

Social Movements and Secular Crisis

[Written Monday, March 01, 2004]

I offer some insight into the world of social behavior as viewed through the works of a Yale and Harvard grad., Neil Howe¹ [i] and William Strauss¹ [ii].

I've used their work for years for everything from marketing to predicting the markets to assisting in understanding the U.S. from a sociological view.

I offer this writing in hope that it will give you some peace while chaos swirls amongst us. At the end of the article you'll find a smattering of web sites if you'd like to click around for some more information or perhaps buy one of Strauss and Howe's books.

Social Movements and Secular Crisis

Strauss and Howe write that there are two types of social movements, 'Secular crisis'¹ [iii] and 'Spiritual awakenings' i[iv]. We are in a secular crisis now and that is the focus of this paper. Secular crisis is defined as, "...when society focuses on reordering the outer world of institutions and public behavior".ii[v] Pertaining to the frequency of social movements, "Social movements do not arrive at random. For example, a secular crisis and a spiritual awakening never occur back to back. Nor does half a century ever pass without a social movement of either type. Instead, social movements arrive on a rather regular schedule." iii[vi]

A social movement lasts about a decade. They arrive in time intervals roughly separated by two phases of life (approximately 40 to 45 years), and they alternate in type between secular and social. iv[vii] (For further reading of the

timing of social movements in non-traditional societies like the U.S., read 'Appendix A', in "Generations".)

What makes 2003 so interesting is that we are coming to the end of the birthing of the civic-minded Millennials (b.1981-2003) and the beginning of the birth of a new generation of 'Adapitives'. The new generation is very similar to the 'Silent' generation, b. 1925-1942, the 'Progressive' generation, b. 1843-1859, the 'Compromise' generation, b. 1767-1791 and the earliest 'Adaptive' generation in U.S. history, the 'Enlightenment' generation, b. 1648-1673. v[viii]

This year, 2003, is of massive social transition.

To understand why, we must first look at the five generational archetypes alive today and what role they play.

In 2003, there are five generations alive. The Millennials, b. 1982-2003, the 13ers (Gen-X), b. 1961-1980 1 [ix], The Baby Boom, b. 1943-1960, the Silent, b. 1925-1942 the G.I., b. 1901-1924 and finally the Lost, b. 1883-1900, (there were 68,000 people alive over the age of 100 in the 2000 census). vi[x]

Let's look at the collective ages of the generations alive today.

Millennials – 0 to 20 (Youth)

Gen-x – 21 to 42 (Rising)

Boomers – 43 to 60 (Midlife)

Silent – 61 to 78 (Elder)

GI – 79 to 101

Lost – 102 to eldest living.

Let's look at the definitions or the descriptors of each of the five generations. These definitions are in very broad terms. They try to define the role each generation's plays. Especially in the coming crisis.

Millennials – Civic, Dominant. Central role is Dependence (growing, learning, accepting, protection and nurture, avoiding, harm, acquiring, values).

Gen-x – Reactive, Recessive. Central role is Activity (working, starting families, and livelihoods, serving institutions, testing values).

Boomers – Idealist Dominant. Central role is Leadership (parenting, teaching, directing institutions, using values).

Silent – Adaptive, Recessive. Central role is Stewardship (supervising, mentoring, channeling endowments, passing on values).

GI – Civic, Dominant. (Strauss and Howe do not elaborate on the ages reached after 87.)

Lost – Reactive, Recessive. (Strauss and Howe do not elaborate on the ages reached after 87.)

Now let's take a look at some other eras in American history that mirror the time we are in at this moment, in 2003. Strauss and Howe define these eras as generational constellations. 1924, 1855, 1766 and 1664.vii[xi]

(For further reading on the Civil War era check the footnote. That era interrupted an entire generation. viii[xii])

“At all four of these moments, Americans perceived their social life to be fragmenting into centrifugal and uncontrollable wildness.” ix[xiii]

The above statement refers to the years, 1924, 1855, 1766, 1664 and now, 2003. That quote was written in 1990. I find it amazingly accurate pertaining to the mood of the nation at this precise moment in time. Furthermore, “Looking up,

13ers will sense among the older generation an utter impracticality, an inability to see the world for what it really is.” x[xiv]

As a 13er, I can state unequivocally, that statement is true. 13er’s love reality. This is one reason reality shows are so big. Their core viewer is the 13er’s (Gen-X). (To read more about Gen-X, see page 313 in Generations. It’s very accurate)

This brings us to 2003.

Strauss and Howe wrote an article about the coming crisis that can be read here, <http://www.lcourse.com/media/commentary/011029.html> . It was written about the events of September 11th, 2001. However, I do not believe that was the crisis that Strauss and Howe were predicting in the book Generations. In Generations, they state that the crisis should take place somewhere closer to 2020.

Their research shows, with great accuracy, that these things can be predicted. I think this last year has told us that although 9/11 was tragic and changed ten’s of thousands of people’s lives; it was not similar to the past crisis’ that occurred at a secular crisis. (Please excuse the callous way this is written. I mean no disrespect to those directly affected by 9/11.)

If you read the web page I pasted in above, you will see that things are not panning out the way ‘society is supposed to behave’ during a secular crisis. As we were all gung ho to kick the Taliban’s butt after 9-11, the mood has decisively changed as Iraq entered the picture. We are not coalescing like we should. This tells me that, unfortunately, 9/11 was not the worst to come.

Moreover, when I read the newspapers from 1923-24, I see similar things in society that are taking place today. Issues like immigration (congress practically closed the borders), and self-help (Carnegie and Peale) were at the forefront of

society. Society demanded we take away civil liberties, like booze. Today we are taking away those liberties via the 'Patriot Act', etc. There were scandals on Wall Street that took place in 1921-22. Over the last three years we have also seen our stock market cycle mirror 1920, 21 and 22. The S&P rubber & tire index fell about 70% and the S&P automobile index fell 70% (their NASDAQ). General Motors fell 75% (our Microsoft, Cisco and Oracle) . (For more on these statistics, visit www.hsdent.com)

"As America moves into the ensuing crisis era, long-deferred secular problems can be expected to reemerge with fearsome immediacy." xi[xv]

Strauss and Howe are speaking of the beginning of or the dawn of, the crisis era. That's now. This era is slated to last until 2025.

"Moving further ahead, perhaps halfway into the crisis era, history suggests the mood will calm somewhat." xii[xvi]

This speaks of the coming bull market. As we saw in 1924-1929. Things mellowed and everything calmed down. Then it hit the fan, didn't it.

The point being, nuclear annihilation isn't in America's cards. Nor is a mass germ terrorist attack. Can I state this as absolute? Of course not. I have trouble predicting where the Bonds are going in the next five minutes. However I do not stop trying to predict. It is in all of our nature. We are traders and traders try to predict the future everyday.

Strauss and Howe predict the coming crisis lasting from 2013 to 2024 in one case and in another they predict it from 2020 to 2029 saying that in either case, the early 20's will be tough. xiii[xvii]

There's so much I left out. Trying to write a concise, short paper on a book and many web sites is daunting. However, I think I've stated the point/theory. The

catastrophe is far off. Regardless of President Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, Osama Bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, Pakistan, India, North Korea or 'insert-a-name that you feel is a threat'.

Further Reading

<http://www.hsdent.com/>

http://www.fourthturning.com/html/about_william_strauss.html

http://www.fourthturning.com/html/about_neil_howe.html

<http://www.fourthturning.com>

References

i[i] http://www.fourthturning.com/html/about_william_strauss.html

i[ii] http://www.fourthturning.com/html/about_neil_howe.html

i[iii] "Generations-The History of America's Future 1584-2069" p.71

i[iv] *ibid.*, p.71.

ii[v] *ibid.*, p.71.

iii[vi] *ibid.*, p.71.

iv[vii] *ibid.*, p.71.

v[viii] All names and years referenced, "Generations" p.97 pullout.

vi[ix] If you'd like to know why 1961 is the beginning of Gen-X and not 1965, then you must read the book *Generations*. It's too complicated to get into here. I would agree with Strauss and Howe's theory that the Baby Boom ended in 1960 and NOT 1964 as so many have written before. I will say this though, I was born in 1961 and I have nothing in common with the Boomers.

vi[x] http://enquirer.com/editions/2001/07/11/loc_numbers_of_super.html

vii[xi] "Generations-The History of America's Future 1584-2069", p.380

viii[xii] *ibid.*, p.97. (pullout)

[ixxiii] *ibid.*, p.380.

x[xiv] *ibid.*, p.381.

xi[xv] *ibid.*, p.381.

xii[xvi] *ibid.*, p.381.

xiii[xvii] *ibid.*, pp.,381-382

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