

The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy

by William Strauss and Neil Howe

NY: Broadway Books, 1997

382 pages with notes and index

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I picked up a copy of *The Fourth Turning* because to refresh myself on the generational differences of donors. I was hoping to help a colleague wrestle with how to apply fundraising techniques with attention to these cohorts. Having read the authors' *13th Gen* a few years ago, I knew this would be an erudite review. I got what I was looking for and much more! *The Fourth Turning* is actually a compelling look at human history, especially Western history since the middle of the fifteenth century!

Howe and Strauss have amazingly taken the most recent 20th century generations (GI, Silent, Boomer, Xer, and Millennial) and found corresponding generations for the last few hundred years. From this, they've developed a convincing rubric of generational archetypes—GIs and Millennials are the "Hero," Silents are the "Artist," Boomers are the "Prophet," and Xers are the "Nomad." Moreover, they've revisited the millennia old theory that time moves through seasons in a cyclical pattern, one that corresponds with the seasons of the year. The post-WWII era was our "High" or spring; the Consciousness Revolution was our "Awakening" or summer; the 80's and 90's was our "Unraveling" or fall; and we're currently headed for our "Crisis" or winter. They chose to label the seasons "turnings" and the time encompassing the four turnings as the "saecula," a label used by the ancients that roughly corresponds to a century.

With an amazing attention to detail, a scholarly eye to history, and a wonderfully readable writing style, Howe and Strauss show the interplay of the generational archetypes and the turnings. For example, they point to the similarities of the spiritual emphasis of the 1960s and 1970s with the Transcendentalists of the 1800s, the Great Awakening of the 1700s, and the Puritan Awakening of the 1600s, and the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s!

The Fourth Turning will definitely affect the way you view history as well as the events of today. Though written in 1997, they illustrate "highly unlikely" scenarios that might precipitate the coming Crisis such as: "A global terrorist group blows up an aircraft and announces it possesses portable nuclear weapons. The United States and its allies launch a preemptive strike. The terrorists threaten to retaliate against an American city..."!

While I don't know if we're currently into the Crisis or not, I *do* know that *The Fourth Turning* is a must read for anyone trying to raise money in today's economic environment. Not only will the savvy fundraiser ferret out ways to frame their case for the different generations, she will also see how different turnings may affect fundraising efforts. If we are indeed heading for a fourth turning, and Howe and Strauss make that highly believable, I think we in the nonprofit world are uniquely situated to help our cultures ride out this winter and successfully enter the spring.

Although full of grim warnings, *The Fourth Turning* is a hope filled book well worth reading.

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