

History leaves no doubt about the reaction enabler of a Crisis: the Fourth Turning constellation of generational archetypes. Once every saeculum, the archetypes reach a combustible combination, dramatically lowering the threshold for a spark of history to ignite a Crisis.

Since the dawn of the modern world, there has been but one Fourth Turning constellation: elder Prophets, midlife Nomads, young-adult Heroes, and child Artists. For half a millennium, that constellation has recurred exactly the same way five times, and a sixth time with a slight variation in timing and consequence. This archetypal lineup has been one of the great constants of Anglo-American history.

- The indulged *Prophet* children of Highs, born in the aftermath of one Crisis, foment the next Crisis upon entering elderhood.
- The abandoned *Nomad* children of Awakenings become the pragmatic midlife managers of Crisis.
- The protected *Hero* children of Unravelings provide the powerful young-adult soldiers of Crisis.
- The suffocated children of Crises come of age afterward as *Artist* youths.

Earlier chapters explained how Crisis eras shape generations; now you see how generations shape Crises. This explains the underlying link between the cycles of history and the rhythms of the saeculum.

While all generational transitions are important to create a Fourth Turning constellation, the aging of the Prophet is critical. A Crisis catalyst occurs shortly after the old Prophet archetype reaches its apex of societal leadership, when its inclinations are *least* checked by others. A regeneracy comes as the Prophet abandons any idea of deferral or retreat and binds the society to a Crisis course. A climax occurs when the Prophet expends its last burst of passion, just before descending rapidly from power. A resolution comes, with the Prophet's symbolic assistance, at a time when the Nomad is asserting full control.

Except for Nomads and Heroes during the Civil War, every prior Crisis era witnessed each generational archetype entering the following phase of life: Prophets into elderhood, Nomads into midlife, Heroes into young adulthood, and Artists into childhood. Here is what history teaches about the four life-cycle phases (and archetypes) in turn.

- As visionary *Prophets* replace Artists in *elderhood*, they push to resolve ever-deepening moral choices, setting the stage for the secular goals of the young.

As Prophet generations enter elderhood, their passion for principle leads beyond the point of no return. No longer are their crusades mostly symbolic; now they acquire a last-act urgency. As the Crisis erupts, their cultural arguments coalesce around a new vision of community. In families, they redefine elderhood as spiritual stewardship. In the larger society, they trade material security for moral authority and translate their lifelong values agenda into commandments that exact sacrifice from themselves and others. From the young, they seek personal obedience and respect; to the young, they offer the opportunity for heroism and achievement unlike anything they themselves had known at like age.

Ever since the late sixteenth century, aging Prophets have provided the torch of conviction for younger generations during their times of trials. The aging Puritan Generation faced death with what historian Perry Miller describes as “cosmic optimism.” They knew their world was heading for catastrophe. But as they looked down on what they perceived to be the shallow souls of their grown children, their last acts were to set unyielding examples—against rebels, kings, and (above all) unbelievers. As the American Revolution catalyzed, die-hard elder Awakeners briefly surged into governors’ posts to inspire heroism and curse treachery. “Let us act like . . . wise men,” declared Sam Adams in 1772. Praying while others fought, this generation produced the first two presidents of the Continental Congress, which enacted blue laws to make “true religion and good morals” the national credo. Through the Civil War Crisis, the Transcendental Generation dominated the leadership in both Richmond and Washington. “Instruments of war are not selected on account of their harmlessness,” thundered Thaddeus Stevens as he urged Union armies to “lay waste to the whole South.” And so they did, finding redemption in what the aging minister Albert Barnes called *The Peaceful Death of the Righteous*. Afterward, the younger Henry Adams recalled the elder trumpets of war and bitterly observed “It’s always the good men who do the most harm in the world.”

- As pragmatic *Nomads* replace Prophets in *midlife*, they apply toughness and resolution to defend society while safeguarding the interests of the young.

Playing to win but half-expecting to lose, Nomad generations enter midlife with a sense of exhaustion. Still forced to take hit-or-miss risks in their work and public lives, they become increasingly cautious in their family lives. By now they take for granted widening gaps between classes, ethnicities, regions, and gender roles. The ablest among them emerge as cunning, pragmatic, and colorful public figures. When the Crisis hits, they find their lives painfully split between the old order and new. But they rise fiercely (and sacrificially) to the occasion, able to make hard and fast choices without fretting much about what others think. Exalting the work-