they were the workers under the power elite. They looked for secure jobs in large corporations, donning the 'gray flannel suit.' They were not terribly alienated from their institutions at this time. The Baby Boomers are children in this age and are represented by 'Dennis the Menace.' Due to the ossified social structures they grew up in, they were spoiled and lacked discipline. However, they had excellent educations and were eagerly accepted by older generations.

The second turning came about at Kennedy's assassination. Things never looked brighter at his inauguration; but the nomads began to resist the heroes expanding



grasp, the heroes were full of hubris and eager for grand change, the artists were tiring of being helpmates and wished to reduce social ossification. The child prophets felt spiritually empty from being spoiled.



# Chapter 7, The Second Turning, Consciousness Revolution (1964-1984)

## Chapter 7, The Second Turning, Consciousness Revolution (1964-1984) Summary and Analysis

The Second Turning tells the story of the 1960s and '70s. The '60s and '70s were a time of great social upheaval, which represents archetypal shift into new social roles. This period brought enormous economic growth and led many to stop focusing on material accumulation. Americans sought to become more humanitarian. The Moon Landing and Woodstock brought out our spiritual searching - both outside and inside of ourselves. Youth violence exploded, the Vietnam War was a disaster but by the end of Reagan's first term, this was all over.

Second Turnings date back to the Protestant Reformation and consist in spiritual renewal. They include the Protestant Reformation (1517-1542), the Puritan Awakening (1621-1649), the Great Awakening (1727-1746), the Transcendental Awakening (1822-1844), the Third Great Awakening (1886-1908) and the Consciousness Revolution (1964-1984). Awakenings change cultures and renew the spirit. They embody strong extremes between cultural symbols.

The archetypes undergo another shift. The Heroes become elders and attempt to move even further beyond their original ambitions but leave open the spiritual world of those younger. The artists take on their mid-lives and try to use their talents to improve society and repress the unruly young. The prophets become young adults and challenge the failing value-system of older institutions. And the nomads are children, but are ignored during social upheaval and, consequently, are not protected from social ills.

In the most recent second turning, the GI generation became elders. They were the 'senior citizens' of the '60s, those who had a reputation as the greatest generation but had no spiritual control over American society. They were mocked openly by the young prophets and criticized by the midlife artists. The GIs had endless confidence, but this was destroyed by Vietnam. They retained their power only by letting the Boomers win the values debate. The Silent generation became the cultural and economic elite. They had few economic difficulties and only grew richer. They sought to produce social reform - such as the Civil Rights movement - and pursued humanitarian projects. They helped to reduce racism and sexism. They also experimented with new familial forms, by divorcing more often and expanding their sexuality. The Silent looked beyond themselves to humanize the world. The Boomers, however, are both spiritual and militant. These are the 'hippies' and 'radicals' of the day. They are young college students and high schoolers, revolting against old social forms. They revolted against Vietnam, turned on LBJ, on Hubert Humphrey and were always the enemies of the Nixon Administration. The 13ers were children, and are symbolized by the authors as 'Rosemary's Baby'. They are ignored by the Silents and the Boomer generations. They



grow up during their parents' social experiments and lack the experience of being protected from traditional familial institutions. The adult media attacks them as heartless and indifferent. The Awakening destroys their sense of self, and they become endlessly cynical. They felt that "America's best days were over."

A third turning, however, loomed over the horizon. By 1984, the awakening was over and generational conflict arises once more. The heroes - now elders - fear that they have no control over social values, the midlife artists - now sensing social victory wish to expand their social liberty, the prophets, now young adults, want to continue their spiritual search and change society entirely, while the nomads had the system and want to go their own way.



# Chapter 8, The Third Turning: Culture Wars (1984-2005?)

## Chapter 8, The Third Turning: Culture Wars (1984-2005?) Summary and Analysis

In 1984, the values revolution of the 60s and 70s had won. The search for inner meaning was part of American life. But social structures of unity had collapsed and division began to form as a result. A culture war emerged, which debated the meaning of 'The American Way of Life.' Americans become cynical about their institutions. They are shocked by social decay. External threats weaken (like the Soviet Union) and internal threats increase. Boomers realize that they have indulged themselves and seek to protect their children.

The third turnings in Anglo-American history are as following: Retreat from France (1435-1459), Intolerance and Martyrdom (1542-1569), Reaction and Restoration (1649-1675), French and Indian Wars (1746-1773), Mexican War and Sectionalism (1844-1860), World War I and Prohibition (1908-1929), and the Culture Wars (1984-2005?). The third turnings all consist in social decay and individualism; they possess "shorter days and longer nights." The artists become the new elders and they speed up social change. They prefer sensitivity and emotion as their modes of social interaction. The prophets grow to midlife age and advance low-key, value-focused moral convictions. The Nomads become young adults; they are independent free agents during an age of social conflict. And the heroes are born; they are protected against this social conflict by their parents.

The Silent generation become 'neoseniors.' They do not see themselves as retiring to Miami to finish out their years. They exercise, try new things, refuse to look old, but they lack confidence in themselves and realize that they have accomplished little. They insist on sensitivity, feeling and sitting both sides down to talk about their problems.

Throughout the Unraveling, the Silent will renew what it means to be old. They will prefer a yuppie lifestyle and will avoid the humdrum of life even in old age.

The Boomers became the cultural elite, and were not yuppies who had partly grown out of their hippie youths. They split into culturally awakened groups - right evangelicals and left new agers. Their unity unraveled and they fought a cultural war. Many of these folks are still liberals and are shocked by the conservatism of the younger generations. They face stagnating incomes and two-income households. They must also live with the consequences of their youthful indiscretions. They will focus on promoting civic virtue in their children and will desperately seek to protect them from their past mistakes. In the future, they will act to find 'new uses for government' but avoid the errors of the Great Society. The communitarians will defeat the libertarians in the culture wars and individualist anti-statism will ebb. They will not trust forms of life that do not bring some

pain. They will return to those unique, sacred and traditional things that they threw off in their youth.

The 13ers entered young adulthood in the beginning of the third turning. They are the generation that doesn't care; older generations continue to beat up on them and they grow more cynical and indifferent. They are individualized and focus on their own small communities; they are stridently independent. The 13ers will continue to search for solid ground and spiritual satisfaction. They are rife with social problems and will desire to remedy them. The 13ers are younger than the liberal generation ahead of them, which makes it so surprising that they are conservative. They are hostile to government and do not trust authority. The Xers will find themselves frustrated by the actions of older generations, the continued criticism. They will continue to resist authority, focus on decentralized forms of life and will embrace diversity and individualization.

The Millenials start being born during the third turning. They are 'cabbage patch kids' and their parents wish to protect their innocent. Their parents raise them with a 'do as I say, not as I did' attitude. The Boomers place great hope in them for civic rebirth and they are thought of as the 'public property' and salvation of the older generations. They embody the new grasp of moral standards and spirituality. They will be raised in healthier environments, they will be more stable, and will be more effective and more loved than the 13ers. These Millenials will enter young adulthood having been protected by all sides of the Boomer society. A lot will be expected of them, and they will be able to deliver. The new millennium will continue this trend. But the 2000s will be more 'jittery' than the '90s and '80s. People will have even less faith in government and have less trust in their institutions. American society will want to be involved in some larger event. The 2000s will be the cultural opposite of the 1950s. The world will be complex, intimidating, customized and beyond the grasp of most. The American people will want to recreate a sense of community but will not know how.

The elder artists will resist the prophets' values, while the profits will continue to lead society towards new forms of spirituality. The nomads, now young-adults, will settle-down and protect themselves from the social turmoil they suffered under, and the heroes, now children, will sense a challenge within the values of the prophets.





# Chapter 9, Fourth Turnings in History

## Chapter 9, Fourth Turnings in History Summary and Analysis

The Spirit of America was at its height at the end of World War II. Today, it is decaying. The Fourth Turning will signal both the absolute bottom of the American spirit and its regeneration. Community instinct is reborn and people work together. Fourth Turnings are crisis eras and they have a certain shape. Crises eras kick off with catalysts, startling events that shift the mood of a people. After the catalyst, society experiences a regeneration which reunifies them. This regeneration reaches a climax where a new social order is born and the climax resolves into a resolution - the conclusion of the old saeculum, and establishes the values of the new saeculum. Typically, the catalyst can be foreseen but the crises, while seeming obvious in retrospect, cannot be foreseen ahead of time.

The Fourth Turnings that date back to the 15th century: Wars of the Roses (1459-1487), Armada Crisis (1569-1594), Glorious Revolution (1675-1704), American Revolution (1773-1794), Civil War (1860-1865), Great Depression and World War II (1929-1946). The next one is coming.

The authors describe the Fourth Turnings in each of these periods. The 1929 Fourth Turning grew out of a materialistic, individualistic 1920s that was culturally divided. The 1860 Fourth Turning arose quickly, out of what appeared to be a stable compromise between North and South. The 1773 Fourth Turning arose out of smoldering discontent, but few realized how widespread this discontent was before it manifested. The 1675 Fourth Turning was preceded by a period of distrust internally between culturally divided groups. The previous two Fourth Turnings tell a similar story. In each of these periods, the catalyst could be predicted (although not in all of its details), but the climax could not.

During Fourth Turnings, the archetypes shift generations. The Prophets produce the next crisis as they become elders; the nomads manage the crisis with an independent pragmatism; the heroes are the soldiers of the crisis, whereas the artists are reborn and overprotected by the nomads. The authors become more specific: the prophets, as elders, continue to push moral reform, which allows future generations to bring about social change. The nomads enter midlife and apply their tattered and painful experiences to protect their society against instability. The heroes fight against the failures of the prophets' social crusades, which fuels another crisis. And as the artists are born, they miss out on the adult experience of social change and self-sacrifice. During Fourth Turnings, the spirit of American reappears, and this is about to happen again.



# Chapter 10, A Fourth Turning Prophecy

## Chapter 10, A Fourth Turning Prophecy Summary and Analysis

Chapter 10 brings together the analysis of the previous nine chapters to make a general prophecy about the future. First, around the year 2005 (again, the book was published in 1997), the catalyst event of the Fourth Turning will occur. The authors suggest possibility like a major financial crisis that leads to secession, a major terrorist attack, fighting over the national debt, the outbreak of a flu or some other virus, and tensions within the old Soviet Union and Iran as options. They deny that any specific prophecy will occur but that something on this order will occur and that it will trigger a series of events like a chain reaction that will lead into a new social order. The pre-crisis years will see increasing distrust of the government and perhaps a massive devaluation in the financial markets. Many will not only feel entitled to government benefits, but some will feel authorized to acquire them. American society will shift its focus from overseas issues to domestic issues. The authors predict that the new economy, while being more technologically advanced, will be less globally integrated with higher unionization rates. Further, there will be new infrastructure investments and institutions will increasingly restrict individual liberty. The crisis will include a few (but not all) of the following distresses: economic, social, cultural, technological, ecological, political or military.

As the Boomers become elders, they will generate a 'gray champion' which will lead society through its crisis (the authors, oddly, ask us to imagine Al Gore leading a global environmental crusade). Boomers will want to maintain their high-consumption life styles during economic trouble, and will impose new taxes on the younger generations. The evangelical Boomers will look to impose new moral constraints. After the financial crisis, the elder boomers will create a new ethic of low consumption. Their old age will be full of an ethos of self-denial.

The 13ers will enter midlife, and will bring with them their typical lack of self-worth. They will face a worse economy with greater inequality - some 13ers will have done well, some badly. Their mindset will be 'hardboiled and avuncular', resisting risk. They will also be the political and economic elite who will mediate conflicts between the Boomers and Millenials. 13er politicians will rekindle community spirit.

The Millenials will be bright soldiers of the new value system. They will not rebel but be obedient to the 13ers and Boomers, particularly to the Gray Champion. They will resist Hollywood with cool rationality, resist feminism by 'mystifying' the distinction between the sexes and they will upset libertarians by supporting increased state control over the economy. The generation being born will be the 'New Silents' who will be reared in an age of innocence. They will be protected as the seeds of society's rebirth. They will grow up ready to aid the new Hero generation. The first turning will rear its head again. The resolution of the fourth turning may come around 2026. The resolution has no foregone conclusion. If it is seen as a social failure, the Millenials will be the shame of it

until they die, but if they succeed they will garner new respect. If the crisis goes well, the artists will eagerly aid the heroes.

The generations will shift up again. The prophet elders will worry about a new materialism, the midlife nomads will see that the old conflicts are over and increase community discipline and restrict personal liberty. The young heroes will feel successful due to new collective action and will want to renovate society, whereas the child artists will learn to trust the values of the new social order.



# Chapter 11, Preparing for the Fourth Turning

## Chapter 11, Preparing for the Fourth Turning Summary and Analysis

Now that the authors have made their predictions about the Fourth Turning, the final part of the book can begin - Part III, or 'Preparations.' It advises the reader on how to prepare for the Fourth Turning. There is no way to prevent the Fourth Turning but we can affect the outcome of the crisis. A new order is coming but what it consists in has yet to be set in stone. Individuals can also prepare themselves, their families and communities to weather the Fourth Turning effectively.

The authors advise participating in 'seasonal' activities, avoiding the 'postseasonal' behaviors, and prepare for the next season or make 'preseasonal' preparations. First, we should engage in seasonal activities because we should take advantage of the great things of the current season, but engaging in postseasonal behaviors will bring unhappiness. Today, focus on technology and diversity, but avoid the wild social experiments of the past season. Further, prepare for the next season: families should save money but live well, and be as communally functional as they can. They should also avoid being ideological. All American ideologies - liberalism, conservatism, libertarianism and socialism are 'linear'; they always recommend themselves for every season, but no ideology is above the seasons, and one should go with the flow of the ideas of the day. The Republicans and Democrats often miss seasonal changes as well.

Here are how Americans as a whole should prepare: (i) they should prepare to spread and protect their values, (ii) they should experiment with new institutions to figure out what works for the future, (iii) they should struggle with political challenges and avoid pushing reforms that cannot be achieved. Further, Americans should (iv) prepare new communities to solve local problems, (v) raise their children well without spoiling them, (vi) and tend to the elderly, neither spoiling or ignoring them. Finally, Americans should (vii) prepare the economy by tending to fundamentals and not get caught up in the moment, and (ix) prepare the military without committing to any one response.

The authors then advise individual Americans to do the following: (i) 'rectify' or return to traditional virtues, (ii) obey new community norms, (iii) build all sorts of new personal relationships, (iv) get ready for teamwork with others, (v) promote familial bonds so as to expand one's support system, (vi) save in order to survive a collapse of the social safety net and (vii) diversify all of one's activities. The authors then advise each generation over how to apply these lessons to their scripts - the GIs, the Silents, the Boomers, the 13ers, and the Millenials.

# Chapter 12, The Eternal Return

## Chapter 12, The Eternal Return Summary and Analysis

Americans must understand the time is not linear; instead, it is cyclical, and the cycle is beginning anew. The next cycle could bring anything major, the end of mankind, or modernity, or the United States, or the end of a prosperous American and even a much better world. If we weather our Fourth Turning well, much of the world may follow us.

The authors argue that we should not feel limited by the Fourth Turning. It is an opportunity for victory and great deeds. So long as we avoid linear thinking, we will avoid seeing history as inevitable progress (which will disappoint) or as inevitable decline (where we would miss opportunities for accomplishment). We are all part of a vast reach of time and cultural memory extends a saeculum backward and a saeculum forward. What will history be like at the end of the next saeculum? It is up to us.



# Characters

## Heroes

The Fourth Turning only mentions actual characters as exemplars of a type of group or generation. Thus, historical figures like George Washington, Dwight Eisenhower and Hillary Clinton are mentioned only as members of these generations and archetypes. The Hero archetype is born during an unraveling or a Third Turning. This is a time period in which cultural institutions are breaking down from the challenges they weathered during the awakening. They are raised in a protected environment, as the previous generation was unprotected during the decline of values brought about by the awakening. They are communal by nature, and revel in collective action projects. They are looked to with hope by earlier generations and rectify the disappointment that the nomads brought. When heroes enter midlife, they often overreach due to their self-confidence and when they are elders they demand respect for their accomplishments. They are leaders, have a traditionalist streak, reason carefully, and are associated with the springtime of a saeculum. Prophets often define society's vision of the hero. If they weather the crisis successfully they are held in high esteem. They are middle-aged during a high and set the value system of that age.

The two prime examples of hero generations are the 'Greatest Generation' or World War II and the 'Millennial' Generation being born between 1982 and 2005. The WWII generation fought in WWII. They won and were in high regard. They formed the stable, ossified culture of the 50s and were the elders that were rebelled against during the '60s and '70s. The Millennials will weather the next Fourth Turning and experience the same cycle.

## Prophets

Prophets are born during a high. Prophets are associated with the fall season, they are interested in social justice; they are often dogmatic, spiritual and based their decisions on feeling. They are defined against Heroes, who they find too complacent. The Prophets are interested in moral uplift and spiritual self-examination. Prophets grow up spoiled after a crisis; times are normal again and parents treat the Prophets to the new found stability. When they are young adults they see through the hollowness of the post-crisis culture and begin to challenge. During this time they become even more self-absorbed and begin spiritual crusades. In mid-life, they become moralistic, and attempt to establish their new morality in social institutions, and they become wise elders at the beginning of the new crisis.

The most recent Prophet generation was the 'Baby Boom' generation that was born in the aftermath of World War II. Their Hero parents pampered them in the wealthy, traditional order of the 1950s. They became young adults in the '60s and '70s, and saw the hollowness of the '50s hero-culture. In the '50s, American set an example for the



world, but by the '60s, the Prophet generation had brought new spiritual values to their country and they were tearing the country apart. As they aged in the '70s and '80s they 'mellowed' and began to focus on integrating their morality into everyday life. They fought the culture wars from both sides, liberals and conservatives. And in the Fourth Turning they will help to guide the heroes through the next crisis.

## **Nomads**

Nomads grow up unprotected during the awakening and grow up alienated in their new culture. They are highly individualistic, anti-authoritarian, and become pragmatists as they enter midlife. They become elders in the post-Crisis; they are 'battle-hardened' through leading a society through this period. The most recent nomad generation was the 13ers or 'Generation X.' GenXers grew up in a dangerously unstable social world, often turned to crime and were given up on by previous generations.

## **Artists**

The artists are overprotected since they are born during the crisis. And they are 'sensitive' during the post-crisis. In midlife, they are largely ineffective leaders as the awakening occurs and become kind and sympathetic post-awakening elders. The last artist generation was the 'Silent' generation, born during the Depression and World War II. They ably assisted the Heroes in the postwar High, but when they came into their own, they were unable to resist the force of the prophets.

## **The Gray Champion**

The Gray Champion arises out of the Hero generation every saeculum. It is typically a figure of great power and charisma that leads her society into a new age.

## **The GI Generation**

The GI generation (born 1901-1924), or the 'Greatest Generation' fought World War II and formed the established order of the 1950s.

## **The Silent Generation**

The Silent Generation (1925-1942) grew up in the postwar world and came of age in the 1960s and '70s. They could not resist the cultural and moral challenge of the Boomers.

## **The Boomer Generation**

The Boomers or the 'Baby Boom' generation (1943-1960) were born after World War II; they promoted spiritual growth and individualism. They fought what they perceived to be the emptiness of the establishment culture.

## **The 13er Generation**

The 13ers or 'Generation X' (1961-1981) grew up during the cultural unraveling of the 1960s and '70s. They grew up unprotected and see themselves as 'nomads.'

## **The Millennial Generation**

The Millennial Generation, 'Generation Y' (1982 - 2004) are the new heroes who resist the cultural decay brought about by the Boomers and inspire hope in older generations, unlike the 13ers. They will be young adults during the Fourth Turning.





# Objects/Places

## The First Turning

The First Turning is a period of 'High' following the last crisis period. It is full of confidence in the current moral order and is led by the heroes. The last 'High' was the postwar consensus era of the 1950s and early-'60s.

## The Second Turning

The Second Turning is a period of 'Awakening' following the last high period. It questions the established order, and provides a spiritual and moral critique of it. It is typically led by young prophets and weakly resisted by the artists. The last 'Awakening' was the 'consciousness revolution' of the '60s and '70s.

## The Third Turning

The Third Turning is a period of 'Unraveling' which follows the last awakening period. It is a period of institutional decay, the consequence of the awakening, and precipitations a crisis. It is usually marked by deep, polarizing cultural conflict. The last 'Unraveling' are the 'Culture Wars' that begin in 1984 and are predicted to last into the first decade of the new millennium.

## The Fourth Turning

The Fourth Turning is a period of 'Crisis' which follows the last unraveling period. During this period, institutions collapse due to a catalyst and lead to a new established order of values. The book concerns the nature and structure of the coming Fourth Turning, which is expected to occur between 2005 and 2025.

## Cycles of History

The authors argue that history runs in generational cycles, rather than in a linear progression as most people today imagine it.

## England

The American story begins in its English past, thus early American saeculum occur there, such as during the War of the Roses, the British Reformation, and the Glorious Revolution.



## **United States**

The US is the primary setting of the book. The book's message is for the American people.

## **World Mythologies**

The authors draw on many world mythologies of creation and apocalypse in order to argue in favor of a cyclical view of time.

## **Linear Time**

This conception of time sees time as leading steadily in one direction, either towards progress, decay or both.

## **Chaotic Time**

This conception of time sees time as having no direction whatsoever. On this view, history has no order.

## **Cyclical Time**

This conception of time sees time as having a cyclical nature; history repeats itself. This is the view of history that the authors defend.

## **The Number Four**

The number four features prominently in the historical cycles of many world's religions and histories. The authors divide saeculum into four periods made of four generations structured by four generational archetypes.

# Themes

## Cyclical Time

The Fourth Turning is a book of prophecy, so it naturally concerns the future. As such, it also appeals to events in the past and present to predict the future. Time is center stage. However, the authors have an argument to make: the West has lost a crucial understanding of time in the last several centuries. For the last few centuries, Westerns have understood time as 'linear' - as always either progressing or regressing. The future builds on the past in a constant, often steady fashion. The notion of linear time follows an older understanding of cyclical time common to the Medieval, Roman and Greek periods in Western history. The authors argue that the cyclical understanding of time is more spiritual and transcendental. As a result, abandoning the cyclical view of time caused us to lose an understanding of the nature of the universe. We can only understand the course of history if we see cycles in history.

The authors argue in great detail that history, particularly the history of societies, is cyclical. They cite world religions and other cultures methods of counting time and argue that these conceptions of cyclical history aided in understanding the actual course of events in these cultures' existences. But the most important cycles of time for the book are those cycles of time in the last century of the United States. The authors illustrate the last six saeculum of Anglo-American history in great detail, but they focus most heavily on the current saeculum which began at the end of World War II.

## Turnings

The title of the book is 'The Fourth Turning' so the notion of a 'Turning' is a central idea of the book. The authors believe that history is cyclical, despite the progress made in some historical periods. These cycles are known as 'saeculum' and vary in length according to culture. In the Anglo-American world of the last five centuries, saeculum tend to last eighty to one-hundred years. These saeculum begin with the end of a crisis and end with the beginning of a crisis. Saeculum are divided into four periods of 'turnings'. They also argue that the last fifty years and the next thirty can be understood in terms of these turnings. The First Turning is a period of 'High' following the last crisis period. It is full of confidence in the current moral order and is led by the heroes. The last 'High' was the postwar consensus era of the 1950s and early-'60s.

The Second Turning is a period of 'Awakening' following the last high period. It questions the established order, and provides a spiritual and moral critique of it. It is typically led by young prophets and weakly resisted by the artists. The last 'Awakening' was the 'consciousness revolution' of the 60s and 70s. The Third Turning is a period of 'Unraveling' which follows the last awakening period. It is a period of institutional decay, the consequence of the awakening, and precipitations a crisis. It is usually marked by deep, polarizing cultural conflict. The last 'Unraveling' are the 'Culture Wars' that begin



in 1984 and are predicted to last into the first decade of the new millennium. The Fourth Turning is a period of 'Crisis' which follows the last unraveling period. During this period, institutions collapse due to a catalyst and lead to a new established order of values. The book concerns the nature and structure of the coming Fourth Turning, which is expected to occur between 2005 and 2025.

## Preparation

The point of the book is to illuminate the cycles of history throughout the past and present in order to understand the unfolding of the future. The 'Fourth Turning' has not yet begun in 1997 when the book was published. On the authors' view, American culture is still in its third turning, or a period of cultural unraveling, polarized moral battles and decay social institutions. The fourth turning will give rise to a crisis and signal complete institutional decay. From this collapsing order a new order will arise bringing a new civic order and a new system of values. The Fourth Turning is meant to aid us in preparing for the crisis ahead. Most of the book is simply an explanation of the idea of the fourth turning and an argument that it will occur. However, the last two chapters concern preparation as the book reaches its apex. Preparation occurs on two levels - at the community level and at the individual level. At the community level, Americans should prepare values for the future and their institutions. They should prepare new political ideas and work on getting society ready for the crisis (though largely at a community level). They must teach the youth important values, and take care of the elderly, but neither group must be spoiled. The economy needs its fundamentals corrected; the military needs to be prepared as well. The individual should relearn classic virtues, obey new community norms, build new, strong relationships, get ready for teamwork, build a familial support system, save money to survive financial collapse, and diversify in 'everything you do.'



# Style

## Perspective

The perspective of *The Fourth Turning* is one that attempts to stand above ideologies and cultural trends. The authors attempt to stand astride history and view broad generational trends in social attitudes, the rise and fall of individualism and communitarianism, the ebb and flow of traditionalism vs. progressivism in moral attitudes, civic pride vs. alienated and so on. They are strongly in favor of a cyclical view of history, as opposed to a linear view, however. They believe that history cannot properly be understood nor prophecy accurately generated without understanding that history repeats itself. One interesting view that the authors express is that certain social attitudes, beliefs and ideologies are appropriate in some seasons but not in others. They advise Americans to obey community norms as they appear in the present period and emerge in the future. They blame political ideologies like conservatism, liberalism, socialism and libertarianism for being 'linear' ideologies and believing that in each generation within a saeculum they always have the right solutions. No, sometimes conservatism is the right attitude and other times liberalism. Sometimes it is appropriate to react to excessive communitarianism and other times against excessive individualism. The authors appear to conceive of social life as ideally reaching a mean between all of these extremes but instead history constantly circles but never reaches an ideological and social equilibrium. This perspective - of seeing the merit and demerit in practically all social, political and spiritual ideals - is most characteristic of *The Fourth Turning*.

## Tone

The tone of the book has a two competing aspects. On the one hand, the book gives off a sense of impending catastrophe and social struggle. On the other, it emits a serenity and spiritual peace about the ongoing cycle of history. *The Fourth Turning* is a book of history and prophecy. The authors hold that we are in a period known as the third turning, where social institutions and values are in a state of decay and different parts of society fight against one another rather than cooperate. This period of time is inevitably following by a fourth turning, or a period of crisis. These crises usually begin with a 'catalyst' or some national or global event that changes social circumstances and puts current institutions into a state of alert and final destruction. The authors spend a chapter making predictions about the forthcoming period of crisis, suggesting that it might begin with a terrorist attack or a financial crisis of epic proportions. It is this aspect of the book that generates its tone of forebodingness. However, the book emits another tone, one of peaceful serenity. *The Fourth Turning* argues at great length that social history is cyclical. And thus, crises precipitate new beginnings. Sometimes societies react to crises poorly, but other times they use crises as a change to triumph and build a better social order. This observation gives the book a bit of a hopeful tone, but this



hopefulness is somewhat overshadowed by the authors' sense that in essence all of these stages of history have happened before and all of them will happen again.

## Structure

The Fourth Turning is organized into three parts, with twelve chapters. Chapter 1, "Winter Comes Again" introduces the book's main topic. Part One, "Seasons," contains the next four chapters which review the components of saeculum or historical periods. They contain both turnings and generation archetypes that in turn bear crucial relationships to one another. Part Two, "Turnings," includes the next six chapters. The first three of these chapters (six, seven and eight) describe the most recent first, second and third turnings. The ninth chapter describes the historical structures of fourth turnings and the tenth chapter uses the previous four chapters to make some predictions about the coming fourth turning. Part Three, "Preparations," teaches the reader how to prepare for the coming fourth turning. The eleventh chapters gives detailed advice on how to weather the fourth turning at an individual and a communal level, whereas the twelfth chapter communicates a message of hope about using the fourth turning constructively.

The chapters themselves are composed in a methodical way. Each chapter opens with a brief 'hook' or story to catch the reader's interest. Next the chapter dives into conceptual or historical analysis. The first five chapters focus mostly on analyzing the conceptions of saeculum, turnings, and generational archetypes, whereas the next five chapters illustrate these conceptions in the events of the last fifty years and the coming twenty or thirty. In the middle of the book, the authors include a series of charts that describe the different historical turnings and particular cases of each generational archetype in American history.

## Quotes

"America feels like it's unraveling." (1)

"The Crisis ends one saeculum and launches the next." (39)

"Archetypes do not create archetypes like themselves; instead, they create the shadows of archetypes like themselves." (79)

"In cyclical time, a society always evolves. Usually, the circle is a spiral of progress, sometimes a spiral of decline." (105)

"We may not wish the Gray Champion to come again - but come he must, and come he will." (142)

"The Second Turning would have come, one way or another. It was time." (170)

"America had entered the Awakening today remembered as the Consciousness Revolution." (171)

"Whether we realize it or not, we will be ready for a dramatic event to shock the nation out of its complacency and decay." (253)

"One large chapter of history ends, and another starts. In a very real sense, one society dies - and another is born." (259)

"Thus will American reenact the great ancient myth of the ekpyrosis. Thus will we achieve our next rendezvous with destiny." (278)

"In each of the four seasons of life and nature, there are things a person should and should not do." (305)

"His history is not yet written. What will it be?" (334)

## Topics for Discussion

Explain the concept of the 'hero' generational archetype and illustrate it with a historical example.

Explain the concept of the 'prophet' generational archetype and illustrate it with a historical example.

Explain the concept of the 'artist' generational archetype and illustrate it with a historical example.

Explain the concept of the 'nomad' generational archetype and illustrate it with a historical example.

Explain the idea of the First Turning. What is the most recent First Turning? How are the generational archetypes structured during this time?

Explain the idea of the Second Turning. What is the most recent Second Turning? How are the generational archetypes structured during this time?

Explain the idea of the Third Turning. What is the most recent Third Turning? How are the generational archetypes structured during this time?

Explain the idea of the Fourth Turning. What is the most recent Fourth Turning? How are the generational archetypes structured during this time? What will the coming Fourth Turning bring?

What are the authors' argument for a cyclical view of time? Is the argument sound? Explain why or why not.

What is the book's major thesis? Do you believe the thesis? Explain why or why not.