NEITHER MARXIST NOR WHIG:  
THE GREAT ATLANTIC CRISSES, 1774–1962, AND THE  
FOUNDATIONS OF DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL ORDER

In their 1991 and 1996 books, William Strauss and Neil Howe seek to explain the origins, triumph, decline and fall of national political and social orders, using the history of the United States as their primary example.1 They developed the concept of the saeculum, a period of roughly 80 years (such as 1794–1865 or 1866–1945 in American history), which concludes with a “Fourth Turning,” or Crisis, that creates a new social and political order. Strauss and Howe defined four recurring eras—the High, Awakening, Unraveling, and Crisis—each lasting about 20 years, and four types of generations—Prophets, Nomads, Heroes, and Artists—that play particular roles in different eras.

The theory can most easily be introduced with one specific example, drawn from recent American history. The GI generation, born from about 1903 to 1924 and now known popularly as the “greatest generation,” was a classic Hero generation. (A Hero, Artist, Nomad, or Prophet is a recurring generational archetype. Within those archetypes, each specific generation has been given a name of its own.) The Crisis (1929–45) of the Depression and Second World War, which they lived through as young adults, taught them the virtues of cooperation, practical approaches to problems, and adherence to simple principles. Their sacrifices also convinced them that they deserved appropriate rewards, and they made sure that the rest of society provided them. The children of that crisis were the Silent generation, an Artist archetype, born from 1925 through 1942. Growing up in the shadow of their GI elders, they stayed in the background well into adulthood, never won the White House, and showed a preference for solutions based on expertise, compromise, and extensive study. During the last ten years they have been almost completely driven out of the national leadership, taking the conciliatory spirit with them. The


Boom generation (born 1943–60) had stable and protected childhoods, during which they instinctively fulfilled their parents’ expectations. No sooner had they entered young adulthood in 1964, however, than they rebelled against everything their parents stood for, ushering in the Awakening of 1964–84, and they have continued to try to redefine American life in one area after another ever since. Generation X, born 1961–81, is a Nomad generation, parallel to the Lost generation (born 1884–1902). Xers had difficult childhoods and started life with reduced economic prospects, and have a cynical attitude towards the institutions that have been in decline throughout their lives. They came of age during the Unraveling (1985–2007), which was, typically, an era of increasing economic instability, cultural conflict, and political polarization. They are, however, adept at finding practical solutions to problems, and generations like theirs have provided critical middle management during the crises of the past. Children born since 1982 belong to the Millennial generation, the new Hero generation who will be the foot soldiers—whatever that turns out to mean—in the next Crisis, which we seem to be entering as I write.²

Two of these archetypes play critical roles in Crisis eras. Prophets, born in the immediate aftermath of one great crisis, play the leadership roles in the next one as they enter old age. Heroes, who pass through the crisis in young adulthood, are the foot soldiers of the crisis, and remain committed to its results for the rest of their lives. The great Prophets of the last American crisis included Franklin Roosevelt, George Marshall, Henry Stimson, and Douglas MacArthur, while its Heroes, known as the GI or “greatest” generation, included every president from Kennedy through George H. W. Bush.

As a historian of both American and Western European politics, I immediately began applying the Strauss-Howe thesis to the history of the major Western European nations as well.³ In this article I shall attempt to apply the theory on a grand scale, and to show how a series of ‘Crises’, as Strauss and Howe use the term, have defined and redefined political orders on both sides of the Atlantic from about 1770 to 1960. Changes in North America and in Western Europe, I shall argue, have been closely related to one another. The great Atlantic crisis of the late eighteenth century saw the political development of the United States, Britain, and France diverge, even as it eventually stabilized European international politics. The political development of the United States and Western Europe
converged somewhat in the mid-nineteenth-century crisis, and that crisis, thanks largely to Otto von Bismarck, also created a relatively stable European order. The process of convergence went even further in the mid-twentieth century, whose crisis actually brought the whole Atlantic world into a single political-military bloc.

The political order created by the Depression and the Second World War here in the United States is now crumbling—as predicted by Strauss and Howe in The Fourth Turning—and it seems quite possible that the next great Atlantic Crisis, which should occupy the next thirty years or so, may easily lead to a new divergence, rather than a convergence, of the political and social orders of the Atlantic world. Already, the NATO alliance is wracked by fundamental divisions and playing less and less of a role in the military planning of the United States.

This article surveys the three great Atlantic crises which I have identified, and which covered the rough periods 1774–1802, 1854–1875, and 1929–1962. It shall focus on the United States, Great Britain, France, and (in the last two cases) Germany. I shall argue that these nations have been roughly, but not exactly, on the same timetable, with the United States typically five to ten years ahead of the European powers, especially the French. Developments within the United States helped set the terms of political conflict in the major European nations in all three of these Atlantic Crises, and the results of wars had critical impacts in all of them. And each Crisis, in each nation, created a political, social, and intellectual order to which the generations that had lived through it remained broadly committed for the rest of their lives. As Strauss and Howe have shown with respect to American history, the passing of those generations, and the advent of men and women who grew up after the previous Crisis was over, led to a new, fundamental debate over the nation’s future shape and, eventually, to a new political social order. The death of the old order at roughly a certain point seems to be inevitable; the exact nature of the new one depends, as we shall see, on a host of unpredictable factors.

**The Eighteenth-Century Crisis, 1774–1802**

The Crisis in the American colonies that began in the 1770s and led in 1775–76 to armed rebellion and the Declaration of Independence was part of a broader change in British politics occasioned by the accession of
George III, who had been born in 1738, just as Walpole’s Whig Supremacy—what Strauss and Howe have called “High”—was coming to an end. King George III had immediately begun to try to regain the patronage and power that his grandfather and great-grandfather had ceded to the great Whig families, to ignore the increasing opinion in favor of a reformed Parliament, to increase the relative power of the Established Church, and, of course, to assert the Crown’s power over its colonies. In doing so, he immediately fell out with the leading members of the post-1700 prophet generation (named by historian David Keirn the Augustan generation), such as William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, and Thomas Pelham-Holles, Duke of Newcastle, and opinion within Britain, as well as in the colonies, rapidly became hostile. (History might have been very different had not Prince Frederick, George II’s father, died in 1751 at the age of 44. He had been close to those men.) Royal authority began to collapse in the American colonies in 1774, after the occupation of the port of Boston, and George III, of course, dispatched more troops to put down the rebellion in 1775. The Crisis, in the Strauss-Howe sense, was now well underway in the colonies, and three American generations, as they have argued, went to work at winning the Revolutionary War and building a new state. They were, in chronological order, the Awakeners (born 1701–23), including Benjamin Franklin and Samuel Adams, whose moral fervor helped rouse the populace; the Liberty generation (born 1724–41), including John Adams, Patrick Henry, John Hancock, and George Washington; and the Republican Generation (born 1742–66), including Alexander Hamilton, John Marshall, Albert Gallatin, and future Presidents Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe. The Awakeners led the initial conflict against the British Crown, the Liberty generation won the war itself, and the Republicans—defined in The Fourth Turning as a Hero generation, like our own GIs—drafted the Constitution, soon dominated the new government and presided over the twenty-five-year consensus era that extended from Jefferson until the late 1820s. They built a new republic, of course, based upon social equality, manhood suffrage, freedom of speech and of the press, and a minimalist state—one that proved barely able to cope with the war they unleashed in 1812. While eschewing any direct attack on the institution of slavery, many of them recognized its contradiction to their principles, and hoped to see it gradually disappear.

The corresponding Crisis in Britain, I argue, began roughly in 1783, at the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, when George II—bereft of
powerful friends—had to allow Lord North to resign and briefly submit to an opposition government. Britain, therefore, was about ten years behind the United States in reaching its Crisis—a pattern that has persisted, as we shall see, for two more centuries. The British Crisis, I suggest, lasted about 19 years, from 1783 through 1802, and, like its American counterpart, created a new Britain that was destined to endure in roughly the same form until the 1860s. The key figures in the British Crisis were George III and his new prime Minister, the younger William Pitt. Pitt, born in 1759, belonged to the British Romantic generation, the counterpart to the Hamilton-Jefferson-Madison Republicans. Born from 1748 to 1776, it also included Lord Liverpool (born in 1770), Spencer Perceval (1762), the Duke of Wellington (1769), Lord Nelson (1758), Charles James Fox (1749), and Viscount Castlereagh (1769). They created a new Britain (and a new British Empire) in reaction to the American and French Revolutions, and its distinctive aristocratic character persisted into the second half of the nineteenth century, for as long as those, like Lord Palmerston who remembered that crisis, still survived.

Members of various eighteenth-century Hero generations played vital roles in their nation’s life at very early ages, and the younger Pitt was only 24 when he became Prime Minister in late 1783. Faced with the opposition of the Whigs, he governed in defiance of majorities in the House of Commons for about five months—in the terms of the British constitution, an emergency government of dubious constitutionality—but managed to secure an election victory in 1784 that shattered the influence of the Old Whigs. He then began a remarkable series of reforms that restored the finances and authority of the government and strengthened the empire, but without paying the slightest deference to contemporary revolutionary thought.

Pitt began by raising various indirect taxes, floating new loans, and establishing a sinking fund that reduced the national debt until 1792. In 1786 he created a new government for India, essentially establishing the British government’s authority over the East India Company—a system that endured for 70 years. Yet even before the French Revolution, he had made only the most half-hearted and unsuccessful moves towards parliamentary reform or the repeal of the Test Acts that still barred Dissenters from many offices. The Revolution brought new calls for parliamentary reform, but Pitt in 1792 absolutely rejected it, arguing that it “was essential to the happiness of the people, that they should be convinced, that they, and the members of [the House of Commons], felt an identity of
interest; . . . under this legitimate authority, a people could be said to be really free." Leaders of the British Jacobin societies were tried and sentenced to transportation in 1793, and new bills on Treasonous Practices and Seditious Meetings, restricting assembly, passed in 1796. Pitt successfully mastered another serious Crisis during the naval mutinies of 1797. By this time, of course, Britain was fighting a worldwide war against France. The last major development of the British Crisis, however, involved Ireland.

Partly in response, perhaps, to the American Revolution, the Parliament in Westminster had lost its right to legislate for Ireland in 1782. Both Catholics and Protestants began agitating for more political and religious freedom, and Pitt in 1793 actually got the Irish Parliament to extend the franchise (but not the right to hold office) to some Catholics. Lord Grattan, Pitt’s new Lord Lieutenant, proposed full-scale Catholic emancipation, but this drew an unequivocal and impassioned reaction from George III.

The above proposal is contrary to the conduct of every European Government and I believe to that of every State on the globe. In the States of Germany, the Lutheran, Calvinist and Roman Catholic religions are universally permitted, yet each respective State has but one Church establishment, to which the States of the country and those holding any civil employment must be conformists.

Besides the discontent and changes which must be occasioned by the dereliction of all the principles that have been held so wise by our ancestors, it is impossible to foresee how far it may alienate the minds of this kingdom; for though I fear religion is but little attended to by persons of rank, and that the word toleration, or rather indifference to that sacred subject, has been too much admitted by them, yet the bulk of the nation has not been spoiled by foreign travel and manners, and still feels the blessing of having a fixed principle from whence the source of every tie to society and government must trace its origin.4

With French encouragement, a full-scale rebellion finally broke out in 1798. Violent, widespread, but unorganized, it was brutally suppressed by British and Hessian troops, English militia, and local irregulars. Between 20,000 and 50,000 Irish died as Lord Cornwallis, the new Viceroy, disclaimed but could not stop the use of tactics he and his Loyalist supporters had never dared apply in the American colonies. (Ruthless violence does, as Strauss and Howe have argued, characterize Crisis periods in all nations.) Pitt decided that a renewed political union with England was the
only solution, even though George III would never allow Catholics to vote, and the Irish Parliament voted itself out of existence with the help of considerable bribes to open up seats in the Irish Commons and the creation of a number of new peerages in the Lords. The Union came into force in 1801. Viscount Castlereagh, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, had promised the Catholics some improvement in their status to secure the union, and Pitt tried to get George III to agree to them. When he failed, Pitt resigned.5

Although the war against France was about to begin a second stage of twelve years, the basic structure and principles of British society and politics for the next six decades had been clearly established. The king and the aristocracy would continue to rule, and Parliament would not be reformed. The authority of the Church of England remained unchallenged, and religion in general exerted a far greater influence upon public morals in the first decades of the nineteenth century than it had in the eighteenth. Methodism, as E. P. Thompson showed, tried to reconcile the growing working class to its dispiriting lot, and to reduce any sympathy for its plight among the rest of England. Beginning in 1830, with the eclipse, at long last, of the Romantic generation that had held power from Pitt’s accession in 1783 until Wellington’s fall in 1830, Britain began to alleviate some of the most restrictive aspects of the Georgian consensus. Catholic Emancipation had been granted in 1829, and after a great struggle, the parliamentary franchise was somewhat extended and “rotten boroughs” abolished in 1832. Tory reformers also tried to alleviate the sufferings of factory workers in the 1840s. Yet there was no real challenge to aristocratic supremacy, and democracy seemed in the 1850s to be losing ground. Meanwhile, Palmerston—old enough to remember, though not to have taken part in, the eighteenth-century Crisis—held the line against any further reform. Typically, the Artist generation that lived through the Crisis as children moderated, but did not fundamentally challenge, the political and social order they had inherited.

The French eighteenth-century Crisis began with the collapse of the royal financial structure in 1787, leading to the calling of the Estates General two years later and the almost complete repudiation of the political and social order of the ancien régime by 1792. As Georges Lefebvre showed in The Great Fear of 1789, revolutionary France was liable from the beginning of the struggle to explosions of panic and
violent action against presumed or real enemies—an essential characteristic of Crises as defined by Strauss and Howe. It was hardly inevitable, however, that France would become a terror state. The Constituent Assembly explicitly based its new design for France upon the principles of the Enlightenment, of course, and had Louis XVI been willing to cooperate, France might easily have become a constitutional monarchy. Liberal and Marxist historians have preferred to focus on the democratic and radical phases of the Revolution as illustrations of their preferred ideas. In fact, however, a combination of the King’s treachery and foreign intervention gave this Crisis a completely different outcome. As Tocqueville emphasized 150 years ago, the brief experiment in democracy—which triggered violent conflicts over social and religious issues—gave way under Napoleon to a centralized, bureaucratic state, with legal equality and educational opportunity for all, but without an independent legislative body or any effective voice for the population, save periodic plebiscites to affirm the Emperor’s decisions.

The French crisis, like the British one, was dominated by a relatively young generation of Heroes—I have tentatively named them the Revolutionary generation—including Robespierre (b. 1758), Carnot (b. 1753), Danton (b. 1759), Lafayette (b. 1757), St-Just (b. 1767), and, of course, Napoleon (b. 1769). Like the British Crisis, the French one, I would argue, came to an end around 1800, and the subsequent High lasted for more than twenty years. (It is a mistake, in my opinion, automatically to equate a great or prolonged war with a Crisis. A Crisis involves a struggle that redefines domestic institutions, and many modern nations have fought long and costly wars during Highs, after their domestic struggles were basically over—most notably the Soviet Union in the Second World War.) The Napoleonic High showed the classic features of a First Turning. Its new institutions included a centralized educational system, a new legal code, considerable attempts to improve the domestic infrastructure, and the re-integration of the Catholic Church—as well as other churches—into the political order. Napoleon also created his own nobility, based largely on achievement rather than birth, and continued building many of the same institutions, with varying degrees of success, all through Central and Southern Europe.

More important, Napoleon’s achievements survived him, both in France and in Italy and Germany, for decades thereafter. Despite two
changes of dynasty in 1815 and 1830 and some very mild political liberalization (parallel to the British reform movement) under the July Monarchy, France remained essentially the same bureaucratically ruled state until 1848, and again, of course, under Napoleon III after 1851. The Restoration Monarchy preserved the principles of liberty and equality, made no effort to recover property confiscated from the émigrés and the Church, and left both the structure and the personnel of the Napoleonic state in place, beginning with Talleyrand and Fouché. Its Parliament was elected by an extremely restricted franchise, restricted membership to relatively wealthy men, and did not control the selection of ministers. Even so, the government controlled elections in a number of ways, and limited the freedom of the press.

In 1830, a sharp swing to the right, religiously, and politically, led to the uprising of the July Days, one led, significantly, by children of the Napoleonic High, including Adolphe Thiers (b. 1797) and Jules Mignet (b. 1796). This was an Awakening revolution, and its results were correspondingly modest. Although it began with a significant purge of Legitimist officials, it increased the electorate to only 2.8 per cent of the adult male population, and kept the National Guard—the local armed militia—firmly in the hands of the government. The government continued to ban opposition societies, and armed risings—crushed easily by troops—and assassination attempts remained the only possible weapons of serious opposition. Not until 1848 did the post-revolutionary generation really come to the fore, and their brief experiment in Republicanism with a tinge of socialism lasted only three years, until its overthrow by the President, Louis Napoleon. Meanwhile, the bureaucratic monarchy with weak and exclusive legislatures remained nearly the only form of government on the Continent—the true legacy of the revolutionary and Napoleonic era, which, in Europe, as well as Britain, continued to regard political equality as the enemy of good order.

I would be remiss, I think, to leave France without some mention of the relationship of some of the great French writers of the nineteenth century to the Strauss-Howe theory of Turnings. Balzac, who wrote as a young man that he wanted to attempt with the pen what Napoleon had achieved with the sword, painted many unforgettable portraits of the transition from a High to an Awakening. His revolutionary Heroes combine respectability, reliability, and frugality; his young Romantic Prophets are
extravagant, self-indulgent, and filled with great ambitions that they can rarely fulfill. Both he and Hugo went back to the Revolution for epic tales of heroism. Zola’s great history of the Second Empire has even greater significance for Strauss and Howe. The Second Empire was the age of the French Unraveling—a period, as always, of economic ferment and social and political degeneracy. Zola’s portraits of a stock-market bubble (L’Argent), a corrupt political order (Son Excellence Eugène Rougon), a doomed workers’ movement (Germinal), and a Paris mesmerized by sexual excess (Nana) have never been surpassed. Although Zola proposed a dubious theory of physical degeneracy to explain what he saw so clearly, the conclusion of La Désâkle, which describes a Paris aflame with the repression of the Commune in 1871, perfectly reflects Strauss’s and Howe’s theory of the entropy and rebirth that characterizes the passage through a Fourth Turning:

It seemed, as night began to fall, high above this city in flames, that the sun was already rising. Certainly this was the end of everything, a fury of fate, a string of disasters such as no nation had ever known: the endless defeats, the lost provinces, the billions to pay, the bloodiest of civil wars, rubble and dead everywhere, no more money, no more honor, a whole world to rebuild! . . . And yet, beyond the still belching furnace, hope was reborn deep inside the great, calm sky. It was the inevitable rebirth of sovereign nature, of eternal humanity, the renewal promised to those who hope and who work, the three that grows a strong new shoot when one has cut off the rotten branch whose poisoned sap had yellowed the leaves.

The eighteenth-century Crisis of the Atlantic world, then, had highly divergent outcomes in the three major Western nations: the United States, Great Britain, and France. The American Revolution occurred largely because of the resurgence of royal power in Britain, and the triumph of American democracy blocked the evolution of British politics towards popular rule that had been taking place during the eighteenth century. Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century, indeed, was far more conservative religiously, socially, and politically than Britain in most of the eighteenth century. Meanwhile, France—after the failure of a democratic experiment in which chance and personality played very important parts—evolved into an even more centralized state, and spread that model through much of Europe during the Napoleonic wars. Little happened during the first half of the nineteenth century to bring the political and
social structures of these three nations closer together, but when their very different political orders faced Crises in the 1860s, they suddenly began to converge.

Meanwhile, after the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, the victors, led by Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia, created a remarkably stable European order that lasted intact for 33 years and was not really destroyed for about 50 years. France never seriously challenged the 1815 frontiers until the 1850s. The German Confederation stopped any serious revolutionary challenges until 1848, and even managed to re-establish itself after the failed Awakening revolution of 1848. The Russian Empire kept a firm hand on Poland, while Britain generally remained aloof. The memories of the last Crisis that stayed alive until the mid-1860s checked any desire to unleash a new general conflict, and Europe prospered economically and culturally for most of the rest of the High, the Awakening, and into the Unraveling that was clearly visible by the 1860s.

**The Nineteenth-Century Crisis, 1854–1882**

During the first half of the nineteenth century, while political reaction continued to rule Europe and the American republic became more democratic, larger, and more prosperous, a transatlantic liberal movement began to arise. The American exslave Frederick Douglass discovered this when he made his first trip to Europe in 1846 and made the acquaintance of John Bright, Richard Cobden, Daniel O'Connell, and many more. Tocqueville, of course, had hastened this process with the publication of *Democracy in America* in 1835, in which he argued that democracy—by which he meant the leveling of social distinctions rather than representative government per se—was clearly destined to sweep the civilized world. The failed German revolution of 1848 reinforced the link between European and North American liberalism, as thousands of German revolutionaries fled to the United States. But by the 1850s, the appeal of the American experiment seemed to be waning among nearly all shades of British opinion. While Tories claimed British superiority by virtue of a disinterested, powerful aristocracy and an Established Church, even Radicals like Cobden became depressed by American imperialism (in the Mexican War) and above all by the persistence of slavery. Many British observers, indeed, had argued as early as the Nullification Crisis that the
slavery question was bound to destroy either the federal Union or democracy, and the Secession Crisis that began in 1860 seemed to bear this view out.9

The eruption of the final Crisis that led from the Dred Scott decision in 1857 through John Brown’s raid in 1859, and thence to the election of Lincoln and the secession of South Carolina in 1860, is in my opinion the most powerful proof of Strauss’s and Howe’s theory of how an older political order gives way to a new one. The Compromise generation of Webster, Clay, Buchanan, and Senator Crittenden—all old enough to remember the Presidency of Washington—had put Union above all, but their children, the southern fire-eaters and the northern abolitionists, did not. The spirit of compromise essentially died with Webster and Clay, and once again, North America ushered in the Atlantic Crisis.10 Thanks to the leadership of Abraham Lincoln, who framed the Crisis in broader political terms and led the North to victory, the United States in this instance moved the whole Atlantic world into a more modern and democratic era.

On July 4, 1861, less than three months after Fort Sumter, Lincoln himself put the issue posed by the attempted secession of the southern states in the broadest terms.

And this issue embraces more than the fate of these United States. It presents to the whole family of men the question whether a constitutional republic, or democracy—a government of the people by the same people—can or can not maintain its territorial integrity against its own domestic foes. It presents the question whether discontented individuals, too few in numbers to control administration according to organic law in any case, can always, upon the pretenses made in this case, or on any other pretenses, or arbitrarily without any pretense, break up their government, and thus practically put an end to free government upon the earth. It forces us to ask, Is there in all republics this inherent and fatal weakness? Must a government of necessity be too strong for the liberties of its own people, or too weak to maintain its own existence? So viewing the issue, no choice was left but to call out the war power of the Government and so to resist force employed for its destruction by force for its preservation.11

Throughout the war, Lincoln restated this argument again and again—most famously, of course, in the Gettysburg Address. Long before it became a war for abolition, the war was for Lincoln a test of the democratic experiment—one with clear implications for the rest of the world. What has never been fully appreciated, however, in a historical profession
increasingly structured according to national specialization, is how widely
that view was accepted, not only on both sides of the Atlantic, but also on
both sides of the political spectrum. From the beginning of the war the
European aristocracy sided with the South and more democratic elements
with the North, keenly aware that the American outcome was bound to
have a big impact in Europe. Carl Schurz, whom Lincoln in 1861 sent to
Madrid as Minister to Spain, immediately discovered that European
democrats favored the North while most aristocrats looked forward to a
southern victory, and soon argued that the emancipation of the slaves
would provide the North and its European supporters with a critical
asset.12 Eighteen months later, after the news of the Emancipation Procla-
mation had reached Europe, Henry Adams described to his brother (an
officer in the Army of the Potomac) exactly how its influence was working.

I went last night to ... a democratic and socialist meeting, most threatening
and dangerous to the established state of things; and assuming a tone and
proportions that are quite novel and alarming in this capital. And they met to
notify Government that “they would not tolerate” interference with us. I can
assure you this sort of movement is as alarming here as a slave insurrection
would be in the South. ... I never quite appreciated the “moral influence” of
American democracy, nor the cause that the privileged classes in Europe
have to fear us, until I saw how directly it works. At this moment the
American question is organizing a vast mass of the lower orders in direct
contact with the wealthy. They go our whole platform and are full of the
“rights of man.” The old revolutionary leaven is working steadily in England.
You can find millions of people who look up to our institutions as their model
and who talk with utter contempt of their own system of Government.13

At that very moment, Lincoln himself was replying to an address
from the Workingmen of Manchester, England, who despite the economic
privations that the Northern blockade of cotton exports from the South
had imposed upon them had taken up the cause of the Union. He, too, ac-
knowledged the common political stakes of the conflict on both sides of
the Atlantic.

It has been often and studiously represented that the attempt to overthrow
this government, which was built upon the foundation of human rights, and
to substitute for it one which should rest exclusively on the basis of human
slavery, was likely to obtain the favor of Europe. Through the actions of our
disloyal citizens the workingmen of Europe have been subjected to a severe
trial. ... Under these circumstances, I cannot but regard your decisive
utterance upon the question as an instance of sublime Christian heroism which has not been surpassed in any age or in any country.\textsuperscript{14}

As the American Civil War progressed, Lord Palmerston and Lord John Russell, born respectively in 1784 and 1790 and thus old enough to have experienced the previous Crisis as children and the Tory High as young adults, were nearing the end of their domination of political life. "The men whose minds are full of the traditions of the last century," the radical John Bright wrote Gladstone in 1861, "your chief [Palmerston] and your foreign minister [Russell], will still cling to the past, and will seek to model the present upon it," but "the past is well nigh really past, and a new policy and a wiser and a higher morality are sighed for by the best of the people...."\textsuperscript{15} Gladstone and Disraeli, born respectively in 1809 and 1804 to the Victorian Prophet generation, developed that new policy during the years of the British Crisis, from approximately 1867 to 1875.

The British Crisis had already begun within the British Empire, and India and North America were now ruled on a new basis. The Indian Mutiny of 1857–58 was brutally suppressed, and the East India Company was abolished and India annexed to the Crown. In 1867, Canada, which was threatening to slide into independence or anarchy, received its own domestic government in the British North America Act. But the real symbol of a new age was Disraeli's Second Reform Act of 1867, which essentially established household suffrage. Gladstone's great ministry, which was elected by the first exercise of that suffrage, significantly reshaped Britain so as vastly to reduce the aristocratic privileges that had survived since the reign of George III.

These changes included the reorganization of the Army and the abolition of the purchase of commissions; the Education Act of 1870, which for the first time gave Britain a national primary educational system (although Britain continued in this respect to lag far behind France, Germany, and the United States until after the Second World War); the opening of the higher civil service to competitive examinations; the Ballot Act of 1872, which removed another huge barrier to real democracy; and the Judicature Act of 1873, which reorganized the court system. Domestically, at least, this British Crisis was perhaps the most peaceful of any Western nation in the whole period we are looking at, although Disraeli, after returning to power in 1874, gave it a somewhat more martial character by proclaiming Victoria Empress of India and setting the country on a new
imperial path. (This in turn resolved another issue that had arisen during the 1860s; whether the monarchy, in the person of a bereaved and reclusive Queen Victoria, would survive at all.) It did not produce the kind of Hero generation that the eighteenth-century crisis had, largely because it did not require struggle and sacrifice on a large scale (although such a generation probably can be identified, exemplified in politics by Asquith and Balfour, and in literature by Soames Forsyte.) But in the long run it meant the eclipse of the British aristocracy, which immediately found itself too weak to reverse the decline in its economic fortunes by imposing any kind of tariff. Britain, in short, had taken note of the verdict of the American Civil War, and taken a series of huge steps towards a politically and socially more equal society.

The influence of the Civil War on British politics has been recognized by every serious study of the Second Reform Act, but as far as I can tell, its influence upon developments in Germany has been almost entirely ignored. I strongly suspect that it was, indeed, highly significant to the resolution of the Prusso-German Crisis of the 1860s under Bismarck. Germany cannot, however, be brought into the discussion without some broader background.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Europe south of the Alps and east of the Elbe seemed to be on a somewhat earlier cycle than the Atlantic world. The wars of Frederick the Great and Maria Theresa, which nearly destroyed the Austro-Hungarian Empire, took place from 1740 to 1762, well before the Atlantic Crisis. The rest of Germany, on the other hand, was transformed by the French occupation and the Reichtsdeputationshauptschluss in the first decade of the nineteenth century, and the events of the Napoleonic wars seem to have helped move Prussia onto the Western European cycle as well. The Prussian Awakening, symbolized by the Romantic Movement, was in full flower by the 1820s. The Unraveling began sometime in the 1840s, and after the false dawn of 1848–50, the real crisis started in Prussia in the early 1860s, when the Constitutional Conflict brought Bismarck into power.

Bismarck had been a child during the Romantic Awakening, and it would be hard to find a statesman more illustrative of Strauss’s and Howe’s Nomadic temperament. Utterly independent, ruthlessly cynical, and caring nothing for consistency of speech, thought, or action, he focused exclusively upon results. This in turn led to many arguments
between him and his much older sovereign, King William I, a man of firm Legitimist principles, but Bismarck usually managed to prevail. Thus the Prussian Minister-President was willing, in the early stages of the Prussian Crisis, both to govern without parliamentary approval in 1862–64 and cleverly to pick a quarrel with Austria to bring about a war in 1866. While committed to the preservation of Prussia and its monarchy and aristocracy, he understood that this goal depended upon the establishment of Prussian supremacy within Germany. But to establish that supremacy, he, too, in 1866 made a huge concession to the new democratic spirit, and created a federal Germany with a parliament elected by universal equal manhood suffrage.

Between April and June of 1866, after the Prussian government had already decided upon war with Austria over the fate of Schleswig and Holstein, Bismarck released a stunning proposal for the creation of a unified German federal state, an economic and legal entity whose laws would be made by a Parliament elected by equal male suffrage. His new German confederation looked a good deal like the original American union of 1789. Initially this proposal shocked and infuriated the conservatives upon whom he depended, while doing little or nothing to alleviate the distrust of the liberals. Like Lincoln in 1863, Bismarck staked his fate upon the performance of his generals, and Moltke at Sadowa did not let him down. To insure a quick peace and forestall intervention by Russia or France, Bismarck then threatened to proclaim the liberal German constitution of 1849 as well, but this did not prove necessary. And meanwhile, the victory over Austria created a constituency for Bismarck within Prussia and North Germany, as it split both conservatives and liberals into two factions, a more ideological one unwilling to forgive Bismarck for his opportunism, and a more realistic one seduced by the grandeur of his achievements. He created the North German Confederation in 1867, and four years later, Napoleon III’s folly allowed him to start a new war against France, fight it in alliance with all the other German states (nearly all of which had sided with Austria in 1866), and create the new German Empire.

It is my firm belief that research would show a strong connection between the advent of true representative government in Germany and the American Civil War. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Germans had blood ties to immigrants in the United States, many of them liberals who had fled across the Atlantic after the repression of 1849. For them the
victory of the Union was both a source of personal satisfaction and a political inspiration. Bismarck himself admitted to Carl Schurz in 1867 that he had sympathized with the South, but he obviously grasped the implications of the Northern victory—that the era of aristocratic hegemony was over. Having guided Germany through the Crisis, Bismarck remained in power through the High, until 1890. Meanwhile, the wars against Austria and (especially) against France, fought by conscript armies, had created a true Hero generation, the Imperial generation, including Alfred von Tirpitz, Bernhard von Bülow, the historian Heinrich Treitschke, and the future Field Marshal von Hindenburg, a veteran of both these wars. A decade-and-a-half later, Bismarck rewarded their sacrifices with the first scheme of national old-age insurance passed in any country. This measure had an important parallel in the United States, where Civil War pensions—especially, but not only, in the North—supported a high percentage of the generation that fought that war, and their widows in old age. More than any other contemporary nation, except perhaps the American North, Germany for the next forty years drew upon a huge cadre of men who had created new national institutions with their own courage and their own blood, and this, as the history of the last three centuries shows, is probably the greatest source of civic virtue and national unity in the Western world. It was neither their fault nor Bismarck’s that German history took a disastrous turn after their eclipse around 1910.

Bismarck also deserves a great deal of credit, of course, for using this relatively brief Crisis to create a peaceful postwar European order. He never wavered from his belief that Germany in 1871 had reached the limits of its expansion; he cooperated with both Russia and Austria to keep eastern European nationalism under control; he made sure France remained isolated, and he helped make sure that the new imperialism in Africa would proceed according to general agreement among the European powers. The memoirs of Bernhard von Bülow, the first Chancellor from the Hero generation, show how deeply he and his contemporaries had also imbibed the view that the wars of 1866 and 1871 had given Germany all that it needed or wanted in Europe. The resurgence of German expansionism after 1910, one might argue, owed less to any “peculiarities of German history” than to the advent of new generations in power.

France’s nineteenth-century Crisis was unique, largely because it began in 1870 with a lost war rather than a victorious one, leaving no tri-
umphant older leader or Hero generation behind to lead the transition into a new order. Although the Franco-Prussian War led to the very bloody suppression of the Paris Commune, the Republic that Thiers (one of the first of the post-Revolutionary prophet generation to have achieved major influence) proclaimed was not designed to last. Much of the ruling elite hoped to restore the monarchy, and nearly did in 1876, when chance, represented by the Pretender’s refusal to accept the tricolor flag, played a major role. During the late 1870s and early 1880s, however, a younger generation of Republicans led by Léon Gambetta managed to propagate a new set of Republican principles—principles that became orthodoxy beginning in the 1880s, and which became the foundation of both the Third and Fourth Republics.

Although members of the Balzac generation like Edgar Quinet, and Louis Blanc had returned from exile to take an active part in politics in 1871, the Republic evolved under the leadership of younger men such as Gambetta (born 1838) and Jules Ferry (1832). Recognizing that the radicalism of Paris had frightened off the countryside in 1848–51, Gambetta tried to appeal to the peasantry and secure its support for a Republican France by instituting universal lay education—as Ferry eventually did. In an attempt to rally all Frenchmen, Gambetta turned the Vatican and the Jesuits into a national enemy, just as Bismarck had done across the Rhine during the 1870s. Napoleon III had already introduced equal manhood suffrage, but the new Republicans insisted on adding freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and an end to administrative intimidation of the voters—essentially a move to a real, rather than a sham, democratic process. By the early 1880s, most of this program was on its way to achievement, and the end of this rather quiet French Crisis probably dates from 1882. Like historians of Germany, historians of France have paid virtually no attention to the influence of the American Civil War, but France by the 1870s certainly knew that all the major Western nations were also taking big steps towards democracy.

Perhaps because it lacked the prestige that comes from a victory in foreign or civil war, the Republic remained vulnerable to threats like the Boulanger movement in 1887 and the clerical and right-wing agitation that arose during the Dreyfus case in the first years of the twentieth century. Indeed, the principles of the Third Republic received their most vigorous implementation during the ministries of Waldeck-Rousseau
THE GREAT ATLANTIC CRISIS, 1774–1962

(born 1846) and Emile Combes (born 1835), who brought about the dissolution of religious orders and the total separation of Church and State. The Hero generation of this Crisis, then, was born approximately from 1835 to 1860, and spread its influence throughout the new France with the help of the École Normale Supérieure, the intellectual center of the new lay Republic. Perhaps because this Hero generation had fought a losing war, they were remarkably pacific in middle age. Such was their prestige, however, that they produced not only the victorious leader of the First World War, Georges Clemenceau (b. 1835), but also Philippe Pétain (b. 1856), to whom France turned 84 years later, in the midst of the next French Unraveling, after the catastrophe of 1940.

Because the entire Atlantic world moved in the same direction in the nineteenth-century Crisis, these events also established some common assumptions, ways of thinking, and principles of government. The Christian Church lost enormous ground intellectually as well as politically, as Darwinism became accepted and Positivism (founded by a prophet of the French Balzac generation, Auguste Comte, b. 1798) dominated the new social sciences. Economic freedom within nations helped industry grow at the expense of labor, while tariffs, except in Britain, protected national markets. Beginning in the 1870s, all the major Western nations joined in a new round of imperialism, bringing most of Africa and East Asia under their formal or informal control. Thanks largely to the influence of Bismarck, an informal Concert of Europe functioned effectively from the 1870s until 1914. By the 1900s, a younger, post-Crisis Prophet generation was beginning to make itself felt in all of these nations, and this time, the nature of the coming Crisis was radically altered by events in eastern and southeastern Europe.

THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY CRISIS, 1929–62

The real trigger of the First World War, as I have argued elsewhere, was the conflict between the emerging nationalities of southeastern Europe and the Austro-Hungarian and Turkish Empires, and in retrospect that conflict shows the characteristics of a Strauss-Howe Crisis in eastern and southern Europe, but not in western Europe. Thus, by the early 1920s the First World War had created a new Turkey, a whole new Middle East, six new or enlarged Balkan states, four states carved from the former
Russian Empire, and, of course, the Soviet Union. Once again Italy experienced a Crisis in advance of its northern neighbors, creating a new and influential political system, Fascism, in the process. (The Strauss-Howe theory received further confirmation 75 to 80 years after 1914, when Communism collapsed in the Soviet Union and the borders of eastern Europe were redrawn once more.) Yet the First World War played a remarkably limited role in the political development of the Atlantic world, where neither France, Britain, or the United States significantly altered the form or the role of their governments after the conflict. The war was fought (except perhaps in France) mainly by Nomad generations, and the veterans, except in France, received remarkably meager rewards for their sacrifices. Even in Germany, where the monarchy fell, the Weimar Republic retained most of the imperial institutions—although the defeat, followed by hyperinflation, certainly accelerated the loss of faith in older institutions that characterizes any Unraveling era. The increased popularity of both Fascism and Communism all over the Western world in the 1920s and 1930s was one result.

Once again the Crisis struck first in the United States; once again Germany was only very slightly behind. The 1920s in the United States, like the 1850s and the 1990s, were years of speculative frenzy, cultural and religious conflict, and ethnic polarization. They were also years of relatively weak Presidents satisfied to try to preserve some kind of national consensus. Between 1929 and 1932, however, the complete collapse of the American economy suddenly called the survival of American capitalism and even the American political system into question. This, in turn, enabled Franklin Roosevelt and the congressional majorities he led into office to revolutionize American life and the role of the Federal government during the years 1933–36.

Like Lincoln, Roosevelt quickly put the New Deal into the broadest possible American historical context. In his famous 1936 acceptance speech in Philadelphia—the “Rendezvous with Destiny” speech—he compared 1936 explicitly to 1776 (it was, indeed, 160 years later!). “It was to win freedom from the tyranny of political autocracy that the American Revolution was fought,” he said, but a concentration of economic power had robbed that victory of any meaning for the average American by 1932.
Against economic tyranny such as this, the American citizen could appeal only to the organized power of government. The collapse of 1929 showed up the despotism for what it was. The election of 1932 was the people’s mandate to end it... Today we stand committed to the proposition that freedom is no half-and-half affair. If the average citizen is guaranteed equal opportunity in the polling place, he must have equal opportunity in the marketplace.

Roosevelt’s analysis had to skip the intervening Civil War crisis, of course, because so many Southern Democrats among his listeners still resented its outcome. But he used warlike Crisis rhetoric as well, claiming to unite the mass of the American people against a tiny, greedy, tyrannical economic elite. “These economic royalists,” he said,

complain that we seek to overthrow the institutions of America. What they really complain of is that we seek to take away their power. Our allegiance to American institutions requires the overthrow of this kind of power. In vain they seek to hide behind the flag and the Constitution. In their blindness they forget what the flag and the Constitution stand for. Now, as always, they stand for democracy, not tyranny; for freedom, not subjection; and against a dictatorship by mob rule and the over-privileged alike.20

FDR’s attempts to implement these principles included the NRA and the AAA, the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and the Social Security Administration. Meanwhile, massive public works programs established the government as an employer of last resort. Roosevelt’s only intermittent success in conquering the economic crisis of the 1930s was less important, in the long run, than his expansion of the role of the Federal government, specifically to meet the needs of the young adults born from about 1903 to 1924—the GI or “Greatest” generation, who remained committed to Roosevelt’s fundamental principles for the rest of their lives. Even before the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese and German-Anglo-French wars in 1937 and 1939, Roosevelt was leading the United States through a domestic Crisis.

After the fall of France, Roosevelt seized upon the foreign Crisis to establish new and even larger tasks for the United States. By the beginning of 1941 he had defined the world conflict as an irreconcilable struggle between democracy and the Axis, and by August—at the time of the Atlantic Charter—he had committed the United States to the defeat of Germany and sketched out his vision of the postwar world. He began his
third inaugural address, on January 20, 1941, by filling in the gap left in his 1936 acceptance speech and specifically linking the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the Second World War.

On each national day of inauguration since 1789, the people have renewed their sense of dedication to the United States. In Washington’s day the task of the people was to create and weld together a nation. In Lincoln’s day the task of the people was to preserve that nation from disruption from within. In this day the task of the people is to save that nation and its institutions from disruption from without.27

After the United States entered the war, planning for a new world designed to prevent a recurrence of the Depression and the World War began, and helped create the Bretton Woods Agreement, the International Monetary Fund, and the United Nations. By 1946 the American Crisis was over, and the American Hero generation was busily building homes and families in the suburbs with the help of the GI Bill, federally assisted mortgages, and highly progressive tax rates. But as we shall see, the United States in the ensuing High retained enough crusading spirit to help Western Europe through a continuing Crisis as well, with a combination of economic aid and military alliance.

The crisis in Germany began at almost the same moment as the American one, but under very different circumstances. Here we encounter one of the most interesting applications of generational theory—an alternative explanation of the rise of Nazism, based upon the premature disappearance of the German generation that should have led Germany through the 1930s and 1940s.

The label “greatest generation” could easily have been applied to the extraordinary Prophet generation of Germans born roughly between 1865 and 1887. They included Max Weber (by. 1864) and Albert Einstein (b. 1879) in the natural and social sciences; Wilhelm Groener (b. 1867) and Erich Ludendorff (b. 1865) in the Army; Walther Rathenau (b. 1867) and Hjalmar Schacht (b. 1887) in industry and finance; and Prince Max of Baden (b. 1867), Matthias Erzberger (b. 1875), Karl Liebknecht (b. 1871), Philip Scheidemann (b. 1865), Gustav Stresemann (b. 1878), Herman Mueller (b. 1875), and Friedrich Ebert (b. 1871) in politics. They also included most of the leaders of the German resistance to Hitler. Proud of their parents’ achievements, they dreamed from young adulthood of modifying and extending them in various directions, but for reasons
beyond their control they never got the chance, and must be known, tentatively, by the depressing name of the Weimar generation.

The First World War that broke out in 1914 was the work of the Wilhelmine Artistic generation that lived through the 1860s as children, such as Bethmann-Hollweg (b. 1856), Arthur Zimmerman (b. 1864), Erich von Falkenhayn (b. 1861), and William II himself (b. 1859). Like most Artistic politicians, Bethmann in particular focused upon managing conflicting groups and failed to give a clear direction to the war, much less make a realistic assessment of what Germany could hope to gain from it. Only in the last year of the war did the Weimar generation, in the persons of Ludendorff and Prince Max, emerge as critical actors, and Erzberger, Scheidemann and Ebert took over the reins of power in 1918 just in time to preside over the final catastrophe. Despite the assassinations of Erzberger and Rathenau, the Weimar generation produced two great statesmen, President of the Republic Friedrich Ebert and Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann, who could both found the new Republic and help restore the prewar Concert of Europe. Bad luck and bad health, unfortunately, led to Ebert’s death in 1925 and Stresemann’s in 1929, before either of them had reached the age of 55. (It is once again suggestive that, in the wake of Ebert’s death, German voters reached all the way back to the Hero generation of the previous, triumphant Crisis and elected Paul von Hindenburg, a veteran of the Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian wars, as his successor.) Without those two untimely deaths, the whole history of Germany and Europe, I believe, would have been entirely different.

Stripped of so many of its leading figures, the Weimar generation lacked the skill and determination to resist the Nazis in 1932–33. Adolf Hitler himself is difficult to locate generationally. His German contemporaries, his fellow soldiers, and virtually all his leading Nazi collaborators were Nomads, born between 1887 and 1907, but his Austrian contemporaries were probably Heroes, and Hitler himself showed something of the Hero archetype through his emphasis on uniformity, organization, and the literal and figurative construction of a new Germany. (Albert Speer, born in 1905, represented the first wave of the new German Hero generation.) Hitler took advantage of the depression, the collapse of the established political parties, the Nazis’ own organizational and propaganda skills, and Hindenburg’s feeble Presidency, to seize power. Once in power he immediately proclaimed a state of emergency and organized German society to
fight a specific list of domestic enemies, including Communists, Socialists, and Jews. As the 1930s wore on, focus shifted to foreign enemies as Hitler planned a war of expansion.

The German crisis remains a warning to Western civilization because it shows how politicians can manipulate a Fourth Turning to mobilize a whole society to secure evil ends. Hitler carefully nurtured his own Hero generation, both by putting them to work (as did FDR) and by planning communities and building roads and automobiles for all of them to drive. He dreamed of a Germany “purified” of all un-German elements, and managed to enlist Germany in this program. And the German hero generation he nurtured fought loyally on his behalf for six years, long after any hope of victory—proving that, as Charles A. Beard once wrote, there is no correlation between the justice of a cause and the willingness of men to die for it—especially, he might have added, in a Fourth Turning.

Rather than building a new Germany, Hitler by 1945 had left Germany helpless, starving, and occupied. And remarkably, it now fell to a member of the much-despised and ill-fortuned Weimar generation to lead a German resurgence during the second half (1945–55) of the German Crisis. Konrad Adenauer had been born in 1876, two years before Stresemann. As a Catholic Rhinelander, he resented what Prussian leadership had done to Germany during his adult life, and willingly abandoned the Protestants of East Germany to two generations of Soviet rule while he built a West German state firmly anchored in the Christian and Western tradition. In 1950, he seized upon the panic created by the Korean War to begin turning West Germany into a full-fledged, rearmed member of the Western alliance. He presided over an extraordinary economic revival and a remarkable rehabilitation of Germany within the West, and he contributed critically to the creation of the Common Market, the first step towards an entirely new Europe, in 1957. He was, in short, the German “gray champion” of the twentieth-century Crisis, and only one other contemporary statesman was as effective in that role as he was.

The British and especially the French and saeculum continued to lag behind the American in the twentieth-century Crisis. Indeed, the failure of Artist leadership in Britain and France—led by the Artist Neville Chamberlain, born in 1868—to recognize the coming disappearance of the old order contributed a great deal to the policy of appeasement. Britain and France continued to drift through the first six months of the Second World
War, and British diaries show that not until the fall of France did Britain suddenly become focused on the appalling danger it now faced. At that moment the Artist, Chamberlain, gave way to the Prophet, Churchill (b. 1874)—exactly the man that the British needed to win the war. Churchill’s speeches immediately drew obvious parallels between the current crisis and that of the late eighteenth century, arguing that Britain, once again, could hold out against a continental hegemon, but critically appreciating the possible role of the United States in bringing the Crisis to a successful conclusion.

The new British Hero generation that had fought the Second World War was, however, determined that this time they should have “Homes for heroes”—and shares of nationalized industries and free health care, as well. Like the New Deal in 1932, the Labour Government in 1945 came into power in a shocking electoral landslide. Britain had its New Deal under the austere postwar conditions of the late 1940s. Once again the British Crisis had a counterpart within the British Empire, but this time it involved the dissolution of the Empire, beginning in India, where the Attlee government abandoned the work of more than two centuries in 1947. The same momentum led to the independence of various Middle Eastern states in the late 1940s, and in 1956, early in the new High, the British had to abandon the hope even of maintaining an informal empire in the Middle East. No nation under study has undergone a more drastic change, both internally and overseas, than Britain from 1945 through 1951, and Churchill’s new government in the early 1950s confirmed the significance of the domestic crisis by declining to challenge any of its major reforms. Britain had lost its Empire and become a socialist democracy and a welfare state. Oddly, however, both Churchill and Attlee foresaw any tighter British connection with European politics, and Britain has haltingly and incompletely moved towards Europe ever since.

In the nineteenth century, the United States had led the Atlantic Crisis by example; in the twentieth, its leadership took much more direct forms. Beginning in 1946–47, American loans to Britain, the Marshall Plan, the NATO Alliance, and covert American involvement in the politics of states such as France and Italy helped insure that Western Europe would follow a liberal, democratic and anti-Communist direction, and that it would prepare militarily to meet any possible threat from the Soviet Union. The Continental nations of Western Europe built upon the Marshall
Plan to form the European Coal and Steel Community in 1950 and the Common Market in 1957—by which date the Crisis in most of Western Europe was essentially over, and the broad lines of Europe’s subsequent development were set. Germany, as we have already seen, had embarked upon a new course under Adenauer. In one major European country, however, the Crisis was only just about to reach its climax.

Because France had lagged 10 to 15 years behind the other Atlantic states in the nineteenth-century Crisis, I would argue, France in 1945 was not yet ready for a major transformation. De Gaulle’s and the Left’s attempts to give France a radically different constitution failed, and the Fourth Republic looked and behaved quite similarly to the Third. De Gaulle—in my opinion a prophet born during the High of the Third Republic, in 1890—tried to reshape France in 1945–46, but gave up in disgust. While the Fourth Republic integrated France into the new Atlantic and European institutions, it could not cope successfully with colonial wars in Indochina (1946–54) and, beginning in 1956, in Algeria. In 1958 the Fourth Republic was essentially overthrown by the insubordination of military commanders in Algeria, and de Gaulle returned with full powers to reshape French institutions and France’s role in the world.

De Gaulle’s first major step, of course, was decolonization, even in Algeria—a step which forced him to face down two generations of French generals in an actual civil war in 1960–62. He succeeded by arguing from history as powerfully as Lincoln, Bismarck, Roosevelt, or Churchill had ever done. France’s empire, which in earlier centuries had reflected the greatness of France, was now, he argued, a burden, and had to be discarded to restore and increase French influence in Europe and around the world. His second step—also in 1962, the year that marks the end of the French Crisis—transformed the French presidency into a popularly elected head of government, as well as a head of state. And lastly, while remaining politically within the Western Alliance and economically one of the leading powers in the Common market, de Gaulle insisted upon a distinct, separate role for France. Within both NATO and the Common Market, he refused to go along with any steps that in his view threatened French national sovereignty and therefore, as he saw it, French culture. Unlike Bismarck, de Gaulle’s tenure in power survived only about half of the ensuing French High, but expectations that his disappearance from the scene would re-orient French policy along more Atlantic lines have never
been fulfilled. Except on the European front, the principles which de Gaulle established during the years 1958–62 have remained the defining characteristics of French political life for the following 40 years.

The international order that grew out of the twentieth-century Crisis was perhaps the most stable of all. The nations of the Atlantic world were bound together in an alliance and fielded a common NATO Army on their eastern frontier. Meanwhile, Europe, beginning in 1957, worked steadily to eliminate any possibility of a return to European conflict by breaking down economic, financial, and ultimately political, barriers among its nations. That process is continuing even in 2005, but whether it will survive the advent of leadership that has no memory even of the 1950s remains an open question. Meanwhile, the Atlantic solidarity that grew out of the last Crisis is clearly breaking down.

As I write in 2005, Europe’s lag behind the United States threatens to create a schism in the Atlantic world that could eventually prove comparable to that of the early nineteenth century. Sixty years have passed since the end of the last American Crisis, and the new one is clearly beginning. Power at the moment lies with a Republican administration which, at home and abroad, seems determined to repudiate all the basic principles established in the years 1933–45, including the promotion by the government of economic equality, secure and generous provision for old age, the protection of labor unions, and, overseas, an emphasis on collective security and an alliance of the industrial nations. The American people remain deeply divided over these changes, and despite his narrow re-election, George W. Bush could just as easily prove to be the Herbert Hoover of the current Crisis as the Franklin Roosevelt. For the moment, however, he has moved the United States in a distinctly different direction that has essentially no resonance on the continent of Europe, and little even in Britain.

A reason can be found within the Strauss-Howe theory. The long Crisis on the continent of Europe, lasting for about 25 years in Germany and 22 years in France, produced a huge Artist generation which, except in Britain and perhaps Italy, continues to rule even today. Chancellor Schroeder’s earliest memories deal with the early 1950s, when a new Germany was still struggling to emerge from the ruins; Jacques Chirac, born in 1932, was already 30 when the last French Crisis came to an end. These men remain entirely committed to the principles that emerged from
the last European upheaval: an at least partial renunciation of national sovereignty and a corresponding reverence for international institutions, a tendency to regard war as an absolute last resort, and a firm belief in a generous welfare state and a protected economy under the European union. Tony Blair, born in 1953, is the first Western European prophet to lead a major nation, and his views are clearly out of step with the European continent, and increasingly controversial within his own country. If the United States continues on its present course, European politics are once again more likely to evolve in contradiction to American politics, as they did in the late eighteenth century, rather than to converge as they did in the nineteenth and the twentieth.

Should Strauss's and Howe's theories manage to gain a real foothold within academia—something that has not yet occurred—a great deal of profitable research might investigate many of the questions I have raised in this article. Meanwhile, here are two or three general points which, I think, emerge from this analysis, and which I tired to foreshadow in the title of the paper.

1. While economic and intellectual changes certainly have profound effects on Crisis eras, they cannot, and do not, determine the outcome. Chance and contingency, the outcome of wars and the lives and deaths of key individuals, have played critical roles in (for example) the British and French eighteenth-century Crisis and the German Crises of the 1860s and the 1930s. While the theory predicts the approximate date of the death of the existing political and social order, it cannot predict the shape of the new one. That will depend upon the balance of political forces at the beginning of the Crisis, the skill of the political leadership within factions contending for power, and in many cases the unpredictable outcomes of battles and wars. And every Atlantic Crisis has involved tremendous outbreaks of large-scale violence that has played a critical role in the creation of most new social and political orders.

2. Despite some reforms and modifications, the political and social order created by a Crisis lasts in its broad outlines for approximately the following 60 years—for as long as the Hero generation that fought the battles of the previous Crisis and the Artist generation that lived through it as children remain in power. Meanwhile, the post-Crisis prophet generation—which, like the Boom generation we all know so well, has an incurable tendency to believe that history began with its own birth—
prepares, for good or ill, the intellectual and cultural explosives with which they will blow the old order apart. And, human nature being what it is, a deep wish to overturn their parents’ legacy consistently emerges as one of their more powerful motives.²²

3. While there may be a long-term movement in Western Civilization (and even beyond the West) towards democracy, equality, social justice, economic growth, and economic equality, those trends are not linear from one saeculum to another across the history of the Atlantic world. Forty years ago, in the midst of the post-Crisis American High, R. R. Palmer reasoned backwards from history to christen the eighteenth-century Crisis the Age of the Democratic Revolution. In fact, it now seems quite unarguable to me that Britain, France, and Germany moved, if anything, away from democracy in the late eighteenth century, not towards it. Only in the 1860s was this trend seriously reversed, and any of the trends I cited above could be reversed again.

4. When the great Crisis involves a great war—and every such Crisis has, so far—the victors remain the dominant powers for the next two or three Turnings—that is, through the subsequent High and Awakening and into the Unraveling—and since at least 1870, this influence has extended to the economic and cultural realms as well. Within the Atlantic world the United States has exercised enormous political influence since 1865, and predominant diplomatic influence since 1945. But now, with the United States and Europe diverging once again, and with the United States embarked, almost alone, on very uncertain military adventures in an entirely different part of the world, that, too, could easily change. We are entering a new Crisis era, and the political, intellectual, economic and moral leadership of both the West and the world are once again up for grabs, and hostage to chance, fortune, and the wisdom, or lack thereof, of the peoples and the political leadership of different nations. And those of us post-1945 Prophets who survive the Crisis and live, in very old age, in the next High, will probably fail to recognize the new world that their children and their grandchildren will have created.

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NOTES

3. Together with a number of other researchers—most of them dedicated amateurs—I did so at length in the discussion forums of the website, www.fourthturning.com which Strauss and Howe started in 1997 after the publication of The Fourth Turning.
6. The Balzac generation has been analyzed at length by Alan Spitzer, The French Generation of 1820 (Princeton, NJ: 1987).
10. It is an extraordinary experience to reread Allen Nevins’s great work, The Ordeal of the Union (8 vols., New York, 1947–1971) in light of Strauss’s and Howe’s theory, because of the acute detail in which Nevins traces the shift to extremism in both the North and the South, continually linking it to the emergence of younger, more radical politicians on both sides.
20. http://www2.austincc.edu/patrick/his2341/fdr36acceptancespeech.htm
22. As Abraham Lincoln understood as a young man of 29. See his address to the Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield delivered in 1838. Referring to the achievements of the American Founding Fathers, he said:

"This field of glory is harvested, and the crop is already appropriated. But new reapers will arise, and they, too, will seek a field. It is to deny, what the history of the world
tells us is true, to suppose that men of ambition and talents will not continue to spring up amongst us. And, when they do, they will as naturally seek the gratification of their ruling passion, as others have so done before them. The question then, is, can that gratification be found in supporting and maintaining an edifice that has been erected by others? Most certainly it cannot."

See the speech, available at:
http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/lyceum.htm