

Turnings in History



Late Medieval Saeculum

Retreat from France (*Third Turning, 1435–1459*) was an era of dynastic decline and civil disorder. In 1435, not long after Joan of Arc's execution, the English withdrew from Paris for the last time. In the 1440s, they were pushed out of France on all fronts. Thus ended the Hundred Years War. Meanwhile, the weak rule of young Henry VI eroded central authority in England. By the 1450s, noble houses flouted the law, vied for power, and engaged in private wars with impunity.

- Arthurians entering childhood

The **War of the Roses** (*Fourth Turning, 1459–1487*) began with an irrevocable break between the ruling Houses of Lancaster and York. After a bloody civil war, Yorkist kings (Edward IV, Edward V, Richard III) mostly prevailed in reigns that were punctuated with invasions and rebellions. At Bosworth Field (in 1485), Henry Tudor defeated Richard III and crowned himself Henry VII, founder of a new royal dynasty. Two years later he defeated a pretender at the Battle of Stoke, which won him the enduring confidence of his subjects.

- Arthurians entering young adulthood
- Humanists entering childhood

Tudor Saeculum

The **Tudor Renaissance** (*First Turning, 1487–1517*) was an era of political and social consolidation. To popular acclaim, King Henry VII crushed challenges to his new dynasty and strengthened royal writs and commissions. On this foundation of central authority, births rose, commerce thrived, and construction boomed. The new sumptuous worldliness was best reflected in the palaces

of Cardinal Wolsey. The era closed in a mood of cultural sterility.

- Arthurians entering midlife
- Humanists entering young adulthood
- Reformation entering childhood

The **Protestant Reformation** (*Second Turning, 1517–1542*) began in Germany with Martin Luther's famous protest and spread swiftly to England. The enthusiasm peaked (in the mid-1530s) with King Henry VIII's break with the Papacy, William Tyndale's Bible, popular reform movements, and Parliament's confiscation of vast Church estates. It ended when reformers tired or (like Thomas Cromwell) were executed, and when foreign wars with Scotland and France diverted the popular imagination.

- Arthurians entering elderhood
- Humanists entering midlife
- Reformation entering young adulthood
- Reprisal entering childhood

Intolerance and Martyrdom (*Third Turning, 1542–1569*) was an era of social fragmentation, civil rebellion, and deadly political intrigue. Through the reigns of Edward VI and Queen Mary, the throne tacked violently over the issue of religion. The economy careened in a boom-bust cycle, with royal debasements fueling unprecedented inflation. When the era closed, early in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, a disillusioned nation looked anxiously at the future.

- Humanists entering elderhood
- Reformation entering midlife
- Reprisal entering young adulthood
- Elizabethans entering childhood

The **Armada Crisis** (*Fourth Turning, 1569–1594*) began when the powerful Duke of Norfolk was linked to a Spanish plot against the English throne, a discovery which galvanized newly-Protestant England against the global threat of the Catholic Hapsburgs. A crescendo of surrogate wars and privateering culminated in England's miraculous victory over the Spanish Armada invasion (in 1588). The mood of emergency relaxed after the successful resistance of Holland and the breaking of Spanish control over France.

- Reformation entering elderhood
- Reprisal entering midlife
- Elizabethans entering young adulthood
- Parliamentarians entering childhood

New World Saeculum

Merrie England (*First Turning, 1594–1621*) was an age of optimism and prosperity, full of dreams of empire yet tempered by a wariness of enemies abroad. For the arts, this was the true English Renaissance and for literature, the glorious "Age of Shakespeare." After succeeding Elizabeth in 1601, James I encouraged learning, exploration, and trade. His elaborately polite relations with the Commons began to wear thin late in the second decade of his reign.

- Reprisal entering elderhood
- Elizabethans entering midlife
- Parliamentarians entering young adulthood
- Puritans entering childhood

The **Puritan Awakening** (*Second Turning, 1621–1649*) began with Parliament's "Great Protestation." Upon the accession of James' son, the reformist urge turned radical and gained popular momentum. Seeking religious exile, John Winthrop led a "saving remnant" of true believers to America. In England, this Puritan Enthusiasm led to the Long Parliament (in 1640), civil war, and the execution of Charles I (in 1649). In the new wilderness colonies, the experimental fervor receded, leaving isolated settlements seeking an enforceable moral orthodoxy.

- Elizabethans entering elderhood
- Parliamentarians entering midlife
- Puritans entering young adulthood
- Cavaliers entering childhood

Reaction and Restoration (*Third Turning, 1649–1675*) was an era of drift and fierce controversy over the ideals of the original New World immigrants. Disoriented by fast-shifting events (Cromwell's Protectorate in the

1650s, the Stuart Restoration in 1660, a war with Holland in which "New York" was captured in 1664), each colony fended for itself and cut its own deal with England. The era ended with the authority of colonial self-government ebbing—and worries about the future rising.

- Parliamentarians entering elderhood
- Puritans entering midlife
- Cavaliers entering young adulthood
- Glorious entering childhood

The colonial **Glorious Revolution** (*Fourth Turning, 1675–1704*) began with civil upheavals and catastrophic Indian wars—soon followed by Parliamentary efforts to reassert direct royal control over the colonies. The ensuing resistance culminated in 1689 with colonial rebellions that were triggered by news of the Glorious Revolution in England on behalf of William of Orange. A further decade of war against Canadian New France ended with Britain's global triumph, vigorous institutions of colonial self-rule, and a new era of peace with local native tribes.

- Puritans entering elderhood
- Cavaliers entering midlife
- Glorious entering young adulthood
- Enlighteners entering childhood

Revolutionary Saeculum

The **Augustan Age of Empire** (*First Turning, 1704–1727*) witnessed the first confident flowering of provincial civilization with booming trade, rising living standards, recognizable (northern) urban centers, and massive (southern) imports of African slaves. Lauding social discipline, Americans took pride in the growing might of Britain's empire. Socially, this was the periwigged apogee of colonial politesse; culturally, it was an age of credentials, wit, and Royal Society rationalism.

- Cavaliers entering elderhood
- Glorious entering midlife
- Enlightenment entering young adulthood
- Awakeners entering childhood

The **Great Awakening** (*Second Turning, 1727–1746*) began as a spiritual revival in the Connecticut Valley and reached an hysterical peak in the northern colonies (in 1741) with the preachings of George Whitefield and the tracts of Jonathan Edwards. The enthusiasm split towns and colonial assemblies, shattered the "old light" establishment, and pitted young believers in "faith" against

elder defenders of “works.” After bursting polite conventions and lingering Old World social barriers, the enthusiasm receded during King George’s War.

- Glorious entering elderhood
- Enlighteners entering midlife
- Awakeners entering young adulthood
- Liberty entering childhood

French & Indian Wars (*Third Turning, 1746–1773*) was an era of unprecedented economic and geographic mobility. Swept into a final war against New France in the 1750s, the colonists hardly celebrated Britain’s total victory (in 1760) before renewing thunderous debates over how to salvage civic virtue from growing debt, cynicism, and wildness. With colonial leadership at a low ebb, popular fears soon targeted the alleged corruption of the English Parliament and empire.

- Enlightenment entering elderhood
- Awakeners entering midlife
- Liberty entering young adulthood
- Republicans entering childhood

American Revolution (*Fourth Turning, 1773–1794*) began when Parliament’s response to the Boston Tea Party ignited a colonial tinderbox—leading directly to the first Continental Congress, the battle of Concord, and the Declaration of Independence. The war climaxed with the colonial triumph at Yorktown (in 1781). Seven years later, the new “states” ratified a nation-forging Constitution. The crisis mood eased once President Washington weathered the Jacobins, put down the Whiskey Rebels, and settled on a final treaty with England.

- Awakeners entering elderhood
- Liberty entering midlife
- Republicans entering young adulthood
- Compromisers entering childhood

Civil War Saeculum

The **Era of Good Feelings** (*First Turning, 1794–1822*) witnessed what Joel Barlow called *The Conquest of Canaan* an era of epical social harmony and empire building. Vast new territories were mapped and settled. Canals, steamboats, and turnpikes pushed back the wilderness. Even a blundering war (of 1812) ended up unifying the nation. Civil disorder was rare—as was spiritual curiosity in an era (wrote Emerson) “able to produce not a book...or a thought worth noticing.”

- Liberty entering elderhood
- Republicans entering midlife

- Compromisers entering young adulthood
- Transcendentals entering childhood

The **Transcendental Awakening** (*Second Turning, 1822–1844*) began with Charles Finney’s evangelicalism and Denmark Vesey’s slave revolt. Soon merging with Jacksonian populism, it peaked (in 1831) with Nat Turner’s Rebellion, the founding of shrill abolitionist societies, and the rise of splinter political parties. After spawning a floodtide of “romantic idealism”—including feminism, new prophetic religions, food fads, and utopian communes—the mood gentrified in the early 1840s into a credo of self-help, moral uplift, and manifest destiny.

- Republicans entering elderhood
- Compromisers entering midlife
- Transcendentals entering young adulthood
- Gilded entering childhood

The **Mexican War & Sectionalism** (*Third Turning, 1844–1860*) was an era of “almighty dollar” commercialism, western “gold fever,” Whitmanesque self-worship, and nativist slogans against Mexicans and Irish. Beneath trimming national leaders, rising tempers launched competing moral crusades. By the late 1850s—from Kansas to Harper’s Ferry, Dred Scott to the Underground Railroad—visions of the nation’s future were separating into two irreconcilable regional loyalties.

- Compromisers entering elderhood
- Transcendentals entering midlife
- Gilded entering young adulthood
- Progressives entering childhood

The **Civil War** (*Fourth Turning, 1860–1865*) began with a presidential election that many southerners interpreted as an invitation to secede. The attack on Fort Sumter triggered the most violent conflict ever fought on New World soil. The war reached its climax in the Emancipation Proclamation and Battle of Gettysburg (in 1863). Two years later, the Confederacy was beaten into bloody submission and Lincoln was assassinated—a grim end to a crusade many had hoped would “trample out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.”

- The first Transcendentals entering elderhood
- The first Gilded entering midlife
- The first Progressives entering young adulthood
- The first Missionaries entering childhood

Great Power Saeculum

Reconstruction & Gilded Age (*First Turning, 1865–1886*) saw old crusaders pushed aside while, notes Van Wyck

Brooks, war veterans who “might have been writers in the days of *The Dial* were seeking their fortunes in railroads, mines, and oil wells.” Savings rates climbed, mass production roared, mechanical and political “machines” hummed, real wages surged, and “middle-class” families prospered in an age of pragmatism that vaunted “truth’s cash value.”

- Transcententials entering elderhood
- Gilded entering midlife
- Progressives entering young adulthood
- Missionaries entering childhood

The **Third Great Awakening** (*Second Turning*, 1886–1908), began with the Haymarket Riot and the student missionary movement, rose with agrarian protest and labor violence, and climaxed in Bryan’s revivalist candidacy (in 1896). Gilded Age realism came under harsh attack from trust-blasting muckrakers, Billy Sunday evangelicals, “new woman” feminists, and chautauqua dreamers. After radicalizing and splitting the Progressive movement, the passion cooled when William Howard Taft succeeded Teddy Roosevelt in the White House.

- Gilded entering elderhood
- Progressives entering midlife
- Missionaries entering young adulthood
- Lost entering childhood

World War I & Prohibition (*Third Turning*, 1908–1929) was an era of rapid technological change, egocentric celebrities, widening class divisions, crumbling trusts and unions, and expert—but weak—political leadership. Following World War I, the public immersed itself in moral crusades (League of Nations, Prohibition, Women Suffrage). By the ‘20s, a fun-filled financial boom was framed by pessimistic debates over drugs, sex, money, cynicism, violence, immigration, and the family.

- Progressives entering elderhood
- Missionaries entering midlife
- Lost entering young adulthood
- G.I.s entering childhood

The **Great Depression & World War II** (*Fourth Turning*, 1929–1946) began suddenly with the Black Tuesday stock-market crash. After a three-year economic free fall, the Great Depression triggered the New Deal revolution, a vast expansion of government, and hopes for a renewal of national community. After Pearl Harbor, America planned, mobilized, and produced for war on a scale that made possible the massive D-Day invasion

(in 1944). Two years later, the crisis mood eased with America’s surprisingly trouble-free demobilization.

- Missionaries entering elderhood
- Lost entering midlife
- G.I.s entering young adulthood
- Silent entering childhood

Millennial Saeculum

The **American High** (*First Turning*, 1946–1964) witnessed America’s ascendancy as a global superpower. Social movements stalled. The middle class grew and prospered. Churches buttressed government. Huge peacetime defense budgets were uncontroversial. Mass tastes thrived atop a collectivist infrastructure of suburbs, interstates, and regulated communication. Declaring “an end to ideology,” respected authorities presided over a bland, modernist, and spirit-dead culture.

- Lost entering elderhood
- G.I.s entering midlife
- Silent entering young adulthood
- Boomers entering childhood

The **Consciousness Revolution** (*Second Turning*, 1964–1984), which began with urban riots and campus fury, swelled alongside Vietnam war protests and a rebellious “counterculture.” It gave rise to feminist, environmental, and black power movements—and to a steep rise in violent crime and family breakup. After the fury peaked with Watergate (in 1974), passions turned inward toward New Age lifestyles and spiritual rebirth. The mood expired during Reagan’s upbeat reelection campaign, as onetime hippies reached their yuppie chrysalis.

- G.I.s entering elderhood
- Silent entering midlife
- Boomers entering young adulthood
- 13ers entering childhood

Culture Wars (*Third Turning*, 1984–2005?), which opened with triumphant “Morning in America” individualism, has thus far drifted toward pessimism. Personal confidence remains high, and few national problems demand immediate action. But the public reflects darkly on growing violence and incivility, widening inequality, pervasive distrust of institutions and leaders, and a debased popular culture. People fear that the national consensus is splitting into competing “values” camps.

- Silent entering elderhood
- Boomers entering midlife

- 13ers entering young adulthood
- Millennials entering childhood

The *Fourth Turning* of the Millennial Saeculum has yet to arrive. Its projected generational constellation:

- Boomers entering elderhood
- 13ers entering midlife
- Millennials entering young adulthood
- New Silent entering childhood