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Philosophical Historiography, Military History, and 2020s Crisis War

Abstract:

Military history has to date shown little interest in war periodicity. It will soon witness the confirmation or disproof of a war forecast made over thirty years ago, by a socio-political model of Anglo-American culture that predicted a major civic and war crisis for the 2020s. Extending that model beyond the scope of original authors, Neil Howe and William Strauss, this essay finds a mathematical periodicity of major war over fourteen centuries of American and English history. This periodicity similarly calculates 2025 at high probability for the start of a drift into civil conflict and/or slide into world war. Military historiography can deploy this modeling for empirically valid research without relying on dubious political agendas or philosophical axioms about national destinies or international determinisms. Philosophy of culture and social realism should encourage historiography's disciplined empirical investigations and predictions.

Keywords:

historiography, military history, American history, war, cultural history, social realism

“Custom is king of all” – Herodotus Quoting Pindar

Culture has a past; to try to think of culture in the absence of any past can only glimpse at society’s superficialities. Each discipline taking itself to be capable of explaining a modest stretch of social history, even of only just a generation’s duration, already begins to think of culture in some guise or another. And to think of a culture only in terms of its past simply gazes at society’s lengthening shadows. With any culture the firm reality of its past has consequences presently with the living who are next enacting futurity. That flux of vitality stands still only long enough for a foreshortened focus and a fast snapshot as people rush onwards with their plans and decisions for the day. That speed of individual timely activity leaves wider matters out of focus. Concerns and choices as psychological happenings fail to find a link with a construal of people’s serial enactments as social performances, and nothing appears to connect with cultural formations that seem as distant and aloof as cold mountains. People rush into their futures while taking for granted that culture is already awaiting us there with its preparations. Yet we are personally thinking that we individually deserve all the credit for bypassing custom and newly creating what is to come.

Indeed, to portray today’s personal thoughts as taking steps on a socially or culturally wide stage seems to miscast the part and misread the lines. When I do my banking from time to time, I surely am not thinking about my bank counting on my customer participation or financial institutions cresting with cultural capitalism. There is no society or culture peeking in on my private funds, as matters appear to stand with me today. So any of us would think, no matter that sociology could well point out how we are banking on those banks staying structurally sound and no matter that anthropology observes how money continues to have such essential currency. Still, as soon as someone thinks about wanting one’s own funds available any time, that idea is thinkable and ever actionable only in connection with sprawling networks of presumptions invested in systemic social structures and firm cultural formations. We like to think about what we may do with our money without thinking of what money will have been doing with us. All the same, the past remains potently real today and tomorrow, and persists in that reality more effectively than any mere possibility. As one thinks of the new car to be bought next year, the money already saved and banked really has purchasing power next year as well as today. Without accurate facts about future money, there will not be a new car for you either.

To think realistically about the past is to already be thinking about the future just as realistically. That ontological symmetry finds its match cognitively. To think about what to be doing without considering what has been done puts on mental blinders. Genuine thinking appreciates that pastly-into-presently-to-futural continuity all around us perpetually. Our plannings and decisions, to be intelligent, must be realistic circumferentially; our activities lose intelligibility with shortsighted fixity. One skilled with approaching decisions realistically has already been appreciating prior established matters equally realistically. Putting the past behind surely fates you to hitting it frontally. Those who say, "What I think of my bank is a picture of it standing today, not yesterday," need reminding about how we forget that our practical view of any bank is assuredly historical in terms of what it has been continuing to be foundationally. Our idea of what a banking firm means to us today is like the image of a far-off galaxy, only presenting itself as it was long ago, yet our eyes are deceiving us truly enough for our purposes. Our fidelity to the institution is hardly about today but only its past and future, a confidence fairly proportional to its priority and perpetuity.

Social realism in this sense of practical intelligibility to our activities offends nothing psychological whatsoever. The full reality of sociality as ongoing past-to-presently-to-futuring gets taken completely for granted with every thoughtful choice. Animals have the pleasure of greeting a completely original day, day after day after day. Humans not living animalistically will have to be realists about whatever we have been continuing to be reliant upon for the stabilities to our lives. Taking choices made presently as acts of defiance against the dead hand of the past displays a misunderstanding about what it is to be a social and cultured human being. As people keep living customarily, they are hardly trapped by eras long past; they have already charted ahead into the future. We are never in the grip of the past like the animals in their blinking credulity. Hard necessities arrive in due time for simple minds unable to mind what has regularly been going on around them. The past is always extending its living hand to those cleverly grasping its lines of help making fresh holds onto the future. Our intelligent preparations again make us convinced realists about the future no less than about the past. Heedless indeed is anyone choosing to enjoy the summer as they like while winter is truly coming no matter what they think.

Philosophy of culture cannot leave culture unintelligible from an unrealistic view of its resources for society's activities and peoples' performances. Nor should philosophy sound surprised about historiographical trends, periodicities, and cyclicities to culture's organicity. Perhaps a philosophy falsely beholden to divine or natural laws exclusively still frets about supra-human forces, invisible necessities, or fateful determinism. Philosophy of culture finds human habits and customary laws where people reinforce them as they must to keep the future manageable and cultivatable. This is a realistic attitude toward the future and the basis to a pragmatic social realism for philosophy of culture.¹ Denying that the past has much to do with the present or future again reduces culture to shallow social transactionality. Sociology has been able to promote that sort of close-focus lens on mere materiality in motion in imitation of that mechanical materialism which is still struggling with single-celled life.² Speaking of social "facts," "forces," "laws," and other intimations of a social physics has sounded suitably scientific to past eras. Nevertheless, social matters should first and foremost align with life sciences as befits the intelligent subjects so busy socializing. Social theory in dread of inhuman mechanics has been heard to proclaim, in the name of choice and freedom, that the past is precisely what must be staunchly resisted. Such transactional and existential perspectives are all the same still acknowledging a realism about past-and-future matters, since one does not resist the unreal or worry about unrealities occupying the future. Freedom from the past gets no organism farther than the level of bacteria that still are not willing anything of note at all.

If history were only about the past then few would find it informative or differentiable from fantasy. Even fable and myth convey lore for edification, in the service of forward planning. (The revered ancestors are always more involved with our futures than their own pasts.) Treating interest, intelligibility, and intention as separable mental affairs forgets their merger in thoughtful activity exploiting opening opportunities. What has been potentially matters far more in the future

1) Durkheim, for example, is better read in the company of social thinkers accustomed to the pragmatic power of social habituation; see Jones, *Development of Durkheim's Social Realism*.

2) Reiss and Ruse, *The New Biology*.

than anywhere in the past where it rests powerless. The careful study of the past amounts to a prehistory of the future that merits cognizance – a view bypassing that “whig” idea of history as progressing toward contemporary conditions, and inverting a “pragmatic” history letting current predilections dictate the past’s formulations. Knowing the past better means understanding the future better, especially because much about the future is moldable from our intelligent modifications and meliorations. Every science’s methodology takes advantage of this anticipatory intelligibility and its working knowledge of future matters. With social theorizing, whether through psychology, sociology, social history, or anthropology, disciplined methodetic accordingly displays a “social realism” in defiance of a-causal nominalism about human activity. Social realism respects the principle of sufficient reason, a reasonableness about what will be responsible for social practices and practicalities. Nowhere with intelligence could there be conflict between reason and freedom. Freedom has little value while there is little idea of what might be done with it.

Social theory can be predictive without getting reductive or restrictive. Social psychology for its part could not disagree, since anyone anticipating an unwanted future would at least be considering it pragmatically and realistically, since an unformatted future merits no preparations. Philosophy of culture and pragmatic historiography hence find each other on the same ground of furthering intelligent preparedness. To be a cultural organicist and social realist rather than a materialistic nominalist it is only necessary to take humanity to be capable of realistic thinking and practical planning. Transcendental metaphysics or predesigned cosmology are entirely unnecessary. There is every reason for philosophy of culture to embrace social realism and realistic historiography for a future which never stops coming as well as a past which is never truly over. As history in its fullest continuity is cultural, philosophy of culture thus encompasses historical prognostication. The future in its preformations was always awaiting us, arriving in surety all the more that we try to control it and succeed in shaping it.

That the past has already been forming the future could only be a shock to the subjective idealist dreaming of endless summer. But winter has been coming all the time. In illustration, that unmistakable chill arrives with the gusts from gathering storms of war.

“War is father of all and king of all” – Heraclitus

To forecast uncivil crisis and massive conflict is no small thing. War is truly terrible, embodied in one of the Four Horsemen symbolically, and realistically as momentous and possibly apocalyptic as anything of cosmic import. Dark arts once looked to celestial signs or earthly omens to foretell the coming of war. A comet, or a solar eclipse, could not be subtle. Science has brought the heavens into its orbit of formulaic knowledge, but war and death remain apocalyptic. In a more secular age, an earnest prediction of war is still regarded with suspicion and dread. Daring to speak war’s name might bring on that scourge by evoking demiurgical forces at work beyond all reason or negotiation. Only the fool or the madman calls on war; the wise keep their premonitions to themselves.

Why would the discipline of history dare to go where so few historiographers would tread? Great cycles to history, like Melville’s great white whale, has lured otherwise respected historians into quixotic quests. Looking for economic cycles is somewhat less disreputable than military cycles, while correlating economic cycles with military cycles seems to be respected the least.³ The whole topic evokes philosophy of history’s ghost still stalking teleological or deterministic visions. All the same, social theory cannot avoid the study of war no more than history.⁴ For its part, cultural history along with military history need not stray from disciplined historiography, although it should rely on the wisdom of an organicist philosophy of culture. To say, “war cannot be predicted” is only a safe bet until it has actually been correctly done. Turning away from evident facts amounts to just cowardice, which has never been a military or disciplinary strength. No one thought that comets could be predicted either, until the day arrived when such predictability was accomplished.

Two scholars of American intellectual history, Neil Howe and William Strauss, published their tome titled *Generations: The History of America’s Future, 1584 to 2069* in 1991, more than thirty years ago. One late chapter of their book makes a singular prediction due to pattern to those *four* centuries: America will undergo

3) Conybeare, “War Cycles, Prices and Causality.”

4) Joas and Knöbl, *War in Social Thought*.

a *Crisis* war sometime during the 2020s. We the living now occupy grandstand seats for witnessing that crisis if indeed it occurs. This essay discusses the historiography of theory and additionally discerns a mathematical periodicity of Anglo-American crisis war over *fourteen centuries*. According to the historical study and mathematical pattern sketched in later sections, the median year for the dawning of either a constitutional crisis, an uncivil war, and/or foreign war should be estimated around 2025, plus or minus. This is not a “reading the headlines” prognostication, but one makeable and indeed made in 1991 that has taken three decades to reach its confirmation or disconfirmation. Explaining how historiography’s resources can account for that methodical forecasting is this essay’s task.

The American authors of *Generations* believed, as all sorts of historians must, that change is one reliable constant for any large society over enough time. A society dedicated to liberty and individualism is more comfortable with change than most, along with self-determination and re-creation. We the people decide our fortunes and our fate. If there is rhyme or rhythm to the course of American affairs, we must be both the dancers and the dance. Authoring the great poem that is America is a unique responsibility. Only those who truly know our nation could write about what Americans have done and how Americans have done it ourselves, and done it to ourselves.

The war forecast of *Generations* was based on a vast trove of information familiar to historians of America and the Anglo-American culture, and inspired by earlier social and political historians who had written about patterns and cycles in history. Howe and Strauss may have reached mass audiences, but their work merits academic study and analysis. Their book, along with subsequent books,⁵ repeated the same prediction of war during the 2020s, and also offered many dozens of interesting predictions about trends and events that would happen after 1991 up to the 2020s. This is not the place to discuss those predictions or their accuracy (although that accuracy, with the advantage of today’s hindsight into past headlines, has approached 100%).

5) Strauss and Howe, *Generations*; Strauss and Howe, *The Fourth Turning*; along with Howe, *The Fourth Turning is Here*.

“There is a mysterious cycle in human events” – Franklin D. Roosevelt

The epic narrative of *Generations* recounts the life journeys of eighteen generations who have lived in America since its colonial beginnings. The linear chronology of historical events across that four-century timespan is paired with a cyclical genealogy of four “generational archetypes” repeating in the same order. Because of that ordering, one of those generations, the “Idealist” archetype, always arrives with its first birth cohort upon the ending of a “secular crisis” that includes crisis conflict and usually war. This generation’s collective character, its “peer personality” as Howe and Strauss call it, and the characters of the other three archetypes that follow in strict succession, are molded by the nation’s “social moments” – the country’s overall sense of priorities and challenges – which are shaped by older generations and shape younger generations.

Historians in calm retrospect do not establish generations, nor do pollsters gushing headlines about 14- to 24-year-olds. Any age group can get called a generation if polling can obtain their answers to leading questions. In truth, generations grow to know themselves, to know themselves better than anyone else, and to know their place on the stage of national history. In 1936, with his country traumatized by the Great Depression at home and alarmed by another World War abroad, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt gave his acceptance speech to stand for re-election as President.

Philadelphia is a good city in which to write American history. This is fitting ground on which to reaffirm the faith of our fathers; to pledge ourselves to restore to the people a wider freedom; to give to 1936 as the founders gave to 1776 – an American way of life. That very word freedom, in itself and of necessity, suggests freedom from some restraining power... .

And so it was to win freedom from the tyranny of political autocracy that the American Revolution was fought. That victory gave the business of governing into the hands of the average man, who won the right with his neighbors to make and order his own destiny through his own Government. Political tyranny was wiped out at Philadelphia on July 4, 1776... .

There is a mysterious cycle in human events. To some generations much is given. Of other generations much is expected. This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny.⁶

Everyone understood that Roosevelt, at the age of 54 that year, was referring to his own generation, the Idealist-archetype “Missionary Generation” as they had become known, who were born during the two decades after the Civil War and who in mature adulthood were later assuming political leadership of the nation.

Another American President, John F. Kennedy, gave his inaugural address in 1961. He used the occasion to similarly make a “call to arms” to his own rising generation, the generation that underwent World War II as younger adults in factories at home and foreign fields abroad.

We observe today not a victory of party but a celebration of freedom – symbolizing an end as well as a beginning – signifying renewal as well as change. For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three-quarters ago... .

We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans – born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage – and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world... .

In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility – I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation... .

And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.⁷

6) Roosevelt, “Acceptance Speech.”

7) Kennedy, “Inaugural Address.”

“Born in the century...” as Kennedy said, to his Civic-minded generation also known as the G.I. Generation born after 1900. His audience of peers innately knew who Kennedy was referring to.

As fascinating as those entwined interactions between generations and their generational moments may be, their periodicity must be timed precisely by one kind of event: the ending of a national war crisis. No other sort of event in *Generations* has as much control over generational genesis, character, and periodicity. It is fortunate for those undertaking the academic study of a political theory like that of *Generations* that momentousness and mathematics are thus paired in playing such oversized roles. For social theory, such ideas as “generation” and “social moment” have perennial import and rapt interest for both scholarly and public attention alike. However, peering into such cloudy matters as mass “personalities,” national “moods,” and social “moments” seems more subjective than objective. What was really happening, and who was it happening to? If it really comes down to, “Well, I guess you just had to be there to understand it,” then this genre of popular history writing is more like biography or journalism.

War is different matter altogether, mattering enormously to a people and a nation. There is much less subjectivity or vagueness about whether and when war occurs, and who is affected by how much. Historians, whether they are focusing on social conditions or political affairs, or they are simply getting their chronologies straight, can rely on the timings of battles and wars since they are among the easier historical events to time. Within the fair margins of precision reasonably expected for empirical inquiries into time-ravaged records and time-worn ruins, convergences upon places and dates of martial conflict is well within the chronological objectivity achievable by the discipline of history.

The forecast of a *crisis* war by *Generations* is especially important for both the study of history and military history. Theodore Roosevelt, speaking at a conference of military historians, told the assembled, “I don’t believe it is possible to treat military history as something entirely apart from the general national history.”⁸ *Generations* in fact predicts that some sort of war could and would happen most any decade through a typical century for a typical nation. The Four-archetype cyclical model of *Generations*

8) American Historical Association, *Who Shall Write Our Military History?*, 31.

theory is able to specify the type of war that occurs during the four “Turnings” of about two decades each that span the interregnum between crisis wars. For example, the character of the Korean War was quite different in motive and method than the Vietnam War or the Afghanistan War because the national mood was distinctively different during their respective eras. However, there are wars and then there is THE climatic war for national survival that each generation going through that war at any age young or old will remember and commemorate for a lifetime.

Categorizing wars is essential to sound military history, and history always provides far more information about the episodes of crisis wars. Big battles get exhaustively analyzed by specialists, but momentous wars deciding fates of nations are endlessly assessed by legions of commentators. The eruption of political instability, the arming for civil or foreign war, the mobilization of armies and navies, the clashing of battles on land and sea, the final conquests and capitulations, and the peace of victory and treaty, are typical matters of record. History remembers, and so do historians. In any large library, a big city’s public library or a large university library, the books on the shelves tell the tale plainly enough. Go to the History area. If one or two bookshelves are enough to recount one war, while multiple bookcases overflow with books about another war, history has already counted up the score. The math of momentous wars conducted by great nations will rarely fail to be fairly obvious.

If the generational model behind *Generations* says that a future crisis war should happen, and it does not, then theory disconfirmations ensue. Given the long time-scales where this generational model operates, only presently can anyone observe, or not, exactly one American crisis very soon. Predicting a single event does not sound very impressive, even one that turns out to be accurate, for any sort of theory. However, in the realm of the humanities and human sciences, we must again temper our expectations to the nature of the disciplinary inquiry and its subject matter. Besides, armed with the right theory, even a scientific revolutionary like Halley or Einstein could count on the striking evidence from a single comet or solar eclipse.

History is our insight into social and civic trends continuing into the future when controlled experiments are impractical or impossible. The best way to know that a trend is firmly in place is to track the origination and prolongation of that trend. In the social sciences, not unlike an earth science such as geology, a theory’s capacity for retrodiction counts as much as its fertility for prediction. Where vast

social and political energies are concerned, past results can be indicative of future performances. Momentum and math matters for cultural sciences as much as any of the natural sciences.

“Still may the Gray Champion come!” – Nathaniel Hawthorne

The sources and strengths of such social momentum can only be the people themselves, counting them all, where conduct and character makes itself known. *Generations* opens its story of America’s past with a tale of character in a time of crisis. The political moment was a particularly dangerous turning point for colonial America, the Glorious Revolution of 1688–1689, which was wedged in between periods of Indian uprisings, French invasions, King William’s War, and civil rebellions erupting from Maine to Virginia.

One of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Twice-Told Tales” (1837) was the tale of *The Gray Champion*. Howe and Strauss relate the events that inspired this thrilling account.

One afternoon in April 1689 – as the American colonies boiled with rumors that King James II was about to shackle them into slavery – the King’s handpicked governor of New England, Sir Edmund Andros, marched his troops menacingly through Boston to let the locals know their place. The future of America looked grim. Yet just at that moment, seemingly from nowhere, there emerged on the streets “the figure of an ancient man,” a “Gray Champion” with “the eye, the face, the attitude of command.” The old man planted himself directly in front of the approaching British soldiers and demanded they stop. His dress, “combining the leader and the saint,” and “the solemn, yet warlike peal of that voice, fit either to rule a host in the battlefield or be raised to God in prayer, were irresistible. At the old man’s word and outstretched arm, the roll of the drum was hushed at once, and the advancing line stood still.” Inspired by that single act, the people of Boston roused their courage and acted. Within the day, Andros was deposed and jailed, and the liberty of colonial America was saved.

“Who was this Gray Champion?” asks Nathaniel Hawthorne at the end of this story in *Twice-Told Tales*. No one knew, except that he was once one of the fire-hearted young Puritans who first settled New England a half century earlier. Later that very evening, just before he disappeared, he was seen embracing the 85-year-old Simon Bradstreet, a kindred spirit and one of the very few original Puritans still alive. “I have heard,” adds Hawthorne, “that whenever the descendants of the Puritans are to show the spirit of their sires, the old man appears again.” One such moment arrived, of course, during the revolutionary summer of 1775 – when elder Americans once again appealed to God, called the young to war, and dared the hated enemy to fire. And indeed, notes Hawthorne, “when eighty years had passed,” the Gray Champion walked once more. “When our fathers were toiling at the breastwork on Bunker’s Hill, all through that night the old warrior walked his rounds. Long, long may it be ere he comes again! His hour is one of darkness, and adversity, and peril. But should domestic tyranny oppress us, or the invaders’ step pollute our soil, still may the Gray Champion come!”⁹

Howe and Strauss promptly point out that Hawthorne himself would live long enough to see his own Transcendental generation set fire to the continent with the Civil War, eighty years after the guns of the Revolutionary War had fallen silent.

Only a little more math is needed to observe the seventy-six-year timespan between the end of the Civil War in 1865 and the entry of America into World War II in 1941. The stage was then set for the birth of the peacetime generation to arrive, the latest incarnation of the Idealist archetype, labeled as the Baby Boom generation. At this point, in the chapter of *Generations* about the lifecycle appointed to this generation, Howe and Strauss announce their dire prediction. They forecast it once and then repeat it again:

By 2026, the youngest Boomer will be 65, the oldest 82. In the intervening era, as this generation passes through its life phase of maximum

9) Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 80–81.

power, history suggests it will encounter a secular crisis comparable to the greatest moments in American history. Meet the old Boom, the next embodiment of Hawthorne's "Gray Champions," combining "the leader and the saint" to show the descendants of the Puritans "the spirit of their sires." Boom principle – or righteous fury – will cast a long shadow over the entire twenty-first century. If the future follows the cycle, old Boomers will bring world history to a decisive turning point.¹⁰

By the 2010s, this aging generation will feel its collective mortality, along with a sense of urgency about unsolved (and previously deferred) problems in the outer world. Events that earlier would have elicited compromise or stalemate will now bring aggressive action pursuant to Boom principle. The Crisis of 2020 – the Gray Champion's hour of "darkness, and adversity, and peril" – will be at hand.¹¹

What can we dimly perceive looking ahead into the fog of the future? Does war lurk there? According to *Generations*, only major civic crises complete with costly military battles and dramatic homeland suffering on a country-wide scale could count. And looking back into the past, what does history observe among all those long lists of military battles and state conflicts that crowd the pages of chronologies to national history?

Military history has to be directed where to properly look. The same guidance is given by experts on national history and the organic model of social history: Focus on great nations of durable and dominate hegemony over their affairs. Accordingly, we proceed to our investigation into Anglo-American socio-military history.

"When in the Course of human events, ..." – Thomas Jefferson

American historians cannot overlook the colonial experience of the tumult and destruction during 1689 to 1697 up and down the Atlantic coast. Towns and settlements were small and dispersed, but the destruction and death was not less than

10) Ibid., 402.

11) Ibid., 405.

a terrible trauma.¹² How could the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution and King William's War be spoken of in the same breath as the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and World War II? The objectivity of mathematics is on hand to lend true perspective. King William's War was the third-worst war, as one among the most hazardous and existentially threatening, in American history.¹³

American Wars		Deaths Combat + Civilian	Population	Deaths per Million
Civil War	1861–1865	750,000	1861 32,050,000	23,401
Revolutionary War	1775–1783	25,000	1780 2,780,369	8,991
King William's War	1689–1697	659	1690 (N. England) 83,600	7,883
World War II	1941–1945	405,399	1941 134,400,000	3,016
War of 1812	1812–1815	15,000	812 7,500,000	2,000
World War I	1917–1918	116,516	1918 102,800,000	1,133
Mexican War	1846–1848	13, 283	1846 20,410,000	651
Vietnam War	1964–1972	58,209	1965 191,270,000	304
Korean War	1950–1953	36,516	1950 151,325,798	241
Spanish-Philippine War	1898–1913	6,642	1900 76,212,168	87

12) Laramie, *King William's War*.

13) Amounts for combat plus civilian deaths are referenced by respective Wikipedia pages which cite their sources. Any such number must be treated as an approximation, but only their comparative magnitudes are significant for the purposes of this essay.

The top four momentous wars for America’s historical course could not be more obvious. Finding scattered small monuments to that misadventure called the War of 1812 would be an expeditionary trek across America. A British corps burned the White House out of spite but they were never staying and memorable events amounted to the rescue of Washington’s portrait and the penning of the “Star Spangled Banner.” To those saying, “World War I was called at the time the Great War,” that indeed was right about the European experience of that tragic war. But that war was not experienced as a *Crisis* war for Americans: America was a participant for less than twenty months, no threat to the homeland would manifest, and the United States’s World War I Memorial was dedicated over a century later in 2021 (and invisible from the National Mall). Nor does the Vietnam War, an overseas war of choice by a superpower, able to qualify as a *Crisis* war since homeland sovereignty was never going to be threatened, no matter that many of that era feared for national moral integrity.

The chronological component to Howe and Strauss’s generational theory of historical cycles permits their theory to be empirically predictive and testable. In the social sciences, a predictive theory based on both a trend line and a causal link can be taken more seriously than just an empirical pattern. Here, we focus on the core chronological pattern, as the more objective portion of the whole theory, and the most potent force compelling the generational model to this theory.

WARTIME YEARS	YEARS SEPARATING WARS
King William’s War 1688–1697	
	1697 to 1776 = 79 years
American Revolution 1776–1781	
	1781 to 1861 = 80 years
Civil War 1861–1865	
	1865 to 1941 = 76 years
World War II 1941–1945	
	1945 to 2025 = 80 years
War 2025– ?	
	AVERAGE = 79 YEARS

Predicting a fifth crisis war only based on a trend of four prior data points is a weak line connecting only a few dots. If the trend line could be extended back, further into the past, confidence in the existence of a heavier trend line could rise. What can history say?

King William's War was simply the local colonial name for the broader conflict that occurred within England and between England and France at that same time. The ascension of the Catholic King James II only worsened the ongoing French-Dutch conflicts, and Dutch Protestant William of Orange's invasion plan to overthrow the Crown in 1688 sought to ally England against France. As William III, the successful conclusion to his Nine Years' War against France from 1688 to 1697 finally brought the relief of peace and security to England, not to be broken apart by a civil war until Thomas Jefferson penned his rebellious words in 1776 to fling into the face of another English monarch, King George III.

As Howe and Strauss point out, no mere coincidence correlates our frontier war in the Colonies and the war of succession in England. There is nothing about the Atlantic Ocean that sunders a nation or that nation's civil woe and strife. The American colonies inherited its pattern of war from England, being after all, until 1776, the same country and culture. And, as Howe and Strauss also point out, there is much worth seeing in English history prior to the Protest versus Catholic turmoil of the seventeenth century.

The sixteenth century had some fairly dramatic political and military moments, but none was greater than the surprising defeat in 1588 of that fearsome Spanish Armada sent by Phillip II to invade the merrie England of Queen Elizabeth I. This was but one thrilling episode to the Anglo-Spanish War which began in 1580 and did not reach political resolution until the 1604 Treaty of London, the uncovering of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605, and the "Twelve Years' Truce" that recognized Dutch independence in 1607.

We are only getting started. The long history of England has much more to tell. Queen Elizabeth I knew well how her coronation was due to the rise of the Tudors in the aftermath of the Wars of the Roses some four decades earlier, as the granddaughter of Henry VII who overthrew Richard III.

“Now is the winter of our discontent” – *Richard III* by Shakespeare

Richard, the final king from the House of York and last of the Plantagenet dynasty, was elevated to Duke of Gloucester in 1461 after his brother became King Edward IV, whose later death in 1483 brought Richard III to the throne. His own death came in 1485 at the Battle of Bosworth Field, a decisive battle of the Wars of the Roses. The generation of his father, Richard of York, and his enemy Henry VI, had contested for the crowns of both England and France since 1455, but a relative peace had ensued upon the crowning of Richard's brother Edward in 1461. That event drew from Richard (the character of Shakespeare's play) the opening lines, “Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this sun of York.” The first phase of the Wars of the Roses between the Houses of York and Lancaster witnessed the largest and bloodiest battles ever to be fought on British soil, including the Battle of Wakefield in 1460 where Richard's father died, and the momentous Battle of Towton in 1461. The hiatus of calm that followed with Edward IV on the throne was cut short by his brother's own kingly ambitions. Richard's coup against Edward's son and ascension in 1483, with the two “Princes in the Tower” imprisoned and then “disappeared,” rekindled the Wars of the Roses for a second military phase that ended with the defeat and execution of Warbeck the Pretender in 1499.¹⁴

The often-disastrous entanglements between the English and French thrones went back centuries. The long “Hundred Years War” of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was mostly a continental affair, dragging much of Western Europe into the struggle but little fighting happened on British soil. The fifty-year reign of Edward III was an adventurous era replete with expensive forays into France yet the later years of his long reign were fraught with major difficulties. The new king of France, Charles V, declared null-and-void all English possessions in France in 1369, war with England was declared, and Aquitaine went into revolt. This “Caroline War” with France was relatively brief, but fierce and costly for England. French forces proved too powerful; Edward retreated to England in 1371 and surrendered Aquitaine and Gascony, with the Treaty of Bruges in 1375 finally forcing England to give up its claims to almost everything of France. An enfeebled Edward III lived just long enough to see the

14) Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses*.

restoration of political stability the following year with the death of his son Prince Edward and the rise of the powerful Good Parliament.¹⁵ John of Gaunt's disruptions were curtailed as he watched his older brother Richard become King, but as Duke of Lancaster, he founded the royal House of Lancaster, while another brother Edmund founded the rival royal House of York.

We have enlarged our tabulation of crisis eras to go back almost eight hundred years:

WARTIME YEARS	YEARS SEPARATING WARS
Caroline War with France 1369–1375	
	1375 to 1455 = 80 years
Wars of the Roses 1455–1471, 1483–1499	
	1499 to 1580 = 81 years
Anglo-Spanish War 1580–1607	
	1607 to 1688 = 81 years
King William's War 1688–1697	
	1697 to 1776 = 79 years
American Revolution 1776–1781	
	1781 to 1861 = 80 years
Civil War 1861–1865	
	1865 to 1941 = 76 years
World War II 1941–1945	
	1945 to 2025 = 80 years
War 2025– ?	
	AVERAGE = 80 YEARS

Focusing here on the Anglo-American history of crisis war, how much farther back in history could its pattern go? We have now gone back in time seven hundred years, yet we are only half-way to the deep origins of this periodical pattern. The grandfather of Edward III, Edward I, had defied Philip IV of France and precipitated the

15) Sumption, *The Hundred Years War*.

Anglo-French War of 1294–1297. The grandfather of Edward I, King John, was overcome by the Anglo-French War and First Barons' War of 1213–1217. That distinctive manner of settling claimants to the crown through civil war was familiar to inhabitants of the previous century, with "The Anarchy" Civil War of 1138–1145.

"Every rich man his castle did make" – *Peterborough Chronicle*

The longest of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles of England, the *Peterborough Chronicle* includes observations upon the era of English anarchy and civil war as it reached its frenzy from 1138 to 1146. The portentous signs of the times were already in the skies. We read in the chronicle for 1135 (our current calendar year 1133) that the sun was darkened and the stars came out at midday. This was the now-famous total solar eclipse on August 2, 1133 CE, with King Henry I, the son of William the Conqueror, having just departed for France and fated to never return. Between Henry's visible absence and bad omens in plain sight, unrest began to grow. Upon the King's death while campaigning in Normandy in 1135, rivals announced their claims, barons across Britain and Normandy had to choose sides. Stephen's prompt arrival and kingship by acclamation in London only spread chaos and confusion. In Chronicle passages recorded for 1137 (1135), we read that "æuric rice man his castles makede" so that "fylden þe land ful of castles."¹⁶ With a "land full of castles" and landed lords one by one revoking their fealty to Stephen, war ensued in 1138 as key barons launched their rebellion in the south-west, Scotland invaded from north, Henry's daughter Empress Matilda and her husband Geoffrey V of Anjou invaded Normandy and then England from the south, and then eastern areas of English rose up against Stephen, who was somehow able to withstand it all. Halley's Comet appeared in 1145 while the storm was passing with stalemates emerging across England.¹⁷ Two years later Robert of Gloucester was dead, rival claimants left England, the Second Crusade began, and England was left with an exhausted peace.

Seven decades later, another English king felt compelled to risk fortune and throne over Normandy. To recover those lands lost to France, King John forged new

16) Clark, *Peterborough Chronicle*, 55

17) Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, 180.

alliances and sent a naval fleet of 500 ships in 1213 to surprise the French fleet off the Flanders coast and capture or sink most of King Philip II's navy. The next year John invaded France at Poitou, but his allies failed him at the battle of Bouvines in July 1214 and the Truce of Chinon stripped England of all French territory. Back at home, John now faced bankruptcy and rebellion from his own barons who demanded taxation reforms with the Magna Carta in 1215. John soon forgot his political promises, so the barons resorted to a treacherous alliance with France to depose him. King Philip II wanted nothing to do with England, but his son Prince Louis raised an invading army in 1216. Louis captured much English territory but he soon found himself unneeded and unwanted with John's sudden death that year, as his pliable young son Henry III was placed on the throne to everyone's relief. In 1217 the French were defeated on the field of battle in Lincoln, and on the seas off the coast of Sandwich, bringing another French fight and domestic anarchy to a war-weary conclusion.¹⁸

The king who followed Stephen, Henry III, enjoyed a prolong and fairly peaceful rule. His son, Edward I, also avoided a major foreign war, until the provocations of France and Scotland grew too great. France's new king, Philip IV, refused to surrender Gascony as promised to England in 1294, so Edward invaded Aquitaine and then sent an expedition to fight with Flanders against France. Edward regained Gascony but other bad defeats resulted in a truce with France in 1297. By then Edward had bigger problems closer to home. The death of Alexander III of Scotland had left the nobility divided, and Edward's clumsy attempts at intervention united them against him. The rebellion against the English, later called the First War of Scottish Independence, erupted in 1296 as Edward invaded Scotland and fought the Battle of Dunbar that year. William Wallace now made his entry onto the stage of history, with the Battle of Stirling Bridge in 1297 and the Battle of Falkirk in 1298. Those large battles would prove to be the last serious resistance to the English.¹⁹ Edward easily intimidated the Scots with another army in 1303–1304 and the execution of Wallace in 1305.

18) Davis, *England's Lost Civil War*.

19) Burt, *Edward I and the Governance of England*, 177–205.

WARTIME YEARS	YEARS SEPARATING WARS
“The Anarchy” Civil War 1138–1145	
	1145 to 1213 = 68 years
Anglo-French War and First Barons’ War 1213–1217	
	1217 to 1294 = 77 years
Anglo-French War and Scotland War 1294–1298	
	1298 to 1369 = 71 years
Caroline War with France 1369–1375	
	1375 to 1455 = 80 years
Wars of the Roses 1455–1471, 1483–1499	
	1499 to 1580 = 81 years
Anglo-Spanish War 1580–1607	
	1607 to 1688 = 81 years
King William’s War 1688–1697	
	1697 to 1776 = 79 years
American Revolution 1776–1781	
	1781 to 1861 = 80 years
Civil War 1861–1865	
	1865 to 1941 = 76 years
World War II 1941–1945	
	1945 to 2025 = 80 years
War 2025– ?	
	AVERAGE = 77 YEARS

Our journey into the past has still farther to go. Stephen’s predecessor on the English throne, his uncle King Henry I, was the grandson of William the Conqueror from Normandy. How William ended up in England in 1066 requires us to travel back even further in time.

“God alone knows who may master this battlefield” – *The Battle of Maldon*, poet unknown

Edward the Confessor, the Anglo-Saxon king since 1042, died at the beginning of 1066 without an heir. His grandfather, Richard I, had another grandson, Robert I of Normandy, whose illegitimate son was William, later to be Conqueror. William expected to be Edward’s successor, but other descendants had the same idea, and they quickly arrayed against each other. Halley’s Comet was in the skies in that spring. By that fall William was invading, routing Godwinson’s depleted forces at the Battle of Hastings on October 14, 1066, and accepting his crown in London on Christmas Day of 1066.

The long-serving Anglo-Saxon kings prior to Edward the Confessor, Cnut the Great (reigned 1016–1035) and Æthelred (reigned 978–1013) kept England entangled with Denmark politically, although war was rare. It was the manner in which Æthelred “The Unready” came to the throne after the death of his half-brother Edward “The Martyr” that displays the peculiarly English manner of combining internal civil war with foreign war. Their father King Edgar the Peaceful left the matter of succession in doubt upon his death in 975. Edward received his coronation that year, but the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle also reports the appearance of a comet, along with famine and many disturbances. The earls Ælfhere and Æthelwine nearly started a civil war, and then Æthelred’s supporters had Edward killed at Corfe Castle in 978, elevating Æthelred to the kingship at around age ten or twelve. Conflicts with the Vikings of Denmark and Norway destabilized the troubled realm from the start. During the 980s the Viking Danes raided with increasing frequency, and marauding armies with aid from Normandy destroyed towns in southeast England. The appearance of Halley’s Comet in 989 could not have been a reassuring sight. An Anglo-Saxon army under the command of Earl Byrhtnoth of Essex at last met the Viking army near Maldon on August 11, 991, and the complete defeat at the hands of the Vikings was immortalized by the epic poem *The Battle of Maldon*.²⁰ A peace with Normandy was brokered by the Pope John XV in 991 and huge sums of silver pacified the Danes.

The tumultuous era of the two sons of Edgar stood in stark contrast to the relative stability and prosperity of preceding decades. Edgar the Peaceful had kept the Vikings, the Danelaw, and the Scots at bay while keeping the kingdom consolidated, as had his ances-

20) Atherton, *The Battle of Maldon*.

tors Edward the Elder, his sons Æthelstan, Edmund I (Edgar's father), and Eadred, and his grandson Eadwig, who altogether ruled for almost eighty years from 899 to 975.²¹

Before Edward the Elder, his father Alfred the Great had to endure the terrible Viking invasions of the mid-to-late ninth century. He was crowned King of the West Saxons in 871 upon the death of his brother Æthelred not long after the battles of Ashdown and Meretun with the Great Heathen Army (as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* labeled it) of Vikings. In 876 the Vikings were back for conquest, but Alfred was able to hold them off and gain a victory in the Battle of Edington (or Ethandun, in Wiltshire) in May, 878. A new Viking army arrived later that year as a solar eclipse darkened England, but Alfred was able to fortify his lands, add London to his realm, and pronounce himself King of the Anglo-Saxons in 886. Fresh war arrived with Viking ships in 889. Alfred and his son Edward countered them at a series of winning battles during 892–893, including one at Farnham in Surrey in 892, another in Benfleet in Essex, and a third at Buttington in Wales. By 896, having gained little of value while losing necessary supplies, the Vikings were in retreat back to the Danelaw, East Anglia, or the continent, and the rest of Alfred's great reign was much more peaceful.²²

The Cerdicing dynasty that ruled Wessex since the seventh century, culminating in Alfred the Great, enjoyed a fair amount of political stability from the early 800s down to 870s. This stability is evidenced by its direct line of kings from Ecgbert (reg. 802–839), his son Æthelwulf (reg. 839–858), and then Æthelwulf's four sons in order of Æthelbald (reg. 858–860), Æthelberht (reg. 860–865), Æthelred (reg. 865–871), and finally Alfred the Great who ascended in 871. Even Ecgbert's predecessor on the Wessex throne, Beorhtric (meaning "Magnificent Ruler"), had a relatively long and satisfactory reign. However, signs of serious political tumult were evident with the way that Beorhtric had come to power in 786.²³

Beorhtric was a true descendant of Cerdic, the founder of Wessex (condensed from "West Saxons"), but he unexpectedly rose to power after King Cynewulf was killed, the culmination of a Wessex civil war that had broken out years before in 757. A year previously Sigeberht had become King of Wessex after the sixteen-year rule of Cuthred. The Wessex nobility promptly assembled the Witen council with Cynewulf at its head to

21) Huscroft, *Making England*, 109–51.

22) Smyth, *King Alfred the Great*.

23) White, "Kinship and Lordship in Early Medieval England."

speedily depose Sigeberht in 757. To no one's surprise Cynewulf himself was crowned in 757, yet the violence was spreading. His sponsor Æthelbald of Mercia, who wanted to add West Saxon to his sphere of enlarging influence across England, was assassinated in that year. Cynewulf grabbed Berkshire from Mercia in the ensuing chaos of 758. The next King of Mercia, Offa, managed to defeat Cynewulf at the Battle of Bensington in 779, and took back Berkshire in the process. Battles with the Britons and Welsh occupied Cynewulf for the next few years, but revenge was stalking him while Cyneheard, brother of Sigeberht, was still a threat. In 786, with a few dozen men, he attacked Cynewulf in Merton, and they were both killed in the fighting. Offa promptly recruited Beorhtric to stand for the West Saxon throne and the uncivil violence was finally quelled.²⁴

With the tragic ending of Cynewulf, we are approaching the origins of this long Anglo-American historical saga. Peering back even further, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* and the *Ecclesiastical History* by the Venerable Bede relate the contested thrones, coups, and wars between West Saxon and Mercia, and Mercia and Northumbria, during the 660s and 670s. Mercia's King Wulfhere enlarged his domination of neighboring realms from West Saxon to Kent and East Saxon in the 660s. The deaths of neighboring kings left Wulfhere as the most powerful Anglo-Saxon king over a fractious England. In the mid-670s his fortunes turned after defeats at the hands of his brother-in-law King Ecgfrith of Northumbria in 674, and then by King Æscwine of West Saxon in 675. It was not yet time for political stability. Wulfhere died from disease in 675, while Æscwine could not reunite Wessex and his rulership ended in 676. A long comet shone overhead for three months during 676 as Æthelred I was settling into his Mercia throne and Centwine took the West Saxon throne. Æthelred subdued Kent the following year, and conflicts between Mercia, Wessex, and Northumbria over disputed territory continued.²⁵ So much political strife was disrupting the Church, and Pope Agatho had to intervene in 678 after the Archbishop of Canterbury removed Wilfrid of York from his bishopric. In 679 Æthelred subdued Northumbria with a sweeping victory over Ecgfrith at the Battle of the River Trent. As a new détente spread across England a younger generation was ready to rule, with Centwine and then Æthelred abdicating their thrones to become monks.

We can now survey 1,400 years of the Anglo-America war and peace cycles.

24) Yorke, *Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*.

25) Ibid.

WARTIME YEARS	YEARS SEPARATING WARS
Anglo-Saxon Territorial Wars 661–679	
	679 to 757 = 78 years
Wessex and Mercia Wars 757–786	
	786 to 865 = 79 years
Alfred the Great vs. Viking Conquests 865–896	
	896 to 975 = 79 years
Edward’s Martyrdom and Viking Wars 975–991	
	991 to 1066 = 75 years
Norway Invasion and Norman Conquest 1066	
	1066 to 1138 = 72 years
“The Anarchy” Civil War 1138–1145	
	1145 to 1213 = 68 years
Anglo-French War and First Barons’ War 1213–1217	
	1217 to 1294 = 77 years
Anglo-French War and Scotland War 1294–1298	
	1298 to 1369 = 71 years
Caroline War with France 1369–1375	
	1375 to 1455 = 80 years
Wars of the Roses 1455–1471, 1483–1499	
	1499 to 1580 = 81 years
Anglo-Spanish War 1580–1607	
	1607 to 1688 = 81 years
King William’s War 1688–1697	
	1697 to 1776 = 79 years
American Revolution 1776–1781	
	1781 to 1861 = 80 years
Civil War 1861–1865	
	1865 to 1941 = 76 years
World War II 1941–1945	
	1945 to 2025 = 80 years
War 2025– ?	
	AVERAGE = 77 YEARS

From the 1300s to the present, the average interval has been 80 years in duration as measured over eight crisis periods, so seven centuries of generational theory yields a projection of 2025. If fourteen hundred years of Anglo-American history makes the basis for a projection, 2022 marks a turning point into a secular crisis. Both projections can carry validity at the same time, since future historians may mark the early 2020s as a slide into an domestic uncivil crisis and the later 2020s as a drift into an international war escalation. History has noted such tumultuous times in earlier centuries. Current judgment (this article dates from 2025) that no civil crisis or foreign war is in evidence this year does not falsify generational theory so easily, since multi-century historical statistics won't yield that degree of accuracy. On the other hand, if 2030 arrives with America's retrospective look at the 2020s as a period of political civility at home and international disengagement abroad, then the first disconfirmation of generational theory about cyclical crises would be registered.

In 1991 Howe and Strauss did not dare to predict the precise nature of the 2020s crisis. They pointed out in their co-authored books that both civil conflict and foreign conflict has featured in past Anglo-American crises. Five of the last nine crisis wars involved civil war. Perhaps a decade ago, and probably a few years ago, a bold forecast of political schism and uncivil conflict by the mid-2020s would not have been entirely dismissed, and to other eyes a major foreign conflict has been looking even more likely for some time. Either way, the 2020s will prove to be decisive, as the prosecution and culmination of a crisis period could reforge national unity, or rend the nation apart if affairs go badly.

"I dare venture to foretell, That it will return again in the Year 1758"
– Edmund Halley

Comets and eclipses have always been perceived as harbingers of either great fortune or terrible doom. Celestial sights in the heavens were viewed that way simply because such dramatic events were surprising and unpredictable to their earth-bound spectators. Such events struck people as fickle and frightening, because memorability is capricious and unreliable. Only the long memory of recorded chronology and history could obtain enough samples of such events to allow one intellect to perceive what millions of eyes over hundreds of years could not. Astronomer Edmund Halley knew

of many reports about comets sprinkled through the annals, so he filtered through incidental occurrences to concentrate on a real celestial pattern. He then showed, with the model of Newton's laws of motion and gravity, that three bright comets in 1531, 1607 and 1682 were actually one and the same orbiting body following its periodic path through the inner solar system every 75 years.²⁶ Against the deductive certainty of his times that divine matters are in divine hands, astronomy took a leap forward for the progress of empirical science.

This historical investigation in Anglo-American crisis wars has attained a span of nearly fourteen centuries. Our shared experience of assembling this table of information has brought us, author and reader alike, to a common observation of an evident pattern to this prolonged past. The power of the logic of induction lies not with forcing events to conform to abstract ideas, but rather with conforming the intellect to the empirical evidence. That overall empirical pattern across 1,400 years of 15 crisis wars and their average separation of about 77 years is a stubborn objective matter that will not go away no matter how much we protest in displeasure or beg the heavens for its departure.

Comprehending human affairs providentially can be left to theology. Scientifically, apprehending real patterns across history is the first stage for next proposing a model of social affairs able to account for that real pattern. That abductive stage of hypothesis is the larger point of Howe and Strauss's Generations theory of four Archetype generations. Lacking a model responsible for a pattern, the mind is left with supposing that any pattern is still just random chance, that might as well disappear next. If, on the other hand, there really seems to be something real to this pattern, then the reality to that pattern cannot exist only in the past, by persisting in the future as well. The empirical testing of social patterns and cycles in public affairs could not be foreign to investigative history.

Historiography, like the philosophy of culture enfolding it, should get realistic about finding the past's intelligibility in its ongoing futurity. To observe the reality of a genuine pattern and glimpse underlying conditionings *is* to observe the reality of the future. Historians of social and civic history who diligently seek patterns and fallibly guess at potent powers are not trying to astound anyone with frightening

26) Halley, *Astronomy of Comets*, 22.

revelations or predetermined fates. Military studies can likewise join the cultural sciences to reduce ignorance and fear by following the logical stages of empirical investigation to presently observe the oncoming history of the future. If our reaction to oncoming lights is just stupefied suspicion or horror, then future history will look back upon us with pity.

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