

Generations in History



Arthurian

(*Hero, born 1433–1460*) This generation grew up during England’s demoralizing retreat from France, an era of a rising pessimism and civil disorder. Raised amid elder hopes that they might save the kingdom, the Arthurians came of age with a civil war that did not end until 28-year-old Henry Tudor established his “new monarchy.” Entering midlife, they closed ranks around a manly new era of prosperity (led by wool exports), social discipline (led by busy local magistrates), and strong central government (led by the new Star Chamber). Entering old age, they enclosed fields, printed books, and planned voyages to the New World—securing a reputation for chivalric teamwork immortalized in *Morte Darthur*, their generation’s treasured epic. (ENGLISH: *King Edward IV, King Henry VII, John Cabot, William Grocyn, John de Vere*; FOREIGN: *Leonardo da Vinci, Christopher Columbus*)

Humanist

(*Artist, born 1461–1482*) This generation passed a sheltered childhood during a bloody civil war, many of the elite attending safer schools abroad. Coming of age, they understood their mission was to embellish the new order. As young adults, they became the “new humanists”—Greek tutors, international scholars, ballad-writing poets, law-trained prelates, and literate merchants and yeomen. Hit during midlife by the Reformation, they adjusted awkwardly. Some wrapped themselves in Wolseyan opulence and refused to pay attention. Others waffled. A few (like the famed “Man for All Seasons”) exquisitely satirized the reigning hypocrisy, stood firm for the old order, and paid the ultimate price. In old age, they were startled by a ruthless new radicalism that overwhelmed their own gracious

refinements. (ENGLISH: *Thomas More, Thomas Linacre, John Colet, Cardinal Wolsey, Stephen Gardiner*; FOREIGN: *Michelangelo, Copernicus*)

Reformation

(*Prophet, born 1483–1511*) This generation began life surrounded by the advantages of order and affluence. They rebelled as youth, prompting first the colleges (in the 1520s) and then an egocentric young king and his Parliament (in the 1530s) to join in a religious upheaval. By the time passions cooled, the Catholic Church was liquidated, the clergy shattered, the masses armed with Bibles, and the Anglican faith unshackled from Rome. In midlife, their insolence hardened into severe principle. With women figuring prominently, they became “commonwealth” moralists, “family of love” mystics, “Calvinist” (or “Romist”) proselytizers, and unrepentant martyrs burned or hanged for their heresies. Deep in elderhood, many lived to see the nation gravitate to the “Puritan Settlement” they had worked so long to inspire. (ENGLISH: *King Henry VIII, Thomas Cromwell, John Knox, Elizabeth Barton, William Tyndale, Nicholas Ridley*; FOREIGN: *Martin Luther, John Calvin*)

Reprisal

(*Nomad, born 1512–1540*) This generation spent childhood amid religious frenzy and a widespread erosion of social authority and came of age in a cynical, post-Awakening era of cut-throat politics and roller-coaster markets. They built a gritty young-adult reputation as swaggering merchants, mercenaries, spies, and “sea-dog” privateers who pulled off stunning “reprisals” through luck and pluck. Entering midlife just as their Queen (a shrewd orphan herself) squared off with Imperial Spain, these daredevil adventurers knew how to “sing King

Philip's beard" while stealing his gold. Making simple appeals to national honor, they aged into worldly-wise elder stewards of English solidarity whose sacrifices made possible a glorious new era. (ENGLISH: *Queen Elizabeth I, Francis Drake, John Hawkins, Thomas Gresham, William Cecil Burghley, Francis Walsingham*; FOREIGN: *Catherine de Medici, Michel de Montaigne*)

Elizabethan

(*Hero, born 1541–1565*) This generation benefited as children from an explosive growth in academies intended to mold them into "perfect paragons" of civic achievement and teamwork. Coming of age with the great wars against Spain, they soldiered with dazzling valor and courtly show. During their "Gloriana" midlife, they regulated commerce, explored overseas empires, built stately country houses, pursued "new" science, and wrote poetry that celebrated an orderly universe. Historian William Esler explains that "ambitious projects of breath-taking scope and grandeur" distinguished these "overreachers" from the "burned-out generation" before them. In old age, many lived to see their hearty and expansive "Merrie England" repudiated by prickly-conscienced sons and daughters. (ENGLISH: *William Shakespeare, Walter Raleigh, Phillip Sidney, Francis Vere, Francis Bacon, Edward Coke*; FOREIGN: *Cervantes, Galileo Galilei*)

Parliamentary

(*Artist, born 1566–1587*) This generation passed through childhood in an era of foreign threats and war. Coming of age with the dawn of imperial peace and prosperity, they built impeccable credentials in law, scholarship, religion, and arts and crafts guilds. In country houses, they swelled the influence of the newly literate gentry. At Court, they became apologists for the byzantine policies of James I. In Parliament, they promoted politeness and insisted on precedent, due process, and full disclosure. In midlife, their incrementalist ethos was shaken by younger calls for radical reform. Their Arminians argued yet resisted; their Parliamentarians applauded yet hedged. Eloquently indecisive in speech and sermon, they watched England veer toward a spiral of hysteria and violence they felt powerless to stop. (ENGLISH: *King James I, John Donne, William Laud, Inigo Jones, George Villiers, John Selden*; FOREIGN: *Claudio Monteverdi, Peter Paul Rubens*)

Puritan

(*Prophet, born 1588–1617*) This generation basked as children in the post-Armada peace. Overcome by spiritual "conversions," many came of age zealously denouncing the spiritual emptiness of their elders' Jacobean achievements. While some later led England through a civil war that culminated in the beheading of King Charles I, others were called by God to lead a Great Migration to America. These young-adult "Puritans" established church-centered towns from Long Island to Maine. In midlife, fearing the corrupting influence of the Old World on their own unconverted children, they turned from the "law of love" to the love of law. Their moral authority remained unchallenged through old age, as they provided the elder die-hards of the great Indian Wars and the Glorious Revolution. (COLONIAL: *Anne Hutchinson, John Winthrop, Simon Bradstreet, Roger Williams, John Harvard, William Berkeley*; FOREIGN: *Oliver Cromwell, René Descartes*)

Cavalier

(*Nomad, born 1618–1647*) This generation grew up in an era of religious upheaval and family collapse. In New England, they were the isolated offspring of spiritual zealots; in the Chesapeake colonies, they were the indentured English youth whose parents' death or poverty consigned them to disease-ridden ships bound for the tobacco fields. Notoriously violent and uneducated, they came of age taking big risks—many dying young, others becoming the most renowned merchants, trappers, mercenaries, rebels, and pirates of their century. In midlife, they struggled bravely against threats to their communities from Old World tyrants and New World native tribes. As politically-tainted elders, they seldom protested the vendettas (such as the Salem witchcraft frenzy) that mainly targeted their own peers. (COLONIAL: *Increase Mather, William Stoughton, Benjamin Church, Metacomet, William Kidd, Nathaniel Bacon*; FOREIGN: *King Louis XIV, John Locke*)

Glorious

(*Hero, born 1648–1673*) This generation entered a protected childhood of tax-supported schools and new laws discouraging the "kidnapping" of young servants. After proving their valor in the Indian Wars and triumphing in the Glorious Revolution, they were rewarded with electoral office at a young age. As young adults, they took pride in the growing political, commercial, and scientific achievements of England—and viewed the

passion and poverty of their parents as embarrassments to be overcome. In midlife, they designed insurance, paper money, and public works—and (in the South) founded a stable slave-owning oligarchy. As worldly elders, they received the colonies' first war-service pensions and land grants—while taking offense at the spiritual zeal of youth. (COLONIAL: *Cotton Mather, John Wise, William Randolph, Robert “King” Carter, Hannah Dustin, Peter Schuyler*; FOREIGN: *William of Orange, Czar Peter the Great*)

Enlightenment

(*Artist, born 1674–1700*) This generation grew up as protected children when families were close, youth risk discouraged, and good educations and well-connected marriages highly prized. Coming of age, their rising elite eased into a genteel Williamsburg-style town-and-planter prosperity. As young adults, this “inheritor generation” provided the colonies' first large cadre of credentialed professionals, political managers, and plantation administrators. In midlife, their Walpolean leadership style betrayed a fascination with youth, whose spiritual zeal they both welcomed and feared. Many elders lived to witness (in the Stamp Act furor) a repudiation of the tea-drinking politeness and rococo complexity on which their provincial world rested. (COLONIAL: *William Shirley, John Peter Zenger, Alexander Spotswood, Samuel Johnson, William Byrd II, Elisha Cooke, Jr.*; FOREIGN: *George Frederick Handel, Voltaire*)

Awakening

(*Prophet, born 1701–1723*) This generation arrived as the first colonial generation to consist mostly of the offspring of native-born parents and the first to grow up taking peace and prosperity for granted. Coming of age, they attacked their elders' moral complacency in a spiritual firestorm. By the 1750s, after breaking the social order of their parents and rendering the colonies ungovernable, they pushed the colonies toward pessimism yet also toward civic renewal. They became eighteenth-century America's most eminent generation of educators, philosophers, clergymen, and abolitionists. In old age, they provided the Revolution with its dire sense of moral urgency, dominating colonial pulpits and governorships until independence was declared. (AMERICAN: *Jonathan Edwards, Benjamin Franklin, Sam Adams, Eliza Pinckney, John Woolman, Crispus Attucks*; FOREIGN: *Jean Jacques Rousseau, Queen Maria Theresa*)

Liberty

(*Nomad, born 1724–1741*) This generation struggled for parental comfort in an era of Hogarthian child neglect. Coming of age with an economic bust, land pressure, and rising immigration, they cut a swath of crime and disorder. As young adults, they joined the rough-hewn Green Mountain, Paxton, and Liberty Boys—and became the unthanked footsoldiers and daring privateers of the French and Indian War. Proclaiming “Don't Tread on Me” and “Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death,” they entered midlife supplying the bravest patriots (including most signers of the Declaration of Independence) as well as the worst traitors of the Revolution. As elders, they led with caution, suspicious of grand causes, while their “Anti-Federalists” restrained the nationalizing energy of younger people. (AMERICAN: *George Washington, John Adams, Francis Marion, Daniel Boone, Ethan Allen, Patrick Henry*; FOREIGN: *King George III, Czarina Catherine the Great*)

Republican

(*Hero, born 1742–1766*) This generation grew up as the precious object of adult protection during an era of rising crime and social disorder. They came of age highly regarded for their secular optimism and spirit of cooperation. As young adults, they achieved glory as soldiers, brilliance as scientists, order as civic planners, and epic success as statecrafters. Trusted by elders and aware of their own historic role, they burst into politics at a young age. They dominated the campaign to ratify the Constitution and filled all the early national cabinet posts. In midlife, they built canals and acquired territories, while their orderly Federalist and rational Republican leaders made America a “workshop of liberty.” As elders, they chafed at passionate youths bent on repudiating much of what they had built. (AMERICAN: *Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Paul Jones, Abigail Adams, Kunta Kinte, Robert Fulton*; FOREIGN: *Maximilien Robespierre, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*)

Compromise

(*Artist, born 1767–1791*) This generation grew up (recalled Henry Clay) “rocked in the cradle of the Revolution” as they watched brave adults struggle and triumph. Compliantly coming of age, they offered a new erudition, expertise, and romantic sensibility to their heroic elders' “Age of Improvement.” As young adults, they became what historian Matthew Crenson calls “the administrative founding fathers”—and soldiered a “Second War for Independence” whose glory could

never compare with the first. In midlife, they mentored populist movements, fretted over slavery and Indian removal, and presided over Great Compromises that reflected their irresolution. As elders, they feared that their “post-heroic” mission had failed and that the United States might not outlive them. (AMERICAN: *Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, Washington Irving, Dolley Madison, Tecumseh*; FOREIGN: *Napoleon Bonaparte, Ludwig van Beethoven*)

Transcendental

(*Prophet, born 1792–1821*), the proud offspring of a secure new nation, were the first American children to be portrayed (and named at birth) as individuals. Coming of age as evangelists, reformers, and campus rioters, they triggered a spiritual paroxysm across the nation. As crusading young adults, their divergent inner visions exacerbated sectional divisions. Entering midlife, graying abolitionists and Southrons spurned compromise and led the nation into the Civil War, their zeal fired by the moral pronouncements of an aging clergy. The victors achieved emancipation but were blocked from imposing as punishing a peace as the old radicals wished. In elderhood, their feminists and poets (many with flowing beards) became unyielding expositors of truth and justice. (AMERICAN: *Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Susan B. Anthony, Nat Turner, William Lloyd Garrison*; FOREIGN: *Queen Victoria, Karl Marx*)

Gilded

(*Nomad, born 1822–1842*) This generation lived a hard-scrabble childhood around parents distracted by spiritual upheavals. They came of age amid rising national tempers, torrential immigration, commercialism, Know Nothing politics, and declining college enrollments. As young adults, many pursued fortunes in frontier boom towns or as fledgling “robber barons.” Their Lincoln Shouters and Johnny Rebs rode eagerly into a Civil War that left them decimated, Confederates especially. Having learned to detest moral zealotry, their midlife Presidents and industrialists put their stock in Darwinian economics, Boss Tweed politics, Victorian prudery, and Carnegie’s “Law of Competition.” As elders, they landed on the “industrial scrap heap” of an urbanizing economy that was harsh to most old people. (AMERICAN: *Ulysses Grant, Mark Twain, John D. Rockefeller, Louisa May Alcott, William James, Sitting Bull*; FOREIGN: *Lewis Carroll, Maximilian*)

Progressive

(*Artist, born 1843–1859*) This generation spent childhood shell-shocked by sectionalism and war. Overawed by older “bloody-shirt” veterans, they came of age cautiously, pursuing refinement and expertise more than power. In the shadow of Reconstruction, they earned their reputation as well-behaved Ph.D.s and lawyers, calibrators and specialists, civil servants and administrators. In midlife, their mild commitment to social melioration was whipsawed by the passions of youth. They matured into America’s genteel yet juvenating Rough Riders in the era of Freud’s “talking cure” and late-Victorian sentimentality. After busting trusts and achieving “Progressive” procedural reforms, their elders continued to urge tolerance upon less conciliatory juniors. (AMERICAN: *Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Henry James, Booker T. Washington, Katherine Lee Bates, Clarence Darrow*; FOREIGN: *Oscar Wilde, Sigmund Freud*)

Missionary

(*Prophet, born 1860–1882*) This generation became the indulged home-and-hearth children of the post-Civil War era. They came of age as labor anarchists, campus rioters and ambitious first graduates of black and women’s colleges. Their young adults pursued rural populism, settlement house work, missionary crusades, “muckrake” journalism, and women’s suffrage. In midlife, their Decency brigades and “fundamentalists” imposed Prohibition, cracked down on immigration, and organized Vice Squads. In the 1930s and ‘40s, their elder elite became the “Wise Old Men” who enacted a “New Deal” (and Social Security) for the benefit of youth, led the global war against fascism, and reaffirmed America’s highest ideals during a transformative era in world history. (AMERICAN: *Franklin Roosevelt, W.E.B. DuBois, William Jennings Bryan, Upton Sinclair, Jane Addams, Douglas MacArthur*; FOREIGN: *Winston Churchill, V.I. Lenin*)

Lost

(*Nomad, born 1883–1900*) This generation grew up amidst urban blight, unregulated drug use, child “sweat shops,” and massive immigration. Their independent, streetwise attitude lent them a “bad kid” reputation. After coming of age as “flaming youth,” doughboys, and flappers, they were alienated by a war whose homecoming turned sour. Their young-adult novelists, barnstormers, gangsters, sports stars, and film celebrities gave the roar to the ‘20s. The Great Depression hit them in midlife, at the peak of their careers. The “buck stopped” with their pugnacious battlefield and homefront managers of a hot war—and

their frugal and straight-talking leaders of a new “cold” one. As elders, they paid high tax rates to support their world-conquering juniors, while asking little for themselves. (AMERICAN: *Harry Truman, Irving Berlin, George Patton, Mae West, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong*; FOREIGN: *Adolph Hitler, Mao Zedong*)

G.I.

(*Hero, born 1901–1924*) This generation developed a special and “good kid” reputation as the beneficiaries of new playgrounds, scouting clubs, vitamins, and child-labor restrictions. They came of age with the sharpest rise in schooling ever recorded. As young adults, their uniformed corps patiently endured depression and heroically conquered foreign enemies. In a midlife subsidized by the G.I. Bill, they built gleaming suburbs, invented miracle vaccines, plugged “missile gaps,” and launched moon rockets. Their unprecedented grip on the Presidency began with a New Frontier, a Great Society, and Model Cities, but wore down through Vietnam, Watergate, deficits, and problems with “the vision thing.” As “senior citizens,” they safeguarded their own “entitlements” but had little influence over culture and values. (AMERICAN: *John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, Walt Disney, Judy Garland, John Wayne, Walter Cronkite*; FOREIGN: *Willy Brandt, Leonid Brezhnev*)

Silent

(*Artist, born 1925–1942*) This generation grew up as the suffocated children of war and depression. They came of age just too late to be war heroes and just too early to be youthful free spirits. Instead, this early-marrying Lonely Crowd became the risk-averse technicians and professionals as well as the sensitive rock ‘n rollers and civil-rights advocates of a post-crisis era in which conformity seemed to be a sure ticket to success. Midlife was an anxious “passage” for a generation torn between stolid elders and passionate juniors. Their surge to power coincided with fragmenting families, cultural diversity, institutional complexity, and prolific litigation. They are entering elderhood with unprecedented affluence, a “hip” style, and a reputation for indecision. (AMERICAN: *Colin Powell, Walter Mondale, Woody Allen, Martin Luther King, Jr., Sandra Day O’Connor, Elvis Presley*; FOREIGN: *Anne Frank, Mikhail Gorbachev*)

Boom

(*Prophet, born 1943–1960*) This generation basked as children in Dr. Spock permissiveness, suburban conformism, Sputnik-era schooling, Beaver Cleaver friend-

liness, and Father Knows Best family order. From the Summer of Love to the Days of Rage, they came of age rebelling against the worldly blueprints of their parents. As their “flower child,” Black Panther, Weathermen, and Jesus Freak fringes proclaimed themselves arbiters of public morals, youth pathologies worsened—and SAT scores began a 17-year slide. In the early 1980s, many young adults became self-absorbed “yuppies” with mainstream careers but perfectionist lifestyles. Entering midlife (and national power), they are trumpeting values, touting a “politics of meaning,” and waging scorched-earth Culture Wars. (AMERICAN: *Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich, Steven Spielberg, Candice Bergen, Spike Lee, Bill Gates*; FOREIGN: *Tony Blair, Binyamin Netanyahu*)

13th

(*Nomad, born 1961–1981*) This generation survived a “hurried” childhood of divorce, latchkeys, open classrooms, devil-child movies, and a shift from G to R ratings. They came of age curtailing the earlier rise in youth crime and fall in test scores—yet heard themselves denounced as so wild and stupid as to put *The Nation At Risk*. As young adults, maneuvering through a sexual battlescape of AIDS and blighted courtship rituals—they date and marry cautiously. In jobs, they embrace risk and prefer free agency over loyal corporatism. From grunge to hip-hop, their splintery culture reveals a hardened edge. Politically, they lean toward pragmatism and nonaffiliation, and would rather volunteer than vote. Widely criticized as “Xers” or “slackers,” they inhabit a Reality Bites economy of declining young-adult living standards. (AMERICAN: *Tom Cruise, Jodie Foster, Michael Dell, Deion Sanders, Winona Ryder, Quentin Tarantino*; FOREIGN: *Princess Di, Alanis Morissette*)

Millennial

(*Hero?, born 1982–?*) first arrived when “Babies on Board” signs appeared. As abortion and divorce rates ebbed, the popular culture began stigmatizing hands-off parental styles and recasting babies as special. Child abuse and child safety became hot topics, while books teaching virtues and values became best-sellers. Today, politicians define adult issues (from tax cuts to deficits) in terms of their effects on children. Hollywood is replacing cinematic child devils with child angels, and cable TV and the internet are cordoning off “child-friendly” havens. While educators speak of “standards” and “cooperative learning,” school uniforms are surging in popularity. With adults viewing children more posi-

tively, U.S. test scores are faring better in international comparisons. (AMERICAN: *Jessica McClure, the Olsen twins, Baby Richard, Elisa Lopez, Dooney Waters, Jessica Dubroff*; FOREIGN: *Anna Paquin, Prince William*)