



## **A guide to Understanding the Four Generation Types Discovering your Place in History Act with more Clarity**

*Come, discover wonderful insights & patterns into your generation type.*

*This is mostly an overview of "**Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069**," by Neil Howe and William Strauss. I add my 2 cents here and there.*

*These guys have brilliantly noticed a 4 generation type cycle. Like the four seasons, they follow each other. In some fairly predicible patterns. Generation after generation, in a roughly 80 to 100 year cycle. They've done to history what Hegel did to philosophy. What Freud, Jung & others have done for our dreams & unconscious.*

*History stands alongside our personal life. It does, No matter if we are aware of it, or not. It's a funny place to hang out. But then again, it has no place else to go.*

***Come together ..... all generation types.  
to battle the **Economic and Environmental Crisis** that we face***

### **Recommendation in a chance encounter.**

Standing in line for something at the Green Festival in Chicago, I struck up a conversation with a young woman who, it turns out, was a grad student, in History. I like meeting history majors. And philosophy majors. With insane 6 figure tuitions, they are a rarity. I write a series of essays: History Standing Alongside One's Personal Life. "What's your dissertation on?" I asked. "Generations," she replied. "Way cool. You've gotta read a book - A History of America's future.

"By Howe & Strauss," she smiled. "I'm using it as the foundation for my thesis."

====\_+\_+\_+\_+\_+=====

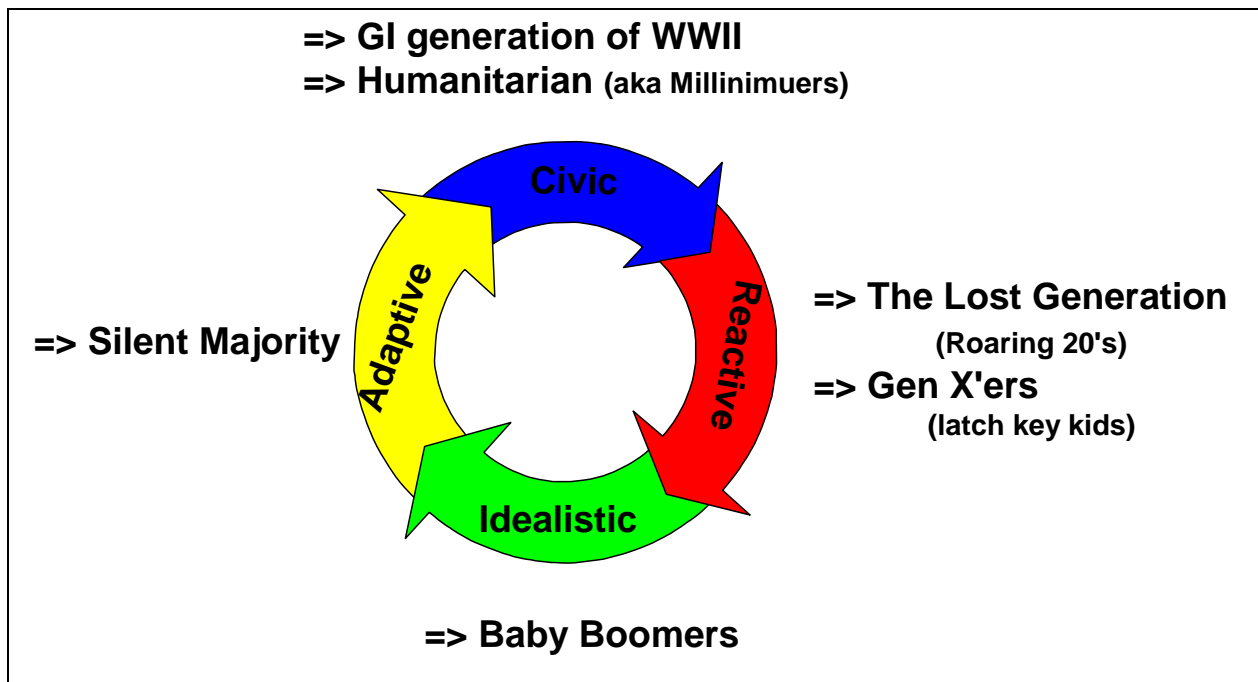
## Generation patterns in a nutshell.

Generations are typically defined as about 20 years, give or take. Howe & Strauss describe 4-generation types that they have noticed, in America.

Each generation type has distinct trends in many key aspects of their lives. Some of them are:

- How they were raised. And in turn, how they raise their kids.
- Coming of age experiences
- Length of time as political leaders

### Generations in a Nutshell



It is not perfect. The authors don't claim it is. They also don't shoe horn in everything into the theory. For example, they noticed that around the Civil War, a generation of the Adaptive type got skipped.



## Analogy of the 4 Seasons

I describe it as it being like the 4 seasons. There are two dominant ones and two transition ones. Winter & Summer, Spring & Fall. When it's cold as hell out, there's no doubt you're in Winter, not Summer. But, there are plenty of days in Spring that feel like Fall. And vis versa.

Season <sup>1</sup>	Description	Generation Name	Role	Example
Winter	Civic	GI generation	In the trenches	The GI's
		Humanitarian <sup>2</sup>		
Spring	Adaptive	Nixon's "The Silent Generation"	Softening of the potential destructiveness of the idealist passions.	Bobby Kennedy Martin Luther King
Summer	Idealistic	Baby Boomer	Moral & Idealistic leaders	FDR, Churchill
Fall	Reactionary	Gen X'ers		Dot Com'ers, Extreme sports,
		The Lost Generation of the Roaring 20's.	The Generals - the "get it done" types.	IKE, Patton, etc

<sup>1</sup> I didn't put much thought into the corresponding seasons - are Civics winter or Summer.

<sup>2</sup> **Commonly called The Millennium'ers.**

*I think this is a crummy name. At a Human Rights conference at Northwestern University in January of 2010, they used Humanitarian. I believe this name will prove to be accurate.*

**World War II**, a classic example

World War II was a secular crisis.

Civics' came of age during it.

Global Climate change & the Economic disaster seems to fit the bill for today's Civics, the Humanitarians.

Idealists like FDR provided them with the moral certainty and inspiration.

Reactionary's like Patton were the field generals and leaders. Blood 'n Guts.

Adaptive's were kids during this time. Watching in awe as their older brothers, parents, aunts and uncles did the impossible and heroic deeds.



## A guide to understanding what the hell is going on.

I find it comforting to know patterns in stuff. Helps me get my arms around individual bits of data.

After reading the book, it came as no surprise to me that:

- ◆ Tom Brokaw claimed the GI's as "The Greatest Generation Ever."
- ◆ Boomers got into Henry David Thoreau, and other previous Idealist's.
- ◆ George W. Bush, Boomer, is a religious wack-job. A damaging Idealist
- ◆ Bill Clinton is a Boomer by age. But his leadership style is clearly that of the Adaptive Silent's. Al Gore, by contrast, is a classic Boomer.
- ◆ Extreme sports & high risk stuff got popular during the Gen X'ers. Similar to the gangster, bootlegging Roaring Twenties.
- ◆ The Gen X'ers of Dot-Com boom had a 'got-nothing-to-lose, go-for-broke' mindset of those that risked everything in past gold rushes.
- ◆ In the 90's, parents started raising their kids more protectively.
- ◆ 20-somethings are getting into the styles from the GI generation. Like fedora's.
- ◆ 20-Somethings are really into group activities. And are really likeable.

Civic's are a well liked generation, by both the Reactive's and the Idealists. The friction between the Idealists and the Reactive's tends to diminish with age.

I've noticed that Boomers and 20-somethings seem to get along really well.

The college kids I meet seem to resonate with my NatCap Club stuff. Some of my Loyola college neighbors delighted in showed me their 60's era stereo cabinet and turn-table. And put on a Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young album.

But Boomers and GI's were more often at each others throats – the Generation Gap. I don't know if these things are in the book or not.

### Patterns of attitudes toward other generations

Civics of one era resonate with stuff from past Civics.

Boomers with authors of past Idealists.

The coming of age book written) by the Silent's didn't connect with the Boomers.

(I forget which book they mentioned)

Generations react in a similar pattern across full generation cycles.

All the negative stuff said about the Gen X'ers? The same stuff was said about the Lost Generation of the 1920's.

The burst in spirituality and human rights? Happened in the past, with other Idealist generations.

- ◆ What generation got women the right to vote?
- ◆ You just know that the abolitionists had to be Full-On Idealists.
- ◆ Travel across the ocean to an unknown land for religious freedom, and face hostile heathens? Idealists for sure.



## Civic's

- Have a powerful, defining coming of age event.
- Face a secular crisis (non religious).
- Raised in a very protective parenting style
- Very group oriented.
  - Boy scouts & Girl scouts were started when GI's gen were growing up.
- Tend to serve longer as political leaders.

### The making of a GI warrior:

Labor Day, 2004. Devils Lake State park, Wisconsin. Taking a break from campaigning for Kerry.

I'm standing in front of a statue dedicated to the men of FDR's Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC). CCC built trails here, rock steps thru the boulder fields. The statue is of a handsome, muscular 20-something, no shirt, pick in hand. Two elder women stood and read the inscription. One of them said slowly, in a voice of memory,

*"The CCC. My brother worked in that. Three hots and a cot, they used to say. Plus he had some money to send back home. That helped us get by."*

She paused wistfully, *"he went right from there into the marines in World War II."*

I couldn't help but figure it made sense.

*That's the Difference between Republicans and Democrats.* Hoover did nothing. Roosevelt, the government, it did good to the people when times were tough. The Depression wasn't their fault. FDR gave them the basics needed to survive. And a sense of pride and dignity.

It's no wonder they trusted the government when it asked them to put their lives on the line.

## Adaptive's

- No powerful, distinct of age event.
- Are in awe of the success of the Civic generations heroic accomplishments. So they figure they'll just be able to make incremental improvements.
- Provide the needed moderation to the Idealists.
- The bridge between the Idealists and the Civics.

Two of the greatest leaders of the Silent's were murdered by some fraction of the Right. At a time when Boomer youthful idealism was emerging. When they were needed most. Before their wisdom could be assimilated within society.

It is no wonder that the Boomers got more excessive in the 60's. Or that religious Fundamentalism form of Christianity has dominated for the past 20+ years. Blowback from the 60's. No compromise. A destructive certainty and righteousness.

I suspect that the loss of Martin Luther King Jr. & Bobby Kennedy will be felt the strongest in the healing period that is sure to come.



## ***Idealists***

- Have a powerful coming of age event.
- Come of age during a Spiritual Awakening

### **Idealism is double-edged sword.**

It can lead to our greater good. And it can also lead to destructive & intolerant extremes.

The Spiritual awakening of the 60's brought some good things. A big jump in human rights (blacks, women, homosexuals) and environmentalism.

More growth into Spirituality. This time, the Boomers, it was Eastern Mysticism and meditation.

It also brought with it really damaging trends. Increase in cults of all flavors. In America, it's the coming to power of the (mostly Christian) **ZEALOTS**. The absolute certainty in their actions is destructive & threatens society. All disagreements are the work of the Devil. George Bush said he talked to God, then sent troops to die.

## ***Reactive's.***

- No powerful coming of age event.
- Raised with the least amount of protective-ness. X'ers were The latch key kids.
- Increase in crimes, truancy, and stuff while they are children.
- They grow up realizing that their economic future is bleak. That they are screwed.
- Tend to engage in high risk stuff
- Practical. Pragmatic. Make it work.
- Lesser time as political leaders.

I don't know if the book sez this, but it's understandable that they react to the hyper idealism of the Idealists.

### **The Generals of WWII were from the Lost Generation of the wild times of the Roaring Twenties.**

General Patton and other generals, were all about getting it done. No matter how. Their time in military service was not glorious. They got screwed during and after the First World War. It was a brutal war, unlike any other.

Upon returning, they didn't get treated well. They had to fight really hard just to get their benefits. They marched on Washington, and built shanty towns. They were even fired upon by the US army. BTW, Eisenhower was tasked with leading that.

During the Battle of the Bulge, GI's were surrounded by the Nazi in the town of Bastogne. The German general offered them the opportunity to surrender. The American general replied "Nuts!" The German asked a soldier was it yes or no. The GI said something like "It means go to hell!"

The Gen X'ers came of age during the Dot COM Gold Rush of the 1990's. Go all out, FULL-On, got nothing to loose.



## **Everybody has some type of relationship to the dominant generations** in your lifetime.

There is overlap & grey areas between generations. But just because your age falls in one type, you may not share the dominant trends . Or only part of it. You might be a mixture of types. You may hate the popular stuff in your time period. You still must deal with them. They impact you. You're still in relationship to those trends.

It gives you some structure to help you make sense of things.  
Enables you to better understand the world. Add Clarity in your Actions.  
At least it did me.

After reading the book some 12 or so years ago, I wish I'd had money to invest in the stock market. I woulda invested heavily in child safety products. I'd a made a killing. Damn. Oh well.

I didn't feel the world was going to hell in a hand-basket just because the younger generation seemed to have no (good) values.

## **My family as a good example** of pretty much the entire gamut of the generation concepts.

I come from a large family, 11 born in a 15 year span. 1946 to 1961.  
Nine babies born in the 10 year span of December '46 to August '56. (one died shortly after birth, 1955)

### **Mom and Dad were of the GI generation.**

Dad born in 1914, Mom in 1918.

Dad was 27 when the War broke out. He fought in WWII, and is considered a GI – Civic generation. This is an example of how some generations are longer than other – they get extended.

But he has a lot of the Reactive type in him, the Lost Generation. He and his younger sister were tossed by Grandma into Show Business in 1922. As vaudevillians they grew up in the Lost Generation's environment. Plus, show business is inherently a high risk world.

No surprise then that he volunteered for the high risk, high adrenaline Glider pilots. Mom used to say, "the paratroopers and the glider pilots had a running joke – they both thought the other was crazy. They were both crazy – they had a one way ticket to behind enemy lines."

Politics never was discussed much, if at all. Neither were racist. This made sense, with Dad growing up with every type of person. Not that he couldn't have gone the other way.

Solid citizens, active in the community. Dad using his show biz skills in school fundraisers. We had a colored maid part of the time. She was treated as part of the family.



### **Only Brian really got into *parts* of the '60's stereotype**

I say "parts", because he was also a leader in the race riots at Thornton Twp. High School in '69. Or so I was told by the big kids on the block.

He successfully dodged the draft. He rallied against the Establishment - "*there's only a handful of people that run this country*" mentality. Of course the drugs. Moved out from home at 16 or 17. Lived in Colorado, and maybe traveled to California. A casualty of the 60's, he died of a drug overdose at age 27. 1977.

### **Everybody else.**

Everybody else except me stayed traditional Catholic. No 'Spiritual Awakening' or Eastern mysticism for them.

The oldest graduated college in 1968 and became a school teacher. School teachers were exempt from the draft. Never seemed to me to be into the '60's, as far as I could tell. No drugs. Into Real Estate like Grandma Oehmen. But he in a way, never let us be racist. At the dinner table, when one of us said "*Colored,*" he asked "*what color?*" And he spent most of his life teaching in an all black school. He and I are the only college graduates.

Skip was pretty typical of many guys in the area. Worked in the factories and steel mills of the South East side and Northwestern Indiana. The lure of John Denver's Colorado hit a lot of us. Skip, he stayed out there. Quite fortunate - he didn't get destroyed when the steel mills went down. Melted, you could say.

All three older sisters were mostly traditional. Born in '47, '52 and '51. Married shortly after high school, settled down and raised families.

The oldest married a Puerto Rican who's family immigrated when he was 12. As one older kid on the block joked about her wedding day, "*what a scene that was in front of your house: a Puerto Rican and his family, a black family (our former maid) and a nun (my aunt).*"

They reacted to the dominant forces, like Feminism. Once or twice I heard them feel threatened by aspects of Feminism. That they were somehow wrong or less-than for "*just raising families and not having a career.*" Some within the extended family became Born-again Christians.

None of them were of the Generation Gap. No bitter arguments with the GI generation. A lot of my friends didn't either.

By the time my two youngest sisters came of age the '60's had dissolved into the party time of the '70's.

### **Combo Boomer and X'er**

Born in 1956, I'm solidly a Boomer. There was more of us born in that year than any other. I've always related to the ideals and spirituality of the times.

**Grade school '62 -'70.** Queen of Apostles, Riverdale, IL

All my older siblings got the traditional nuns – ruler cracking, ear twisting. Even my brother just 2 years older than me.

I got lucky and got nuns and priests who totally embraced the Vatican II liberal changes. In 1966,



Father Maher marched with Martin Luther King Jr, in Harvey, the town next door. Recently I found out he was well known in the Civil Rights movement in nearby south Chicago. And not surprisingly, got called a “nigger lover.”

Sister Shaun Paul introduced a real Pro/Con student debates on the controversial topics of the day – abortion, birth control, Vietnam, drugs. A couple of girls had been downtown during the Democratic Convention riots. In '69, Sister Virginia Mary gave extra points to everyone who went to the town hall meeting and fought to clean up the local Little Calumet River. She got blown away – almost all of us 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders showed up.

In '68 we got our first male teacher ever.

**“Latch key Kids.”** Starting in 1968, Mom had to work to support the family. So my two younger sisters and older brother came home to a mostly empty house.

I was into adrenaline pumping, risky Rock Climbing back in 1976. Way before the Extreme sports got cool.

### **Thornton Township High School, Harvey, IL '70 – '74**

A suburban school that was a microcosm of the 60's.

We had racial tension and riots every year. But there was a fair amount of inter-racial friendships. Even some inter-racial dating. It caused a stir, but no violence. Drugs. Long haired hippie to crew cut & straight laced. A banner hung across the main hall during sexual awareness week: *“VD is nothing to Clap about.”*

During the graduation ceremony, many of us drank and smoked pot. By then it had become somewhat of a tradition.

### **College - Eastern Illinois University. Central Illinois, 1976 – 80.**

Some in my age group are more X'ers in personality. Sure, I tried to fit in with the disco superficiality of the 70's. It was there, all around me.

Those of us with the 60's values were growing smaller. One professor had been part of the '60's in Boston. Parties at his house out in the country were clothes optional. The annual 'smoke pot in the Quad' day was slowly fading.

Without Vietnam, there was no unifying issue. Racism. Sexism, Politics. Environmentalism. They were each separate. I wrote that the only common denominator now was relationships between the sexes.

Born-again, Fundamentalist Christians were common. For most of the ones I talked with, there Spiritual Awakening was what saved them from their self-destructive drinking and drugs.

### **Nothing is clear cut about generations.**

It certainly isn't in my family.

John ('46) the oldest, he and his friends were into the Volkswagen thing. Buying, selling, and fixing them up. I still have my copy of the classic “Volkswagen guide for the complete Idiot.”



He avoided the draft, but has friends that were in Vietnam. One was in the worst of it, the Tet Offensive, and suffers from agent orange, the whole bit.

Skip, ('48), had a friend that came home pretty messed up. Mark, he tells the story about how one day, he was sleeping on the back porch. His Dad touched his shoulder to wake him up. Reacting like he was back in 'Nam, he jumped up and damn near choked his father to death.

My older sisters had friends and in-laws who were in Vietnam, or got lost in drugs and the whole social upheaval that came with the '60's.

Every war comes with social upheaval. It was just more in-you-face in this one. But that's for a different essay.

**Each time period is filled with complicated people.**

I never interpreted the book to suggest that everything fits into nice neat little packages.

History is always standing alongside one's personal life.

And one's personal life contains

Contradictions,

Opposites.

Bits and Pieces - (wait, I hear a song by the Dave Clark Five, circa 1965)

**Growth like the needle on a record.**

In was New Year's Day, 1974. I sat alone in the basement, listening to an album.

Hung over as hell. Depressed. Another boring New Year's Eve. My love life still sucked,. I watched the needle go round and round on the record top.

A poem came to me. Went something like this:

*"I saw a little man,*

*Sitting on the record, that was playing*

*He looked up at me, and screamed joyously,*

*"Hey Big man, look at me! I'm Free!"*

*I said to him,*

*"Little man, even tho you are happy, don't scream.*

*I know you think you see different things all the time.*

*Truth is,*

*Each time the record turns, you come back around.*

*No nearer, no farther, than my eyes believe.*

*So please Little Man, don't scream.*

It's common to think we, or things, have changed a great deal. Like 180 degrees. Then we see things haven't changed much at all, and we bum out, "aw man, the more things change, the more they stay the same."



But then the song keeps playing, and in a half an hour or so, the needle is in the center. The spot is 5 inches in or so. Ah, Change does occur.

**Generations are one full revolution.**

Growth happens. Civilization progresses.  
Not as fast as any Idealist dreams.  
Nor not at all, as the cynic smugly finds comfort in.  
But it does happen.  
This is comforting to me.

**The world needs you**

The world faces both economic and environmental disasters.

We need everyone from the emerging Civic generation, you Humanitarians.  
It's just like we needed everyone from the GI generation to win World War II.

The Regular Guy 'n Gal were the backbone of success, not college grads.  
Most were good, honest folks. But lots of 'em weren't.  
They had lotsa vices. Con men, hustlers, floozies, jerks, racists, bigots, prostitutes.  
A lot of 'em had no frick'n idea what they were fight 'in for.  
But they all answered the call.  
They put their lives on hold. And on the line.

**Everyone -**

- ✓ No matter how much or how little your education.
- ✓ No matter where you live - suburbs, city-nice-area, city-not-nice-area, or out in the country.
- ✓ White, blue or green collar. No collar. Immigrant collar.
- ✓ Truck drivers, cops, civil servants, janitors, middle managers, union workers, doctors, computer programmers, MBA's and trades people.
- ✓ From all seven continents.
- ✓ All religions.
- ✓ Oh yes, and to all political persuasions.

**"You" includes every generation type** that's alive today.  
Silent's, Boomer's, X'ers, Humanitarians.

GI's, the few that are left, hold Wisdom.  
No matter the state of their health,  
their Hearts still speak.  
We just gotta listen a little differently, that's all.

**History is standing alongside our personal life. Like it could be someplace else?**

====\_+\_+\_+\_+\_+=====



**I suppose the Allies could have lost WWII**, and we'd still have survived. Not fun. Very, very unpleasant & painful to say the least. But we would have.

I suppose that at every point of crisis of this magnitude, everybody feels that failure is not an option. The Civil War was orders of magnitude greater than any other. WWI greater than the Civil War. World War II was fought on every continent.

Now we face another period of economic destruction. Not nation-states, but from trans-national global corporations who have all the rights of person-hood, but none of the accountability. Not from dictators this time, but from CxO's.

**Add to this a new wrinkle - the Earth, from the core to stratosphere.**

Forces of Nature we do not fully comprehend, much less able to 'battle.' Or 'fix'. Systems of air and water at a global level. Positive and negative feedback loops. From microscopic stuff to life measured in tons.

Forces from the molten, red-hot core of our Earth. Literally. Volcanoes. Tectonic plates shifting. The earth of our grounding quaking beneath our feet. Which then ripples into the ocean systems, which impacts the weather, which feeds into plants & animals, which.....yada yada yada.

Oh, and not to mention the effects of 200 years of the Industrial Revolution.

In 20+ years in IT, I've mapped out the connections within some pretty large, ugly, convoluted, developed-over-decades mainframe software systems. And there are techie & engineering types who understand much more complex systems. But what we face now is beyond superlatives.

**I haven't made up my mind** if the same is true with today's secular crisis. Can people survive if we fail? What about if massive climate destruction triggers some leaders into considering & implementing a nuclear strategy?

**Humanitarian Generation, this is quite a Secular Crisis you are coming of age into.** People laughed when Laurel would say to Ollie, with a Hu-rumpfh!

"Well Ollie, this is **Another fine mess** you've gotten us into."  
As it has always been, there are times we laugh so that we do not cry.

Mitakuye Oyasun!

Lakota for **"All My Relations!"** [everything in the world is My Relative]

- Bob Oehmen,

Revised, Tuesday, March 2, 2010

Originally published on [www.NatCapClub.org](http://www.NatCapClub.org), April 15, 2009.

