

The Lifecourse Method

To know where people are today, focus on their generation, not their age.

People never "belong" to an age bracket. Rather, they belong to a generation which happens to be passing through an age bracket—a generation with its own memories, language, habits, beliefs, and life lessons. Back in the 1950s, we called rising 50-year-olds the "power elite"; today, we call them the "cultural elite"—a shift having more to do with the experience of living Woodstock vs. D-Day than with anything new about being age 50. Put differently: You learn less about a traveler by looking at the train station you find him in than by looking at the baggage he left home with.

To know where people will be tomorrow, focus on the life trajectory of their generation.

Generations never stand still. Like individuals, they strive, mature, and transform—always motivated to overcome basic personal and social challenges that they define for themselves early in life. Some generations (like Mae West's) start wild and later on slow down; others (like Gloria Steinem's) start off cautiously and later on speed up. From year to year, a generation's choices are buffeted by fads and events. But in the long run, its life trajectory is invariably governed by its archetype.

To know where a certain age group will be tomorrow, focus on the cohort shift.

The attitudes and behavior of every age group undergo constant flux. From one decade to the next, youth can turn from do-wop to acid rock to rap; midlifers from gray-flannel to midlife crisis to spiritualism; elders from reclusive apathy to senior-citizen entitlement to other-directed compassion. Most companies, public agencies, and nonprofits desperately seek clues about future swings in a particular age group—but they won't find them until they understand the next generation due to "age into" their target zone.

To know where society will be tomorrow, focus on the turning.

You may gather data on all the latest demographic and technological trends, but if you don't know what season of history it is—spring, summer, winter, or fall—you still won't know whether to sow or reap. From Henry Ford to Henry Kaiser and from Bill Levitt to Bill Gates, great innovators possess the ability to anticipate entirely new currents in the public mood. The future is never linear, and the further ahead you need to plan, the more you need to see around the next great bend in social time.

Respect and make use of the past—for history is the great teacher.

The world is full of market and social forecasters. But few have a definable method, and even fewer have road-tested their method—as LifeCourse has—on five centuries of past

events. For those who have the key, the past can be a treasure chest of parallel lifecycles and instructive scenarios. To comprehend today's "Millennials" for instance, reacquaint yourself with the original powerhouse "G.I." generation—and to dig deeper into the uncertainty and fragmentation of the '00s—take another look back at the 1930s or 1860s. History's echoes deserve attention not just because they bring us closer to our past, but because so much can be learned from them.

The Lifecourse Insight

Overview

Everyone lives a lifecourse, which from birth to death is experienced in stages. The most fundamental of these are the four life phases dating back to antiquity—each lasting (in twentieth-century America) about 20 to 22 years and each associated with a unique social role. These are Childhood, age 0 to 20; Young Adulthood, age 21 to 41; Midlife, age 42 to 62; and Elderhood, age 63 to 83.

Major events in history shape people differently depending on the life phase they occupy. As people are shaped, they sort themselves into different generations. To belong to the same generation, a group of people must feel a unique location in history, share distinct beliefs and behavior, and perceive a common group membership. They must also be able to inhabit the same life phase at the same time—which is why a generation comprises roughly 20 to 22 consecutive birth cohorts. (A birth cohort is everyone born in the same year.)

Each life phase is constantly being vacated by an older generation and entered by a younger one as the birth cohorts age. This cohort shift is constantly changing the basic attitudes and behavior we associate with each life phase.

Cohort shifts are always occurring in all four life phases. Once every living generation fully occupies a life phase and begins to move into the next, the society enters a new mood era or turning. A turning necessarily lasts about the length of a life phase or generation. And because there are four life phases (the seasons of life), there is also a cycle of four turnings (the seasons of time): High, Awakening, Unraveling, and Crisis.

Each of the four turnings produces a distinct societal mood because a different generational archetype—Prophet, Nomad, Hero, and Artist—is being born, coming of age, entering midlife, or entering elderhood. Generations with the same archetype experience roughly the same kinds of events at the same life phase; a generational archetype can be defined by the turnings that shape it when young and by the turnings it presides over as mature parents and leaders. (Heroes, for example, always come of age during Crises, Prophets during Awakenings.) Archetypes and turnings give rise to each other and, both of necessity, tend to recur in the same order.

The Four Life Phases

“Life’s racecourse is fixed,” wrote Cicero near the end of his life. “Nature has only a single path and that path is run but once, and to each stage of existence has been allotted its appropriate quality.” Across all cultures and epochs, all classes and races, the experience of aging is a universal denominator of the human condition. “From a biological standpoint,” observed Chinese philosopher Lin Yutang, “human life almost reads like a poem. It has its own rhythm and beat, its internal cycles of growth and decay.”

The ancients made sense of Cicero’s “stages” or Lin Yutang’s “rhythm and beat” by portraying human aging as a circle that nature and society divides into four parts. To several North American native tribes, life has been experienced as “four hills” (childhood, youth, maturity, old age), each corresponding to a wind and a season, and each possessing its own challenge, climax, and resolution. To the early Hindus, it was a journey through four *ashramas*, four phases of social and spiritual growth. Pythagoras was among the first western thinkers to interpret life as a cycle of four phases, each roughly twenty years long and each associated with a season: the spring of childhood, the summer of youth, the harvest of midlife, and the winter of old age. The Romans likewise divided the biological saeculum into four phases: *pueritia* (childhood); *iuventus* (young adulthood); *virilitas* (maturity); and *senectus* (old age).

In the modern era, the quaternal seasonality of the human lifecycle has remained a constant in literature, philosophy, and psychology. “Metaphorically, everyone understands the connections between the seasons of the year and the seasons of the human life,” writes sociologist Daniel Levinson. “Each has its necessary place and contributes its special character to the whole. It is an organic part of the total cycle, linking past and future and containing both within itself.” Carl Jung similarly describes the “arc of life” as “divisible into four parts.”

We connect our lifecycle with the seasons of nature not only to link our personal past to our personal future, but also to locate our own life within a larger social drama. Modern history has its own seasons—its own wets, hots, dries, and colds. Now consider what happens when one group of people grows up in a wet season and comes of age in a cold, while a later group grows up in dry season and comes of age in a hot. Because the seasons of history shape the seasons of life differently, the result is different *generations*. More fundamentally, because the seasons of history arrive in a fixed pattern, generations will also arrive in a fixed pattern—a recurring cycle of four *archetypes*. Rooted in ancient temperaments and enduring myths, these archetypes connect personal time with social time. Created young by the seasons of history, the four archetypes recreate those seasons, in the same order, as successive generations pass through life.

Like the seasons, the four phases of life blend one into the other, guided by a rhythm that allows variation. Where a season's length is determined by the time from solstice to equinox, the length of each lifecycle phase is determined by the span of time between birth and the coming of age into young adulthood.

In American society, the ritual acknowledgment today occurs at 21, the age of college graduation and initial career launch. Afterwards, a person is deemed to be an autonomous adult. The length of life's first phase fixes the length of the other life phases as well. Once one batch of children has fully come of age, *it and it alone* comprises the society's young adults, casting its next-elders into a midlife social role. This now happens when the latter reach age 42, the minimum age U.S. history (though not the Constitution) has declared acceptable for a President. And, in turn, the group entering midlife pushes another into an elder role, now starting around age 63, today's median age for receiving one's first old-age benefit check from the government.

Since the share of people able to survive the elderhood phase of life has grown enormously over the last fifty years, it may make sense to define a new phase of life: *late elderhood* (age 84 on up). The social role of late elders is pure dependence, the receiving of comfort from others. Apart from consuming resources, few of the very oldest of today's Americans are altering the quaternal dynamics of the lifecycle. If late elders ever swell in number, or if they ever collectively assert an active role, the impact on the saeculum (and on history) could be substantial.

The phases, and social roles, of the modern American lifecycle can be summarized as follows:

- **Childhood** (*pueritia*, age 0–20). Social role: *growth* (receiving nurture, acquiring values).
- **Young Adulthood** (*iuventus*, age 21–41). Social role: *vitality* (serving institutions, testing values).
- **Midlife** (*virilitas*, age 42–62). Social role: *power* (managing institutions, applying values).
- **Elderhood** (*senectus*, age 63–83). Social role: *leadership* (leading institutions, transferring values).
- **Late Elderhood** (age 84+). Social role: *dependence* (receiving comfort from institutions, remembering values).

The first four (childhood through elderhood) comprise the quaternity of the human lifecycle. The length of these four—roughly 84 years—matches the span of the American saeculum dating back to the Revolution.

The Generations:

Introduction

“You belong to it, too. You came along at the same time. You can’t get away from it,” Thomas Wolfe wrote (in *You Can’t Go Home Again*) about his own Lost generation. “You’re a part of it whether you want to be or not.” To Wolfe, as to F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Malcolm Cowley, and other writers of the 1920s, membership in that generation reflected a variety of mannerisms: weary cynicism at a young age, risk-taking, bingelike behavior, disdain for a pompous “older generation.” Wolfe’s peers stood across a wide divide from moralistic midlifers and across another divide from a new batch of straight-arrow kids. To “belong to it,” you had to come of age not long before World War I started. No one formally defined it that way; people just *knew*.

Wolfe’s Lost Generation literati never explained exactly how they identified their “generation.” But the question must be raised: In a world in which people are born every minute, how can social generations be located and their birthyear boundaries defined?

To answer this, you first have to determine the *length* of a generation. Here it helps to consider what happens when society encounters some great event that seems to change the course of history: History puts a different stamp on different peer groups according to their age-determined social roles. (For children this role might mean responding to an emergency by showing deference to elders and staying out of the way, while for young adults it might mean taking up arms and risking death to meet the enemy.) Thus, the length of a generation (in birthyears) should approximate the length of a phase of life (in years of age). Before the early nineteenth century, American generations should average about 25 years in length; since then, they should average about 21 years. Necessarily, these lengths can vary somewhat for each generation depending on the noise of history and the precise timing of great events.

To apply these lengths to real birthyears, you have to locate an underlying generational persona. Every generation has one. It’s a distinctly human—and variable—creation, with attitudes about family life, sex roles, institutions, politics, religion, lifestyle, and the future. A generation can think, feel, or do anything a person might think, feel, or do. It can be safe or reckless, individualist or collegial, spiritual or secular. Like any social category (race, class, or nationality), a generation can allow plenty of individual exceptions and be fuzzy at the edges. But unlike most other categories, it possesses its own personal biography. You can tell a lifelong story about the shared experiences of the Silent Generation in ways you never could for all women, all Hispanics, or all Californians. The reason, to quote Ferrari, is that a generation “is born, lives, and dies.” It can feel nostalgia for a unique past, express urgency about a future of limited duration, and comprehend its own mortality.

There is no fixed formula for identifying the persona of a real-life generation. But it helps to look for three attributes: first, a generation’s common location in history; second, its

common beliefs and behavior; and third, its perceived membership in a common generation.

Common Beliefs and Behavior

Common beliefs and behavior of a generation show its members to be different from people born at another time. They are the means by which a generation moves history.

No element of belief or behavior ever appears uniformly across all members of a generation, of course. But conspicuous elements often do appear in a decisive majority of members—leading Comte to conclude that each generation develops a "unanimous adherence to certain fundamental notions" and Dilthey to talk of a "generational *Weltanschauung*," a worldview that shapes a generation's direction from youth through old age. To quantify these elements for recent generations, you can turn to a wealth of age-graded data—from opinion surveys and educational tests to crime records and Census reports. The changes from one generation to the next are often striking and revealing.

To see how generational traits differ, consider shifts in political affiliations, such as the huge contrast between the Republican-leaning Lost (life-long skeptics of progress and organization) and the Democratic-leaning G.I.s (lifelong optimists about science and government). Consider the changing attitudes toward risk, such as the young Silent's well-documented quest for marital and career "security" in the '50s, versus the Xers' '90s-era aversion to marriage and corporatism. Consider the variable gap between acceptable sex roles for men and women, a gap that G.I.s once widened but that Boomers have since worked hard (in careers, families, and public life) to narrow. And consider a generation's overall life goals. Back in the late 1960s, Boomer college freshman believed by a two-to-one majority that "developing a meaningful philosophy of life" was more important than "getting ahead financially." Since the mid-1980s, the Xer response to this question has switched to a two-to-one majority *the other way*. Between two elections, an opinion reversal of this magnitude would be considered seismic. Between two generations, these dramatic survey results show how a new persona can entirely transform the emotional texture of people who come of age two decades apart.

For generations born more than a century ago, the data become thinner, making behavior and beliefs hard to quantify. To distinguish between generations, you have to infer from anecdote, case study, and contemporary observation. Sometimes a well-recorded event will reveal underlying personas. For example, the U.S. election of 1868 turned out to be the largest generational landslide ever recorded, as the weary voters and candidates who fought the Civil War threw out the principled leaders and generals who led it. In that single year, the elder Transcendental generation (of Lincoln) lost a full third of its seats in Congress and state houses to the younger Gilded generation (of Grant). During that and the next two Presidential elections (1868, 1872, and 1876), a younger pragmatist challenged and defeated an elder reformer. With these elections, one of the most dramatic clashes between two adjacent yet very different generations finally drew to a close.

Common Location in History

Common location refers to where a generation finds itself, at any given age, against the background chronology of trends and events. Location in history gives shape to a generation.

At critical moments in history, members of each generation tend to occupy a single phase of life. At the end of World War II, the Silent, G.I., Lost, and Missionary Generations each fit snugly into the age brackets of youth, young adulthood, midlife, and elderhood age. The same close fit between generations and phases of life occurred in the late 1920s (just before the Great Crash), or in the early 1960s and early 1980s (just before and after an era of cultural upheaval). These phase-of-life alignments are generational crucibles. A peer group therein acquires what Mannheim called “a community of time and space, ... a common location in the historical dimension” in which members encounter “the same concrete historical problems.” Ortega refers to them as “zones of dates” which make members of a generation “the same age vitally and historically.”

At any given moment, history inevitably touches a generation’s oldest and youngest cohorts in different ways. The Vietnam War put far more pressure on Boomers born in 1945 than in 1955, for example, and World War II put far more pressure on G.I.s born in 1920 than in 1910. Yet within each generation, a few special birth cohorts can pull on older or younger people and gravitate them into a sense of common location. Cheryl Merseur observes in *Grown Ups* that for Americans born in the 1950s (like herself), their “sixties took place in the seventies.” This “sixties” experience felt authentic enough to bind Merseur and her peers to older Boomers who knew the genuine article. But no one could have their “sixties” in the fifties or eighties. People born in 1944 and 1954 thus share a common age location, while those born in 1954 and 1964 do not.

Generations can be separated at exact birth dates by paying attention to what Mariás defines as the “social cartography” of successive birth cohorts. “In this analogy,” he suggested, “each generation would be the area between two mountain chains, and in order to determine whether a certain point belonged to one or the other, it would be necessary to know the relief.” Sometimes the watershed is obvious, sometimes subtle. Occasionally, even a split-second can be decisive in binding and separating adjacent generations. In contemporary America, a one-minute delay in birth can mean the difference between kindergarten and first grade six years later. Down the road—depending on the conscription laws—that can mean the difference between gliding through college just ahead of a controversial war, or belonging to a class that feels real pressure from a wartime “draft.” A one-minute difference did in fact separate the newborn babies of December 31, 1942, from those of January 1, 1943—a critical tick of the clock that later helped ignite the fiery college Class of ’65 and create a lasting cohort boundary between the Silent and Boomers.

Common Perceived Membership

Common perceived membership refers to how a generation defines itself—and to a popular consensus about which birth cohorts belong together. Perceived membership gives a generation a sense of destiny. The philosopher Julián Marías once remarked that "to ask ourselves to which generation we belong is, in large measure, to ask who we are." Whenever a generational boundary seems murky, the best way to clarify it is often simply to *ask* people which side of the line they would put themselves.

Perceived membership confirms what many pollsters have long suspected about Boomers—that their true boundaries (born between 1943 and 1960) should start and stop a few years earlier than the fertility bulge demographers often use to define this generation (between 1946 and 1964). Ask some people born between 1943 and 1945 whether they've always thought of themselves as Boomers. Chances are, they'll say yes. Ask the same question of people born between 1961 and 1964. Chances are, they'll say (more emphatically) no. The term "Generation X" was a self-label first popularized by young literati born between 1961 and 1964, and its central purpose was to deny Boomer membership. Even when a generation can no longer be asked directly, it often leaves plenty of evidence about its perceived peer membership. This evidence is what links the famous circle of "Lost Generation" authors born in the late 1890s with writers just a bit older (Randolph Bourne, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound), but not with writers just a bit younger (John Steinbeck, Langston Hughes, W.H. Auden).

To say that you identify with your generation does not, of course, mean that you care for your generation. Ortega wrote that the generational experience is a "dynamic compromise between the mass and the individual." To refuse this compromise is not easy; indeed, total refusal forces a person to become painfully aware of outsider status. The German sociologist Julius Peterson observed that any generation includes what he called "directive," "directed," and "suppressed" members. The "directive" members set the overall tone, the "directed" follow cues (and thereby legitimize the tone), and the "suppressed" either withdraw from that tone or, more rarely, battle against it.

Perhaps the most important aspect of a generation's self-perception is its sense of direction. Ortega once wrote that each generation is "a species of biological missile hurled into space at a given instant, with a certain velocity and direction" which gives it a "preestablished vital trajectory." Mannheim likewise referred to each generation's sense of "essential destiny." For some generations, this sense of destiny can be overwhelming. The cohesion of postwar G.I.s reflected a massive generational consensus about the world they wanted and were expected to build. Thomas Jefferson's peers once felt the same way after the Revolution. Yet for other generations, this sense of destiny is something quite different. The Silent see their work as smoothing out the harsh edges of life—a task reminiscent of Theodore Roosevelt's "Progressive" peers. Boomers see in themselves a mission of vision and values—a quest others accede to them, if begrudgingly. Lincoln's generation was much the same. And Xers have come to expect little of themselves as a generation—a fact which itself has become part of their collective persona. A similar trait arose in the generations of George Washington and Dwight Eisenhower.

A generation can collectively choose its destiny. But you cannot personally choose your generation any more than you can choose your parents or your native land. That much is fate, conditioning everything about your life whether or not you like it or care to notice it. As Martin Heidegger observed, it is "the fateful act of living in and with one's generation completes the drama of human existence."

Cohort Shift

When reflecting on our own lives, especially on our college years, many of us can recall unusual cohort-groups coming of age as young adults—perhaps a few years younger, perhaps a few years older than ourselves. In the memory of the living, this has happened four times. In the early 1920s, an upbeat, collectivist batch replaced the cynics and individualists. In the late 1940s, a suddenly risk-averse batch replaced the can-do war heroes. In the mid-1960s, a fiery batch replaced the adult emulators.

And around 1980, a smooth and knowing batch replaced the complainers. Whichever side of the line they were on, college alumni commonly remember these breakpoints. Others can recall less dramatic shifts: the rising drug use among successive college freshmen cohorts in the late 1960s and early 1970s, for example, or the growing popularity of military and entrepreneurial careers among those who came to campus in the early 1980s. As you grow older, you look at other age groups and wonder whether you are changing or they are changing. The answer, quite often, is neither: You were both different to begin with. You were born at different times. You belong to different cohort-groups.

What exactly does it mean to belong to a cohort-group? Unlike many group definitions (like neighborhood or career), cohort-group membership is *involuntary*. Then again, so is age. But unlike age, cohort-group membership is *permanent*. And unlike sex or race (also involuntary and permanent), it applies to a finite number of identifiable individuals. After its last birth-year, a cohort-group can only shrink in size. Fixed in history, it must eventually disappear. What makes the cohort-group truly unique is that all its members—from birth on—always encounter the same social events and moods and trends at similar ages. They retain, in other words, a *common age location in history* throughout their lives. Since history affects people very differently according to their age, common age location is what gives each cohort-group a distinct biography and a distinct lifecycle.

We have no trouble appreciating age location when thinking of momentous historical events like war, depression, revolution, or spiritual prophecy. These events obviously impress people differently at different ages. The same cataclysm that a 10-year-old finds terrifying, a 30-year-old may find empowering, a 50-year-old calming, a 70-year-old inspiring. Once received, such impressions continue to shape the personality people take with them as they grow older. Today's ninetyish elders, for instance, came of age with the New Deal, World War II, and collective heroism. Even in late elderhood, they retain their taste for teamwork—and often wonder why self-obsessed "yuppies" never had it. Their fiftyish juniors, on the other hand, came of age with Vietnam, Watergate hearings, and "Consciousness III" euphoria. They retain their taste for introspection, and often wonder why bustling "senior citizens" never had it. The 90-year-old had no Woodstock,

the 50-year-old no D-Day—nothing even close. This coming-of-age contrast will continue to influence both groups' attitudes toward the world—and toward each other—for as long as they live. Likewise, a very different contrast will always separate those who were children at the time of D-Day and Woodstock. If D-Day empowered young-adult G.I.s, it intimidated Silent children. And if Woodstock brought inner rapture to 25-year-old Boomers, it made 5-year-old Xers feel that the adult world was turning hysterical.

Age location also shapes cohort-groups through historical shifts in society-wide attitudes toward families, schooling, sex-roles, religion, crime, careers, and personal risk. At various moments in history, Americans have chosen to be more protective of children, or more generous to old people, or more tolerant of unconventional young adults. Then, after a while, the mood has swung the other way. Each time this happened, the social environment changed differently for each cohort-group.

Take “open classrooms” in the early 1970s; or A-bomb drills for elementary students in the mid-1950s; or the huge rise in Social Security benefits in the mid-1970s. All were passing fads, but fads that forever changed the lives of the specific cohort-groups affected by them. The first permanently if subtly altered how today's 40-year-olds feel about parental authority; the second, how today's 55-year-olds feel about nuclear deterrence; the third, how today's 90-year-olds feel about their social status relative to their next-juniors. Trees planted in the same year contain rings that indicate when they all met with the cold winter, wet spring, or dry summer. Cohort-groups are like trees in this respect. They carry within them a unique signature of history's bygone moments.

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 within two- or three-year cohort-groups. College-age students date, study, and compete athletically within 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 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, or profession), cohort-group membership forges a sense of collective identity and reinforces a common personality.

Quantitative research on cohorts is still a young science. The very term “birth cohort” was not coined until 1863 (by the French sociologist Emile Littré), and the concept attracted little attention over the next hundred years. Since the early 1960s, the interest has grown more serious—especially in America. Intrigued by lifecycle shifts, a few historians have begun to pore over town archives, gravestones, and census records to

study cohort-groups in small communities. Social scientists have also begun to look more carefully at modern behavioral data from a birthyear perspective. All this could not happen at once. The number crunchers first had to wait until they could obtain age-bracketed data for the American population at large. Then they had to wait still longer until time could sort out the independent effect of cohort membership from other behavior-shaping variables such as phase of life (the “age effect”) and historical change (the “period effect”). But as the widespread collection of age-bracketed data enters its fourth decade, the results are finally arriving. More often than not, they show that cohorts matter a great deal.

Survey analysis of voting behavior is a classic case in point. In the early 1960s, researchers discovered that Americans age 65 to 80 voted heavily Republican, while younger Americans voted Democratic. At that time, three explanations seemed equally plausible: People always tend to vote Republican when they get old (the age effect); elders were the leading wave of a national trend toward Republicanism (the period effect); or the 1890s cohort-group leans Republican (the cohort effect). Most experts opted for the first answer—the age effect. “Aging seems to produce a shift toward Republicanism,” concluded one study in 1962. “The pattern appears to be linear.” Wrong. Two decades have passed, and survey researchers have been able to isolate and measure the influence of each effect. Cohorts win, hands down. The post-1970 arrival of a new and increasingly *Democratic* batch of 65-to-80-year-olds made cohorts the only possible explanation. So, a decade later, did the arrival of a new and increasingly *Republican* batch of 18-to-28-year-olds.

Further confirmation of the power of cohorts comes from longitudinal tests of intelligence and educational aptitude. For a third of a century, psychologist K. Warner Schaie has measured the “psychometric intelligence” of 7-year cohort-groups—born from 1886 through 1962—living in Seattle, Washington. Schaie’s original purpose was to trace universal lifecycle trends (the age effect) in aptitude scores. In this, he has been successful. His surveys show that measured intelligence rises most steeply in the twenties, begins to level off during the thirties, and enters a gradual decline after the early fifties.

What Schaie was not looking for—but found—was a powerful correlation between his aptitude scores and his specific cohort-groups. In each case, the cohort effect remained strong even after Schaie isolated it both from the influence of age and from the influence of historical changes such as better schooling. In fact, *among subjects under age 70, most measures of aptitude vary far more across cohort lines than across age brackets.*

Such marked contrasts between cohort-groups prompt us to ask searching questions about the age location and collective biography of each group. As yet, however, research on cohort effects remains in its infancy, and seldom are such questions ever addressed. Even when birthyear information is available, most experts do not bother to isolate it from data presented under other labels. A typical table shows age on the vertical axis, calendar year on the horizontal. Thus, by implication (though not by label) the cohort lies along the *generational diagonal*. Unless you are looking “diagonally” for the cohort effect, you

will not see it. And unless you are willing to wait many years, you cannot rule out that what you see is simply due to aging or to historical trends affecting all age brackets.

Reading along the generational diagonal shows us that history does not always move in a straight line. It also prompts us to ask *why*. What differences in parental nurture, schooling, adult expectations, economic trends, or cultural tone might explain why the early-1960s cohorts scored so low on aptitude tests? Or why the early-1920s cohort (if Seattlans are any guide) grew up scoring so high? The closer we look, the more interesting such questions become. Why, for example, did the schoolchildren of the 1930s develop such strong number skills, and then raise their own children (the Jack-and-Jill readers of the 1950s) to have such a commanding grasp of verbal meaning? What was it about the nurture of that 1885-1900 cohort-group that produced such precocious talent at “word play”—culminating in memorable slang, brilliant mystery fiction, the invention of crossword puzzles, five of America’s seven Nobel Prizes for literature, and the greatest elder elocutionists (from Adlai Stevenson to Claude Pepper) of the 20th century?

Countless such questions lie unanswered among the myriad cohort-groups of the past four centuries. How and at what age did history shape them? And how and at what age did they in turn shape history?

The Turnings

Introduction

A *turning* is an era with a characteristic social mood, a new twist on how people feel about themselves and their nation. It results from the aging of the generational constellation. A society enters a turning once every twenty years or so, when all living generations begin to enter their next phases of life. Like archetypes and constellations, turnings come four to a saeculum, and always in the same order:

- The First Turning is a *High*. Old Prophets disappear, Nomads enter elderhood, Heroes enter midlife, Artists enter young adulthood—and a new generation of Prophets is born.
- The Second Turning is an *Awakening*. Old Nomads disappear, Heroes enter elderhood, Artists enter midlife, Prophets enter young adulthood—and a new generation of child Nomads is born.
- The Third Turning is an *Unraveling*. Old Heroes disappear, Artists enter elderhood, Prophets enter midlife, Nomads enter young adulthood—and a new generation of child Heroes is born.
- The Fourth Turning is a *Crisis*. Old Artists disappear, Prophets enter elderhood, Nomads enter midlife, Heroes enter young adulthood—and a new generation of child Artists is born.

Like the four seasons of nature, the four turnings of history are equally necessary and important. Awakenings and Crises are the saecular solstices, summer and winter, each a solution to a challenge posed by the other. Highs and Unravelings are the saecular

equinoxes, spring and autumn, each coursing a path directionally opposed to the other. When a society moves into an Awakening or Crisis, the new mood announces itself as a sudden turn in social direction. An Awakening begins when events trigger a revolution in the culture, a Crisis when events trigger an upheaval in public life. A High or Unraveling announces itself as a sudden consolidation of the new direction. A High begins when society perceives that the basic issues of the prior Crisis have been resolved, leaving a new civic regime firmly in place. An Unraveling begins with the perception that the Awakening has been resolved, leaving a new cultural mindset in place.

The gateway to a new turning can be obvious and dramatic (like the 1929 Stock Crash) or subtle and gradual (like 1984's Morning in America). It usually occurs two to five years after a new generation of children starts being born. The tight link between turning gateways and generational boundaries enables each archetype to fill an entire phase-of-life just as the mood of an old turning grows stale and feels ripe for replacement with something new.

The four turnings comprise a quaternal social cycle of growth, fulfillment, entropy, and death (and rebirth). In a springlike High, a society fortifies and builds and converges in an era of promise. In a summerlike Awakening, it dreams and plays and exults in an era of euphoria. In an autumnal Unraveling, it harvests and consumes and diverges in an era of anxiety. In a hibernal Crisis, it focuses and struggles and sacrifices in an era of survival. When the saeculum is in motion, therefore, no long human lifetime can go by without a society confronting its deepest spiritual and worldly needs.

Every twenty to twenty-five years (or, in common parlance, "once a generation"), people are surprised by the arrival of a new saecular season—just as people are by the end of spring announced by the first oppressively humid day or the end of autumn by the first sleet storm. We keep forgetting that history, like nature, must turn. Abraham Lincoln understood as much. Speaking to a crowd just eighteen months before the bombardment of Fort Sumter, he told a story of an Asiatic monarch who directs his sages to compose a statement "to be ever in view, and which should be true and appropriate in all times and situations." After considerable study, the sages drafted an answer: "This, too, shall pass away."

Modernity has thus far produced six repetitions of each turning. From the record of history, the following typology can be constructed.

The First Turning

A *High* brings a renaissance to community life. With the new civic order in place, people want to put the Crisis behind them and feel content about what they have collectively achieved. Any social issues left unresolved by the Crisis must now remain so.

The need for dutiful sacrifice has ebbed, yet the society continues to demand order and consensus. The recent fear for group survival transmutes into a desire for investment, growth, and strength—which in turn produces an era of commercial prosperity,

institutional solidarity, and political stability. The big public arguments are over means, not ends. Security is a paramount need. Obliging individuals serve a purposeful society—though a few loners voice disquiet over the spiritual void. Life tends toward the friendly and homogeneous, but attitudes toward personal risk-taking begin to loosen. The sense of shame (which rewards duty and conformity) reaches its zenith. Gender distinctions attain their widest point, and child rearing becomes more indulgent. Wars are unlikely, except as unwanted echoes of the recent Crisis.

Eventually, civic life seems fully under control but distressingly spirit-dead. People worry that, as a society, they can *do* everything but no longer *feel* anything.

The post-World War II American High may rank as the all-time apogee of the national mood. The Gilded Age surge into the industrial age was supported by a rate of capital formation unmatched in U.S. history, symbolized by the massive turbines in the Centennial Exposition's Hall of Machines. In the early 19th century, the geometric grids of the District of Columbia and Northwest Territory townships projected a mood of ordered community that culminated in the Era of Good Feelings, the only time a U.S. President was re-elected by acclamation. In the upbeat 1710s, poetic odes to flax and shipping conjured up a society preoccupied (in Cotton Mather's words) with "usefulness" and "good works."

Recall America's circa-1963 conception of the future: We brimmed over with optimism about Camelot, a bustling future with smart people in which big projects and "impossible dreams" were freshly achievable. The moon could be reached, and poverty eradicated, both within a decade. Tomorrowland was a friendly future with moving skywalks, pastel geometric shapes, futuristic Muzak, and well-tended families. In the Carousel of Progress, the progress remained fixed while the "carousel" (what moved) was the audience. The future had specificity and certainty but lacked urgency and moral direction.

The Second Turning

An *Awakening* arrives with a dramatic challenge against the High's assumptions about benevolent reason and congenial institutions. The outer world now feels trivial compared to the inner world.

New spiritual agendas and social ideals burst forth, along with utopian experiments seeking to reconcile total fellowship with total autonomy. The prosperity and security of a High are overtly disdained though covertly taken for granted. A society searches for soul over science, meanings over things. Youth-fired attacks break out against the established institutional order. As these attacks take their toll, society has difficulty coalescing around common goals. People stop believing that social progress requires social discipline. Any public effort that requires collective discipline encounters withering controversy. Wars are awkwardly fought and badly remembered afterward. A euphoric enthusiasm over near-term spiritual progress eclipses public concern over secular problems, contributing to a high tolerance for risk-prone lifestyles. People begin feeling guilt about what they earlier did to avoid shame. Public order deteriorates, and

crime and substance abuse rise. Gender distinctions narrow, and child rearing reaches the point of minimum protection and structure.

Eventually, the enthusiasm cools—having left the old cultural regime fully discredited, internal enemies identified, comity shattered, and institutions delegitimized.

Many Americans recall this mood on the campuses and urban streets of the Consciousness Revolution. Earlier generations knew a similar mood in Greenwich Village around 1900, in utopian communes around 1840, in the Connecticut Valley nearly a century earlier, and in the Puritans' New Jerusalems in the post-Mayflower decades.

Recall America's circa-1984 conception of the future: Tomorrowland had evolved through *Space Odyssey* to *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, a spiritual future in which human consciousness triumphs over machines. The visions alternated between perfection and disaster—between utopias celebrating "love" and dystopias annihilating everything. We no longer believed that progress required self-expression more than self-control—even if we still assumed that our nation must be advancing *somewhere*.

The Third Turning

An *Unraveling* begins as a society-wide embrace of the liberating cultural forces set loose by the Awakening. People have had their fill of spiritual rebirth, moral reform, and lifestyle experimentation. Content with what they have become individually, they vigorously assert an ethos of pragmatism, self-reliance, laissez faire, and national (or sectional or ethnic) chauvinism.

While personal satisfaction is high, public trust ebbs amid a fragmenting culture, harsh debates over values, and weakening civic habits. Pleasure-seeking lifestyles coexist with a declining public tolerance for aberrant personal behavior. The sense of guilt (which rewards principle and individuality) reaches its zenith. Gender differences attain their narrowest point, families stabilize, and new protections are provided for children. As moral debates brew, the big public arguments are over ends, not means. Decisive public action becomes very difficult, as community problems are deferred. Wars are fought with moral fervor but without consensus or follow-through.

Eventually, cynical alienation hardens into a brooding pessimism. During a High, obliging individuals serve a purposeful society, and even bad people get harnessed to socially constructive tasks; during an Unraveling, an obliging society serves purposeful individuals, and even good people find it hard to connect with their community. The approaching specter of public disaster ultimately elicits a mix of paralysis and apathy that would have been unthinkable half a saeculum earlier. People can now *feel*, but collectively can no longer *do*.

The mood of the current Culture Wars era seems new to nearly every living American but is not new to history. Around World War I, America steeped in reform and fundamentalism amidst a floodtide of crime, alcohol, immigration, political corruption, and circus trials. The 1850s likewise simmered with moral righteousness, shortening tempers, and multiplying “mavericks.” It was a decade, says historian David Donald, in which “the authority of all government in America was at a low point.” Entering the 1760s, the colonies felt rejuvenated in spirit but reeled from violence, mobs, insurrections, and paranoia over the corruption of official authority.

Look at how Americans conceived of the future throughout the '90s: Think-tank luminaries have exulted over the history-bending changes of the Information Age, while the public has glazed at expertise, cynically disregarded the good news, and dwelled on the negative. From movies like *The Terminator* and *Deep Impact*, to novels like Neil Stevenson's *Snow Crash*, the culture has raked with futuristic images of individuals struggling to survive in a random, ‘every-man-for-himself’ world.

The Fourth Turning

A *Crisis* arises in response to sudden threats that previously would have been ignored or deferred, but which are now perceived as dire. Great worldly perils boil off the clutter and complexity of life, leaving behind one simple imperative: The society must prevail. This requires a solid public consensus, aggressive institutions, and personal sacrifice.

People support new efforts to wield public authority, whose perceived successes soon justify more of the same. Government *governs*, community obstacles are removed, and laws and customs that resisted change for decades are swiftly shunted aside. A grim preoccupation with civic peril causes spiritual curiosity to decline. A sense of public urgency contributes to a clampdown on “bad” conduct or “anti-social” lifestyles. People begin feeling shameful about what they earlier did to absolve guilt. Public order strengthens, private risk-taking abates, and crime and substance abuse decline. Families strengthen, gender distinctions widen, and child rearing reaches a smothering degree of protection and structure. The young focus their energy on worldly achievements, leaving values in the hands of the old. Wars are fought with fury and for maximum result.

Eventually, the mood transforms into one of exhaustion, relief, and optimism. Buoyed by a newborn faith in the group and in authority, leaders plan, people hope, and a society yearns for good and simple things.

Today's oldest Americans recognize this as the mood of the Great Depression and World War II, but a similar mood has been present in all the other great gates of our history, from the Civil War and Revolution back into colonial and English history.

Recall America's conception of the future during the darkest years of its last Crisis: From “Somewhere over the Rainbow” to the glimmering Futurama at the 1939 New York World's Fair, people felt hope, determination, and a solid consensus about where society should go: toward spiritual simplicity (home and apple pie) and material abundance

(bigger, better, and more homes and pies). All this seemed within reach, conditioned on a triumph that demanded unity from all, sacrifices from many.

Throughout the 7 saecula of modern Anglo-American history, each turning has made its own contribution to history. Each offered its own solutions—which, in time, created new problems and anxieties. Thus have the four turnings kept the great wheel of time in motion, infusing civilization with periodic new doses of vitality, propelling the human adventure ever forward.

Generational Archetypes:

Introduction

The miraculous humble birth. The early evidence of superhuman power and strength. The rise to fame. The triumphant struggle with forces of evil. The overweening hubris. The fall. The climax of betrayal—or heroic sacrifice—and death. Perhaps you recognize this as the saga of Hercules, Superman, Jason and the Argonauts, or the boys of Iwo Jima.

Jung saw this “hero myth” as perhaps the most potent expression of his archetypes, recurring in a wide range of eras and cultures. Some hero myths, like Superman, are pure fable; others, like our memory of World War II veterans, are rooted in historical reality. Yet as time passes, the details that distinguish between fable and reality tend to fade until most of what’s left is myth, the raw outline of the archetype itself.

Many academic historians decry myth-making whenever they spot it—and lament the fact that much of what students “know” about the 1960s and ’70s comes from such films as *JFK*, *Nixon*, or *Forrest Gump*. Yet deliberate myth-making is as old as history itself. Margaret Mitchell constructed myths from the Civil War, Shakespeare from the War of the Roses, and Homer from some otherwise-forgotten skirmish in the Dardanelles. In any era, mythical archetypes assist people’s understanding of who they are and what they should live up to. By converting events into myths, a culture can transcend chaotic or linear history and allow the instinct for reenactment to express itself. The myths that endure are those that illuminate the virtues (or vices) that successive generations see recurring in their own time.

Of all myths, the most widely noticed is the hero myth. But as the contrasting stories of Hercules and Orpheus suggest, heroes can be secular or spiritual; they can display what Jung called either “extraverted” or “introverted” behavior. “There are two types of deed,” insists Joseph Campbell in *The Power of Myth*. “One is the physical deed, in which the hero performs a courageous act in battle or saves a life. The other is the spiritual deed, in which the hero learns to experience the supernatural range of human spiritual life and then comes back with the message.”

The secular hero-king and spiritual hero-prophet often appear in the same myth. Yet when they do, they are never the same age—not even close. Typically, they are two phases of life apart. In legends where the young hero-king makes his perilous journey, his

first encounter is often with what Campbell describes as “a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass.” The prophet can be a ritual elder, holy man, or what Campbell calls a “shaman”—a person who has undergone a spiritually transforming rite of passage and, entering old age, uses the powers thereby gained to assist the young. This elder possesses little worldly power but supernatural gifts of magic and access to the gods.

Recall all the classic western pairings of the young hero and the elder prophet: Joshua and Moses in the Old Testament; the Argonauts and the centaur Cheiron in Hellenic myth; Aeneas and the Sybil of Cumae in Roman myth; King Arthur and Merlin in Celtic myth; Siegfried and Hildebrand in Teutonic myth; or Cuchulain and Skatha the Wise in Gaelic myth. Outside the West, such pairings are nearly as common. In Hindu myth, the young king Rama meets the old hermit Agastya. In Egyptian myth, Horus, son of Osiris, is taught by Thoth, the all-knowing vizier. In Navajo myth, the questing young sun gods are told powerful secrets by the crone Spider Woman. Even today, this timeless tale continues to be retold—as Disney’s *Apprentice and the Sorcerer*; as *The Hobbit*’s Bilbo Baggins and Gandalf; as *Star Wars*’ Luke Skywalker and Obi Wan Kenobi; and as *The Lion King*’s Simba and Rafiki (who, like the Egyptian Thoth, takes the form of a wise baboon).

For the young hero, the elder prophet is not necessarily an ally. He (or, often, *she*) can also be a lethal enemy—as Medusa was for Jason, or as the crone sorcerers were in *Snow White* or *The Wizard of Oz*. Yet more often, as Campbell notes, the young hero’s close bond with a wise elder is essential to his ultimate success. Like Merlin, he will be a loving teacher. Like Obi Wan Kenobi, he will feel the unseen “force” of the universe. Like Gandalf, he will rescue the young hero through mysterious mental powers. Like Mickey’s Sorcerer, he will warn against the dangers of hubris. In the end, the old prophet helps the young king find (or save) his dynasty.

Myths involving young hero-kings and old prophets are universal in part because people are comforted to hear tales of the valor of youth tempered by the wisdom of age. Yet people of all eras know that such a mythlike symbiosis between young and old occurs only on occasion. In America, certainly, it has not been present for decades. The last time heroic youth and wise elders had this kind of constructive relationship was during World War II. The reason these young Hero myths are so embedded in our civilization is because they explain events when the secular world (the domain of kings) is being redefined beyond prior recognition—in other words, in Crisis eras.

Another popular type of myth—of the young prophet and the old king—is much the opposite. These legends tell not of the founding of kingdoms, but of religions. They invoke memories not of a world threatened by dire peril, but of a world suffocating under mighty dynasties that have become oversecure and soul-dead. They speak to the insight (not valor) of youth and the blindness (not wisdom) of elders.

When we encounter sacred myths of young prophets (Abraham in Ur, Moses in Egypt, Jesus before the Roman magistrate), the dominant image of persons roughly 40 years

older is typically one of expansive wealth and rationalism, resplendent in power but bereft of values (Hammurabi, the Pharaoh, Pontius Pilate). While the hero myth ends in the palatial city, the prophet myth *starts* there. In the Buddhist myth, young Siddhartha escapes the sumptuous pleasure dome of his royal father. In Persian myth, young Zoroaster defies the too-worldly kavis and karpans. In Islamic lore, young Mohammed challenges the immorality of the rich merchant families. In western fables, young Merlin stands up to the mighty King Vortigen; young Bacchus puts the gold curse on old King Midas; and the Pied Piper steals the youth away from the stolid burghers of Hamelin.

These Prophet myths reveal what Jung would call the shadow of the aging hero archetype. The Hero is seen not through his own eyes, but through the fresh vision of the youth Prophet. The one who sees that the emperor has no clothes is not one of the emperor's own peers, but a child who dares to speak the truth. Occasionally, these myths present kindly older people, often women, who help youths express their visions. Yet the recurring tone of these myths is one of stress and hostility across the generations. By teaching lessons about vision (or self-centeredness) among the young and power (or corruption) among the old, these young Prophet myths speak of Awakening eras.

Myths evoking the Nomad and Artist are less grand and more personal, mainly because they encounter history's turning points at a less critical phase of life. These archetypes encounter their first turning point not coming of age, but growing up as children (the Nomad in an Awakening, the Artist in Crisis). They encounter their second turning point not entering the peak of elder power, but entering midlife (the Nomad in Crisis, the Artist in an Awakening).

Compared to the Hero and Prophet myths, their tales speak more to human relations than to the rise and fall of dynasties and religions. Yet they too embody "shadow" lifecycles that mirror each other in reverse. Nomads are abandoned and alienated children who later, as adults, strive to slow down, simplify, and brace their social environment. Artists are sheltered and sensitive children who later, as adults, strive to speed up, complicate, and adorn their social environment. Nomads are raised to manage alone and are burdened with low expectations. Artists are raised to cooperate with others and are burdened with high expectations.

One common story line features a *Cinderella*-like hated child, immersed in a hostile or neglectful social environment, who must apply competitive instincts first to survive, then to succeed. In similar myths, hard-scrabble youths must use their wits to evade murder (*Aladdin*), cannibalism (*Hansel and Gretel*), slavery (*Pinocchio*), or meltdown (*Toy Soldier*). Parental figures are typically missing, and the enemies are less often elders than prime-of-life people possessed of a ruthless vanity. If aging people are wizards, they are friendly helpmates, more like fairies than sorcerers, their powers flowing from whimsical kindness more than stern wisdom. These myths depict the child Nomad being nurtured by an older Artist amidst the darker sides of an Awakening.

When a myth shows the Nomad archetype in midlife, the story tells of an aging adventurer, savvy but going it alone. If older generations are present, they represent an

older Prophet and a younger Hero—never the other way around. The Nomad is neither as dutiful (or naive) as the younger Hero, nor as transcendently wise (or wicked) as the older Prophet. The best the Nomad can hope to experience is a brush with others' greatness. In the *Star Wars* trilogy, Hans Solo looks down the age ladder and sees the good Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia—and looks up and sees the wise Obe Wan Kenobe and the evil Darth Vader. These are times of *Crisis*, during which the Nomad does the dirty work with little expectation of public praise or reward.

The opposing child myth is that of the sensitive, dutiful youth enveloped in protections constructed by no-nonsense adults. Recall the classic myth of the Little Dutch Boy, doing his small part to save the mighty dike, or in anthropomorphic tales of sweetly vulnerable little animals (*Bambi*, *Peter Cottontail*) or machines (*The Little Engine That Could*). These myths depict children who look for ways to be helpful in a closed social environment where dos and don'ts are unquestioned. Sometimes adults have built such an impenetrable perimeter of protection that the outer world is invisible (*Uncle Remus*, *Winnie the Pooh*). Relations across generations are harmonious. Where the emotional timbre of the young Nomad stories is blunt and horrifying, here it is subtle and heartwarming. These myths depict the child Artist being nurtured by an older Nomad. Looking carefully through a child's prism, we can recognize the possibility (Christopher Robin), if not the fact (Little Dutch Boy), that the adult world is in Crisis.

In these four archetypal myths, you can recognize two sets of opposing temperaments, as well as two sets of inverted lifecycles. When multiple generations enter the myths, you typically see the Nomad sandwiched between the younger Hero and the older Prophet, and the Artist between the younger Prophet and the elder Hero.

This same archetypal ordering arises again and again in nearly every time and culture. Why? A society will not elevate an event (or story) into myth unless it illustrates enduring human tendencies. This ordering reflects a latent understanding of the shadow suppressed within each archetype. Were it possible for generations to come in some different order (say, from Hero to Prophet to Artist to Nomad), it would be much harder for the shadows to reveal themselves, or for a society to have that *enantiodromia* that enables civilization to correct its worst excesses.

What Jung observed about individuals is also true for generations: Each archetype's shadow is best revealed by the one directly across the cycle, two phases-of-life distant. The too-sanguine aging Heroes are countered by the fresh insights of young Prophets; the too-melancholic aging Prophets, by the valor of young Heroes; the too-phlegmatic aging Nomads, by the sensitivity of young Artists; and the too-choleric aging Artists, by the survival skills of young Nomads.

This sequence further explains the oft-noted similarities between very old and very young generations, whose location in time lies a full cycle apart. If a generation's shadow is *two* phases of life older (or younger), then a generation's matching archetype is *four* phases of life older (or younger). "It is one of nature's ways," Igor Stravinsky once observed, "that we often feel closer to distant generations than to the generation immediately preceding

us.” The affinity between grandparent and grandchild is universal folk wisdom. If each *family* generation is assumed to be a rough proxy for two *phase-of-life* generations—meaning that you “shadow” your parents and “match” your grandparents—then this folk wisdom directly reflects the sequence of archetypes.

In one of America’s grandest historical myths, *Gone With the Wind*, Margaret Mitchell has her characters acknowledge the similarities between archetypes born more than sixty years apart. At one point in the story, Rhett Butler tells Scarlett:

“If you are different, you are isolated, not only from people of your own age but from those of your parents’ generation and from your children’s generation too. They’ll never understand you, and they’ll be shocked no matter what you do. But your grandparents would probably be proud of you and say: ‘There’s a chip off the old block,’ and your grandchildren will sigh enviously and say: ‘What an old rip Grandma must have been!’ and they’ll try to be like you.”

Describing his “pirate” grandfather, Rhett admitted “I admired him and tried to copy him far more than I ever did my father, for Father is an amiable gentleman full of honorable habits and pious saws—so you see how it goes.” Rhett predicted that Scarlett’s children “will probably be soft, prissy creatures, as the children of hard-bitten characters usually are.... So you’ll have to get approval from your grandchildren.” In Mitchell’s story, Rhett and Scarlett represented the (*Nomad*) Gilded Generation; their parents the (*Artist*) Compromise Generation; their children the (*Artist*) Progressive Generation; and their grandchildren most likely the (*Nomad*) Lost Generation.

What these modern myths illustrate is this: Your generation isn’t like the generation that shaped you, but it has much in common with *the generation that shaped the generation that shaped you*. Or, put another way: Archetypes do not create archetypes like themselves; instead, they create the shadows of archetypes like themselves.

These myths suggest that for any generational differences to arise at all, a quaternity of opposing archetypes becomes a logical necessity. How else could young heroes emerge, if not in response to the worldly impotence of self-absorbed elder prophets? How else could young prophets emerge, if not in response to the spiritual complacency of hubristic elder heroes? This in turn requires that each generation exert a dominant formative influence on people who are *two phases of life younger*—that is, on the *second* younger generation.

This critical cross-cycle relationship is just what we see in most societies. It arises because a new child generation gathers its first impressions about the world just as a new midlife generation gains control of the institutions that surround a child. Even though a child’s biological parents will be distributed about equally over the two prior generations (assuming that generations average about 21 years in length), the older parental group has the dominant role. Boomers were parented by G.I.s and Silent, but the G.I.s exerted a far greater power over ’50s-era schools, PTAs, pediatric advice, TV, and movies. In the 1990s, similarly, Boomers and Xers together gave birth to Millennial children, but the

tone has been set by Bill Bennett, Hillary Clinton, Steven Spielberg, and Bill Gates and their Boomer peers. Likewise, the Lost Norman Rockwells set the tone for the Silent, and the Silent Bill Cosbys for Xers, just as the Xer Jodie Fosters will set the tone for the generation born early next century.

Move up one phase-of-life notch, and this pattern repeats. When a child generation comes of age, it does so just as that older generation enters elderhood and gains control of the institutions surrounding the young adult's world. A younger generation reaches military age just as its cross-cycle shadow reaches its maximum power to declare war. In American history, for instance, a generation's dominance in national leadership posts typically peaks around the time its first cohorts reach age 65—just as footsoldiers are on average about 42 years (or two phases of life) younger. The G.I.s fought in (Missionary-declared) World War II, the Silent in the (Lost-declared) Korean War, Boomers in (G.I.-declared) Vietnam, and Xers in (Silent-declared) Desert Storm.

This cross-cycle relationship has been true throughout American history. Franklin's (*Prophet*) Awakening Generation set the tone for Jefferson's (*Hero*) Republicans, which in turn did so for Lincoln's (*Prophet*) Transcendentals. In between, Washington's (*Nomad*) Liberty Generation set the tone for Daniel Webster's (*Artist*) Compromisers, which afterwards did it for Grant's (*Nomad*) Gilded.

The reaction of each archetype to its shadow can be friendly or antagonistic. Like Luke Skywalker's dual relationship with his father, it is usually some of both. Intentionally or not, most parents enter midlife trying to raise a new generation whose collective persona will complement, and not mirror, their own. Later on, however, the results of that nurture often come as a surprise. The G.I. pediatrician Benjamin Spock declared just after World War II that "we need idealistic children," and his peers raised Boomers accordingly—though many later voiced anger over the narcissistic product. Silent author Judy Blume wrote at the height of the Consciousness Revolution that "I hate the idea that you should always protect children," and her peers raised Xer children accordingly—though many later voiced anguish over the hardened product.

A key consequence of these cross-cycle shadow relationships is a recurring pattern that lies at the heart of the saeculum: an oscillation between the *overprotection and underprotection* of children. During a Crisis, Nomad-led families overprotect Artist children; during an Awakening, Artist-led families underprotect Nomad children. Following a Crisis, Hero-led families expand the freedoms of Prophet children; following an Awakening, Prophet-led families curtail the freedoms of Hero children.

These powerful cross-cycle phenomena explain why myths always depict the archetypes in one fixed order—the only order that is possible in the seasons of time: Hero to Artist to Prophet to Nomad. Recurring in this order, the four archetypes produce four possible generational constellations.

As each archetype ages, its persona undergoes profound yet characteristic changes—echoing the ancient Hellenic doctrine that all living things develop toward a destination

contrary to the form in which they first present themselves. Yet each archetype also has an underlying identity that endures unchanged. “Value orientations do not change much during a generation’s life time,” writes sociologist J. Zvi Namenworth. “Committed during its early stages, a generation most often carried its value commitments into the grave.” Once a generation fully occupies the leadership role of midlife, it succeeds in reshaping the social environment to reflect that orientation. Meanwhile, knowingly or not, it nurtures a new child generation as its shadow, equipping it to challenge its own ruling mentality. As the parental generation enters elderhood blind to its shadow, the child generation comes of age, emerges as the shadow, and reacts against its elders’ perceived excesses.

When this rhythm is filled out with the full range of historical examples, a four-type cycle of generations emerges. They are listed here beginning with the Prophet archetype—the one born in the saecular spring.

- A Prophet generation grows up as increasingly indulged post-Crisis children, comes of age as the narcissistic young crusaders of an Awakening, cultivates principle as moralistic midlifers, and emerges as wise elders guiding the next Crisis.
- A Nomad generation grows up as underprotected children during an Awakening, comes of age as the alienated young adults of a post-Awakening world, mellows into pragmatic midlife leaders during a Crisis, and ages into tough post-Crisis elders.
- A Hero generation grows up as increasingly protected post-Awakening children, comes of age as the heroic young teamworkers of a Crisis, demonstrates hubris as energetic midlifers, and emerges as powerful Awakening elders attacked by the next Awakening.
- An Artist generation grows up as overprotected children during a Crisis, comes of age as the sensitive young adults of a post-Crisis world, breaks free as indecisive midlife leaders during an Awakening, and ages into empathic post-Awakening elders.

Has anybody noticed this four-type cycle before? Yes—many times, over the millennia.

The Prophet Archetype

We remember *Prophets* best for their coming-of-age passion (the excited pitch of Jonathan Edwards, William Lloyd Garrison, William Jennings Bryan) and for their principled elder stewardship (the sober pitch of Samuel Langdon at Bunker Hill, President Lincoln at Gettysburg, or FDR with his “fireside chats”). Increasingly indulged as children, they become increasingly protective as parents. Their principal endowments are in the domain of *vision*, *values*, and *religion*. Their best-known leaders include: John Winthrop and William Berkeley; Samuel Adams and Benjamin Franklin; James Polk and Abraham Lincoln; and Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt. These have been principled moralists, summoners of human sacrifice, wagers of righteous wars. Early in

life, none saw combat in uniform; late in life, most came to be revered more for their inspiring words than for their grand deeds.

A Lifecycle Outline

- As *Prophets* replace Artists in childhood during a High, they are nurtured with increasing indulgence by optimistic adults in a secure environment.
- As self-absorbed *Prophets* replace Artists in young adulthood during an Awakening, they challenge the moral failure of elder-built institutions, sparking a society-wide spiritual awakening.
- As judgmental *Prophets* replace Artists in midlife during an Unraveling, they preach a downbeat, values-fixated ethic of moral conviction.
- As visionary *Prophets* replace Artists in elderhood during a Crisis, they push to resolve ever-deepening moral choices, setting the stage for the secular goals of the young.

The Nomad Archetype

We remember *Nomads* best for their rising-adult years of hell-raising (Paxton Boys, Missouri Raiders, rumrunners) and for their midlife years of hands-on, get-it-done leadership (Francis Marion, Stonewall Jackson, George Patton). Underprotected as children, they become overprotective parents. Their principal endowments are in the domain of *liberty*, *survival*, and *honor*. Their best-known leaders include: Nathaniel Bacon and William Stoughton; George Washington and John Adams; Ulysses Grant and Grover Cleveland; Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower. These have been cunning, hard-to-fool realists—taciturn warriors who prefer to meet problems and adversaries one-on-one. They include the only two Presidents who had earlier hanged a man (Washington and Cleveland), one governor who hanged witches (Stoughton), and several leaders who had earlier led troops into battle (Bacon, Washington, Grant, Truman, and Eisenhower).

A Lifecycle Outline

- As *Nomads* replace Prophets in childhood during an Awakening, they are left underprotected at a time of social convulsion and adult self-discovery.
- As alienated *Nomads* replace Prophets in young adulthood during an Unraveling, they become brazen free agents, lending their pragmatism and independence to an era of growing social turmoil.
- As pragmatic *Nomads* replace Prophets in midlife during a Crisis, they apply toughness and resolution to defend society while safeguarding the interests of the young.
- As exhausted *Nomads* replace Prophets in elderhood during a High, they slow the pace of social change, shunning the old crusades in favor of simplicity and survivalism.

The Hero Archetype

We remember *Heroes* best for their collective coming-of-age triumphs (Glorious Revolution, Yorktown, D-Day) and for their hubristic elder achievements (the Peace of Utrecht and slave codes, the Louisiana Purchase and steamboats, the Apollo moon launches and interstate highways). Increasingly protected as children, they become increasingly indulgent as parents. Their principal endowment activities are in the domain of *community*, *affluence*, and *technology*. Their best-known leaders include: Gurdon Saltonstall and “King” Carter; Thomas Jefferson and James Madison; John Kennedy and Ronald Reagan. They have been vigorous and rational institution builders. All have been aggressive advocates of economic prosperity and public optimism in midlife; and all have maintained a reputation for civic energy and competence even deep into old age.

A Lifecycle Outline

- As *Heroes* replace Nomads in childhood during an Unraveling, they are nurtured with increasing protection by pessimistic adults in an insecure environment.
- As teamworking *Heroes* replace Nomads in young adulthood during a Crisis, they challenge the political failure of elder-led crusades, fueling a society-wide secular crisis.
- As powerful *Heroes* replace Nomads in midlife during a High, they establish an upbeat, constructive ethic of social discipline.
- As expansive *Heroes* replace Nomads in elderhood during an Awakening, they orchestrate ever-grander secular constructions, setting the stage for the spiritual goals of the young.

The Artist Archetype

We remember *Artists* best for their quiet years of rising adulthood (the log-cabin settlers of 1800, the plains farmers of 1880, the new suburbanites of 1960) and during their midlife years of flexible, consensus-building leadership (the “Compromises” of the Whig era, the “good government” reforms of the Progressive era, the budget and peace processes of the 1980s and ’90s). Overprotected as children, they become underprotective parents. Their principal endowment activities are in the domain of pluralism, expertise, and due process. Their best-known leaders include: William Shirley and Cadwallader Colden; John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson; Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson; Walter Mondale, and Colin Powell. These have been sensitive and complex social technicians, advocates of fair play and the politics of inclusion. With the single exception of Andrew Jackson, they rank as the most expert and credentialed of American political leaders.

A Lifecycle Outline

- As *Artists* replace *Heroes* in childhood during a Crisis, they are overprotected at a time of political convulsion and adult self-sacrifice.

- As conformist *Artists* replace Heroes in young adulthood during a High, they become sensitive helpmates, lending their expertise and cooperation to an era of growing social calm.
- As indecisive *Artists* replace Heroes in midlife during an Awakening, they apply expertise and process to improve society while calming the passions of the young.
- As empathic *Artists* replace Heroes in elderhood during an Unraveling, they quicken the pace of social change, shunning the old order in favor of complexity and sensitivity.