

## [Transcript] The Realignment / 388 | Neil Howe: The Fourth Turning Is Here - How America's Crisis Will End

Marshall here. Welcome back to The Realignment.

I'm really pumped to share this episode. Speaking with Neil Howe, author of *The Fourth Turning* is here. Let the seasons of history tell us about how and when this crisis will end. Back in the 1990s, Neil, along with his departed colleague William Strauss, wrote *The Fourth Turning*, which made the provocative argument that modern life moves in generational historical cycles, what they call turnings. Despite the peace of prosperity of the 90s, they predicted that after 2008, we'd enter a crisis period or a fourth turning, prediction that nearly perfectly rhymes with many of the challenges faced today. Now, Neil argues that many of the themes and topics we cover on this show, from geopolitics and great power conflict, to party re-alignment and striddle strife at home, contribute to what he and William Strauss predicted back in 1997. So, so many different topics were hit here. The thing I noticed that whether or not you agree with Neil and William's theories or predictions, we should understand that so much of their approach is shaped to what we live today. They were actually the ones who came up with the term millennium, so their thoughts on generational change are incredibly important. I cannot recommend this and *The Fourth Turning* enough. Such enjoyable books that provide a lot of value and fabulous understanding of the world, so I hope you all enjoy this conversation and that I can make this comprehensible. Huge thank you to the Foundation for American Innovation for reporting the podcast work. Hope you all enjoy this conversation.

Neil, how welcome to the re-alignment.

Well, thank you very much, Marshall. Having me on your show.

Yeah, I'm excited to speak with you. Obviously, at a pure sociological level, you're the person along with your departed co-author, William Strauss, who came up with the term millennial. So, it's interesting to interview you as a millennial, so much of my self-conception is literally stemming from the words and concepts that you're really talking about here. So, here's what I want to just start with. This is such an interesting book for me, this being *The Fourth Turning* is here because I'm not just interviewing you or this person who has this theory of the world who is putting it out there. This is a follow-up to a book from the 1990s, *The Fourth Turning*, where you made some predictions about how the next 25, 30 years would go, predictions that in many ways rhyme with a lot of the, let's say, diagnosis one would give of the challenges facing America and the world in the 2020s. So, I just want to start here. 1990s, we know the cliché is the end of history of interviewed friends who are young on this podcast. What did you see in the 1990s that in 1997 would convince you, hey, I should maybe write a book that suggests that this isn't going to go as long as one thinks it will, or things aren't as strong at a foundational level as one would think, given the way we tend to reinterpret how we think about that moment today? Yeah, that was, so Bill and I decided to write this book, I don't know, probably, you know, 1995, 1996. There wasn't anything we were seeing in the 1990s, and of course that's the whole point. We're trying to look ahead to something that wasn't seen yet. I mean, looking at history to be able to understand the future as an exercise and be able to look around corners, see how things will change. I mean, anyone can extrapolate. I mean, if anything, the future is always going to be, you know, the last 10 or 20 years extrapolated forward, then you don't really need history, do you? You just don't need it. We need to go deeply into the past. And this is, we actually, I think in the book, quote, Churchill to this effect,

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you know, the deeper into the past you go, and the more deeply you understand history, the better you're able to see around the corners. And in fact, we had already written a book, *Generations*, which came out in 1991. We wrote that in the late 1980s, which already sort of made the prediction. I mean, we already had basic dynamics of the rhythm of history in place that was generationally driven, right? That suggested that this period of the autumn season, what we call the unraveling era, would end sometime in the 2000, 2010 decade, sometime in the middle of that decade. And in fact, I think it ultimately did, but the GFC, the Global Financial Crisis. But we had already seen that, right? So it wasn't suddenly a discovery. It was, no, I think you could say that there were certain people in the late 1990s of there was a famous debate, for instance, between them, between Francis Bikki Ahmed and Sam Huntington, who had a kind of a different, you know, where the future was going to go. In other words, there were differences of opinion on this. And that debate you're referencing is the posh of civilizations, kind of thing that's an alternate model. Exactly. And, but I think that's fair to say that a number of people were thinking, you know, a very lightly governed America where seemingly individualism was rampant, and the marketplace had triumphed, and globalism was everywhere, and governmental intervention and regulation seemed to be disappearing. And it was the end of all big issues. You know, the end of all strong governmental actions, the end of all strong historical conflicts was coming about. I think a lot of people could sense that probably wasn't going to happen, right? That seemed a little too good to be true. It's a little bit like, you know, after a long, long summer and a long, long fall, you think, even if you're not thinking back to the last winter, you're kind of wondering, it's just going to keep going. And I think there were a lot of Americans at the time who were, who had trepidations about how long this would last. All we did simply said, there actually is a time table. It doesn't come to an end. And that there are these rhythms of history, there are these eras, which are generationally driven, and you can anticipate when they will begin and end to some extent. And that was really our method, as you know. And so it wasn't looking at what was happening at the time, but it was looking simply at the calendar. So the helpful follow up here then, you describe the period we're in as a fourth turning, we'll get to like the exact definition of a turning. But to make this comprehensible to people, we should understand this is the millennial crisis. That's what you're referring to this current moment as. I'd love for you to just define what you see as the crisis in American Union slash global society today. And how does that articulation of the crisis fit within the model you provided in 1997? Where are the gaps? Where does the timeline intersect helpfully, wherever you want to take it? Well, yeah, maybe it's best to go and actually look at what turnings are and how we arrived at this. Bill and I, when we first started writing, did not have any particular theory of cyclical history at all. We originally wanted to write a book simply about different generations in American history and how they're different, why they're different, and why they leave such different legacies. You know, we have been members of the boomer generation, which was very famously different, you might even say, almost archetypally the opposite of our parents generation who fought World War II. And there were just such absolutely dramatic differences. The

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GI generation was particularly raised. We were indulgently raised. They came of age with D-Day, we came of age with Woodstock. They spent their young adults years building battleships and founding families and we were sort of taking voyages inside ourselves. It was a completely different kind of experience. And we wanted to now have these incredible generational contrasts, which, you know, certainly boomers are very well aware of, happened before in American history. And we found that they had. And in fact, going all the way back to the early 17th century, we really started with the first Old World immigrants to New England in the 1630s, the great migration to New England, the Puritan generation. We found that these, all these had a very strong generational sense. They were different from their kids, different from their parents. Since it's not new, this didn't just start boomers or Gen X or millennials, right? This had been with us since the founding of America, you know. And one quick thing, and what's fascinating about the cyclical nature of this, it's not simply just that I am different than my father. It's that my differences with my father are a lot like the differences between his father and his grandfather in terms of like this. There's the repeating nature of that. Yeah, there is a repeating nature because what we found was that not only are generations very different, these generations tended to follow a recurring pattern. Then it's to say, following, for example, a very idealistic and anti-establishment generation like boomers, you know, we're all familiar with the fact that you had these very kind of caustic, cynical, pragmatic generation of Xers, right? Who were just survivalists, you know, raised to think for themselves and really, you know, you know, die up in scum, really couldn't, you know, stand boomers, you know, coming of age, a very different sense of themselves. We found that that had been repeated constantly in American history. You know, following the transcendentals, you had the guild of generation of people like Ulysses Grant, a completely different generation of metal and muscle, just a very different kind of sense of themselves. But this goes back to the American's founding. And you can find other differences too. For example, the generations that come of age during the great crises of American history, like the American Revolution, the Civil War, you know, the Great Depression and World War II, tend to be very community-oriented generations, friendly gecko, you know, from the time they were raised as children, right? And they have a much more strong sense of their collective strength and a much more, and are looking much more if I ordered you of society in the future. And I pause you, I pause you to understand this. As a millennial, I do not feel as if my generation feels, just speak for all of us here with the, you know, voice of God as a podcaster. I do not think we feel community-oriented. I think you could go through all the statistics we all know, loneliness, disengagement, all the Robert Putnam things. So it is your argument that the crisis itself, and the crisis is an era, right? It is in 2008. It's, this is why it's used to think of the Great Depression period was the 1930s all the way through World War II. Does the crisis forge us into community-oriented people by the nature of what we have to do? Or is there some community-oriented order seeking aspect of my personality that is buried and has to be brought out through that moment? How should we understand that? I think of the latter. So a lot of the FOMO and the loneliness and all that, which you're absolutely right, is because millennials seek community, but can't find it. We know, for instance, that in grade school, you know, they're more likely to do community service. They like the added community service. I remember all the millennials,

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you remember when, I can't remember, you know, what Don McCain's running makes, you remember,

ran up in Alaska, you know, ran, I remember to remember her convention speech, nominating convention speech, but she constantly put down community service. And I had a bunch of millennial employees and there were practical tears the next morning, you know, what's the matter with community service? How can you possibly involve people from wanting to bring the community together?

In other words, millennials feel that they are in a hunger games world, you know, or a squid game. You know what I mean? That kind of world where they don't want to be, they want this community. We see it in so many aspects of millennial life. They want to work for big employers and want to work for players with benefits. They want to work for players to bring them together as a community.

You see them living together in cities. You see them actually increasingly being marketed, you know, these sort of communal units where everyone shares stuff together. The whole bull have been ensuring economy as soon as exactly the opposite of boomers in the same phase of life. Boomers didn't want to live with their parents. They want to do anything possible to live away from their parents,

right? And they certainly didn't want to live with each other in general. They wanted strong locks on their door and they only wanted an individual play. But my sense is that millennials feel they're in a world which is not theirs. They need to transform it in the community direction, right? There's no question that this is not a community world today. But that's the sense where Tega got set when it said that every generation is a trajectory. It's not a place. It's a sense of where it's going, where it wants to go. Boomers have changed America since the time they were growing up was leave it to beavers in a very corporate, organized, community-oriented America into this totally individualized place. I mean, just think of the boomer arc as they have taken over society, sort of blasting everything into little bits and pieces of atoms. Until now, we don't have defined benefit pensions. We have defined contribution, but you can contribute if you want to. And if you don't, you don't have to roll it over. You can borrow from it. You can do anything you want. Boomers have turned out to be over their life cycle, extremely tolerant, of huge divisions of differences in income in America today, big differences in class, because you remember the biggest problem when they were coming of age was America's oppressive

and overwhelming middle class. Back in the late 1960s, the genie of efficient for income and wealth approach that's all time low, right? We were a very tightly balanced society at that point.

Boomers hated it. It was Pleasant Valley Sunday, hard coal burning everywhere. Everyone was identical. Why can't we have different strokes for different folks? Go different directions. And pretty soon, it wasn't started with the culture and college campuses and even inner cities, resisting, you know, authority and the patriarchy and so on, and then telling you what to do.

But it ended up by the late 70s, early 80s in the economy, you know, tax cuts, deregulations, so that whole panoply, both on the left and the right, with boomers, was all around liberating individuals from all the social discipline and constraint, right? And ultimately,

leading us into the autumn season, I talk about the awakening as summer season, right? That's the summer of the secular. But the autumn season is this period of weak and disempowered institutions,

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but strong individualism. In the boomer era, Marshall, you go into a bookstore and all the most upbeat books are about me, myself, and I. You ever notice that? I can do anything. I can try out. I can, all of the most downbeat books are about what we are in trauma, death of the family, death of politics. And that is the world that boomers have created. There is a seasonal arc to these things. And I think that comes clear in our writing. And it's not just this secular. You can see the same things in prior secular. You see the same things happening as we went into the 1850s before the Civil War. You can see the same thing happen as you go into the 1760s before the American

Revolution. And my point, again, is that it's only by getting deeply involved in history that you can appreciate and begin to sense these longer-term rhythms. And a lot of the book has to do with tracing social indicators. And you recall, I mean, you've read the book, you know, we trace, you know, we look at rubber pundits, you know, work, you know, we look at indicators of community. We look at indicators of the realignment cycle in politics, right? We look at foreign policy. We look at demographics, you know, fertility and immigration. We look at, we look at culture. We look at religion. Religion is an interesting aspect of America life that most historians don't really take very seriously. We take it very seriously. And the history of America is not just the history of economies, politics, and civic achievements. It's also the history of the inner life, culture, religion, how we think about ourselves from the inside out. And if I were simply to say, when you map the four turnings along the secular, the secular lasts about 80 to 100 years, right? And it's divided into generation-length pieces. And each of those pieces is a season, right? And then the second turning is a solstice. You know, the sun gets its longest late days, that's the awakening. And that's when society remakes its inner world of values, religion, culture. The wear season is the opposite solstice. That's when the sun is in its lowest. And that's when we remake the outer world of political institutions, infrastructure, economics, how we actually live together in the material world, how do we actually create real communities outside ourselves, right? So there is a yin and yang quality to it. And the kinds of generations coming of age in these different eras are very different. One is what we call the profit archetype, like boomers, or like the missionary generation born after the Civil War, the so-called the wise old men and women during the World War II and the New Deal, you know, the likes of Henry Stimson, you know, those Stimson and McCarty there and FDR and Einstein

and all those. And they were looked up to for values and vision. And the generation coming of age during that period was the GI generation. And they were great technique rats. I mean, they were great community players. And to some extent, you think the GIs, you know, when we look at the GI generation, which has been sort of adamant, could you give an initial birthdate for the GI? Because like the GI generation born in 1901 to 1924. And the one who really saw combat the most was sort of the later half of that generation. But there was JFK is a good archetype. Yeah, JFK to George Bush senior, right? Who was one of the youngest members of the generation, you know, very, very young as a pilot when he got shut down. But my point is, is that that generation, we look at them and Tom Broca wrote the book, you know, the greatest generation, we look back at them and you think, oh my gosh, they were always, you know, this way. They were, they were this, they stood at the very beginning for country and so on. They were always so as American as apple pie. What we forgot is that they were kids brought up, and they believed in

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community, much as millennials do today as aspirational. I mean, they were the ones who were raised to, you know, you know, join, join the four age clubs and that they were the first girl scouts and boy scouts that were released in school uniforms to the first time. People wanted to protect these kids, much as people wanted to protect millennials when they first came along, right? And they wanted to see them more in civic life, much as the way Bill Clinton said it was a great idea back in the mid 1990s that millennials would be in school uniforms. Remember the old school uniform movement? And they came of age at a time when they really believed in sort of community would be great for Americans future. And they looked up and the generations above them are very individualists. And the next generation older was the lost generation. They were the rum runners and the Jenkins crowd during the 1920s. They were wild, you know, wild partyers and hated authority, hated the hated government, and generally voted for the Republican Party, by the way. Giants came of age voting for the Democratic Party. But of course, at that point, the economy gave way, right? We had the great, you know, Black Thursday, the economy went into a free fall. And one thing we forget is a lot of the millennial generation during the Communist Party. I mean, they became socialists. They became anti-American. I mean, they became the opposite of what we remember. Many of them swore to the destruction of capitalism in the United States. And sometimes people ask me, you know, at these millennials, you know, you call them a hero. I could type that many of them are so anti-American and so on. I said, do you ever look at the GI generation that were there at that age, right? Because the original, you know, neo-conservatives at, you know, City College of New York, you know, Irving Kristol, a lot of these figures were in the 1930s. And in the point you're going to hear, they were Trotskyists. I mean, they were in the Trotsky fringe. Of course, they backed the losing candidate of that one. But yes, now they were admittedly, you know, there were still socialists after World War II was over, which kind of distinguishes them from a lot of, you know, their fellow travelers who really fell back in line more during the war. And obviously, you know, Stalin really discredited himself of the Stalin-Hitler pack. And many things brought about sort of the collapse a little bit of the enthusiasm around a common turn. But nonetheless, we forget where that generation started. And we forget how unlikely it seemed that they would be able to create this new America. But to some extent, you're absolutely right. They were transformed by the World War II experience, by the New Deal, and especially by World War II. And by the time the war was over, we were in a different country, right? Yeah, a couple of things. Yeah, go ahead. A couple of things. One, I just want to, because this is really, this is really a book to be read. I usually listen to Ottawa books, but I just want to read this book. I'm recommending you read the book. It's just very like, there's concepts and things are floating on. It's really just a book that should be read. So I want to make this very clear. When you were talking about, you know, the individualism versus community orientation, I think listeners should think back to how insane movies like Office Space, American Beauty, Pleasantville look to us now. So those are baby boomer produced 1990s movies where you'd think the worst thing in the world is you live in a suburb, you have a house, and you've got a 40 to 50 hour a week job that is considered, this is also the thing of Fight Club. You know, the hell at the narrator's life is that he has to go to IKEA and he just can't find the perfect individuals. If you talk to any,

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especially during the worst part of like, let's say COVID or the aftermath, if you talk to any millennial or even, you know, Gen Z or let's say, wait, what's Kevin Spacey's problem in American Beauty? This looks pretty great. But these are perfect illustrations of how these different perspectives are going to be shaped that I got at a deeply generational level, except from purely politics and those things. But it's also a sign of how the saculent keeps turning. One thing I point out actually, when I get to the last section, I talk about the first turning. I don't know, you recall that chapter, but I sort of say what happened in the last part, you know, what happened in the late, late 40s, when we're all kind of tooling down for war and America went into this very different period, right? And one quick thing, the fourth event in that scenario, because this isn't a good pivot, because we should tell the last 75 years to this, the fourth turning was obviously Great Depression World War II. So now after World War II, you're getting into the first turning after the first turning again, which, which prioritizes community, de-emphasizes individualism, America society itself feels that it's more the sum of its part than the sum of its parts, right? Which is, which is the opposite of the fall season when we feel as individuals much more empowered than the community, right? So it's a very different kind of gestation of a very different sense of what society is, right? It always comes after crisis. And, and I, and I make this point, everyone wants to know, you know, when can we get a golden age again where we all believe in community? We all, you know, we're a band of brothers writ large, you know, that kind of sense, right? I hate to say it, it only happens after a crisis. And, and you look back in American history, in those periods when people thought they were living and something resembling a golden age only comes after a crisis. And, and there's a reason for that. And, and I explore that in the book. You might even say to society is scared straight, you know, on a massive scale. Once you're a threshold for crisis, because this is where the definitions get fascinating. Because first, I mean, sure, you remember this. Well, let me, yeah, go on. Yeah, let me just make this observation as a, as a, maybe a cautionary note to everyone who's, who's watching. And then he is, this is not a prediction. This is just a correlation, right? Every fourth turning that we've ever had going back to the 15th century has always featured a total war. And every total war that we've had has always occurred in a fourth turning. You know what I mean? So, so that's the Revolutionary War, Civil War, Civil War two. Yeah. And then going back to the incredible wars we had during the Glorious Revolution, which is America's first kind of revolutionary moment around the time of the Glorious Revolution in London. But it was a period of brutal warfare in, in the, in the colonies. And then going before that, you know, back to the Armada, the World of Roses. I mean, we go back. It's an amazing, it's amazing rhythm. And, and so what happens in those periods, as you can imagine, now it, what, what's the conflict about? What could be a conflict with some exterior community, or it could be a conflict within the community? You know, the Civil War, for example, or where the War of the Roses, which is basically two parts of the community, splitting into two sections, and then having it out, right? One of them has to prevail. Or it's some interesting combination of the two. And as I point out in the book, these aren't either or. It's very often a little bit of both. I often say the American Revolution was a little bit of both. I mean, King George was over there, but on the other hand, most of the killing during the, the late 1770s or 1780s was colonists killing other colonists.

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I mean, especially in the South, you run about this, but in the South.

Yeah, exactly. I mean, if you're a loyalist in the South, it's not great.

No, it was terrible. And it was, it was the, you know, the back country loyalist against the, you know, plantation Patriots. But anyway, it was, it was horrible violence. And at the time, it was generally referred to as a Civil War. People referred to it as a Civil War in America, only later that the Patriots had, because they get to write history, right? The winners get to write history and say, oh no, it was a revolution against this, these British, you know, it was all about King George. And we were, you know, it was all about red coats and forget the fact that a hundred thousand colonists exited the colonies in the early 1780s along with the British.

That would have been the equivalent of seven million Americans today, you can imagine.

And that's probably an undercount because, you know, many probably migrated on their own. So, so anyway, that this is my point. We see both of these things today in America, right? Yes, we see the growing risk of geopolitical conflict. In fact, we're engaged in a proxy war right now in a major land war in Europe. We fear now near germ, we fear something in the Western Pacific.

And we also fear the increasing threat of the Biprecation and collective conflict of two sides of America, sort of the red zone, blue zone conflict. Ten years ago, we did not even do surveys on Civil War in America, the possibility of Civil War in America. But at last count of the last few years, it's been about half of the Americans think that it's likely to happen, you know, in the next few years. And this is just people, this feeling about what's happening in this country. So my point is, is that these trends that we predicted long before anyone talked about any of this, we seem to be there. At least people seem to be have entered that mind space, right? Where it's at least thinkable today.

And what we're saying is it's not only thinkable, some form of these things is likely to happen, which will occur. We don't know. And as I put it in the book, the difference between an internal conflict and an external conflict is often on a razor edge, all the way up into the point until society decides which way it's going to go. It was certainly that way in the 1930s, if you would ask people in the 1937, you know, what kind of, if there's a big conflict in this country, what would it be? It probably would have said, well, it would have been the New Deal against its opponents. I mean, we were incredibly polarized. And it was about the dictator all the time. Exactly. It was going to be a rebel engineer. In fact, we had Sun Clare Lewis came out of the bucket. It can't happen here, which is all about a fascist takeover in America. In other words, we thought that that would be the conflict. But in a process, and I spell out in the book, which has to do with kind of a second regeneracy that often occurs during a crisis in Syria, the country galvanized around a different sort of issues. And it was sort of an interesting sectional game, because it had to do with Roosevelt Geneseing, Geneseing in some of his northern support, and bringing back on board

some of the Sunday Democratic supporters that he needed, because of course, they dominated all the

leadership of all the congressional parties because of seniority, right? So he brought them back on board, and he galvanized the country around essentially an us versus fascism agenda. And ultimately, the attack on Pearl Harbor was almost anti-climactic. This country mobilized for war in the sense of bringing the arsenal of march. About a year earlier, about really even

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at the end of the end of 1940. And we really started cupping up the fiscal pumps by the opening months of 1941. So that was almost a year before Pearl Harbor. Anyway, an interesting story of how that happened. Very hard to predict in advance how that would have gone. What our point is, and my point continuing in this book, is that no, you can't predict which way it will go. What you can predict is that something will go, right? That there will be a conflict, and that that conflict will reestablish this new sense of humanity. It's the overall social process, can be predicted, not the actual handrails of the conflict itself. So we've discussed a bunch of different crises so far in the podcast. And if we just do the quick APUS history summary, civil war, I mean, the revolution war is about the nature of what America is in terms of a very British colony, a very independent thing. So war is about a debate around, are we these states united, or are we the United States? Union versus secession, great depression to World War II is the domestic thing. It's the external thing, but also domestically, the nature of the industrial economy, financial structures, sides of government, et cetera, et cetera. What would you say the millennial crisis, this period of roughly 2008 to the present into the future? What is this crisis about? I think we can tell what kinds of events will get us in there. What we can't predict is how we will be transformed when we come out of it. And I mean that honestly, when we went into civil war, remember the elimination of slavery wasn't even on the table. And I often remind that, Lincoln in fact broadly agreed with people that he would sign a constitutional amendment, guaranteeing the South slavery indefinitely in the South. So long as you know that they were, he was running on, the Republicans basically inherited the free soil platform and street fiasco party, we just didn't want slavery in any of the new territories or states for reasons which were fine with the abolitionists, but they also suited those. A lot of white people that didn't want any blacks in many of the new territories, slave or not, you know what I mean? So in other words, it was a mixture of motives, but the abolition of slavery was not on the table when Lincoln was elected, at the time when the South succeeded. I remind people that because they read back, you know what I mean? They read back. Oh well, that was what the nation wanted. We were divided over that. No, that was not on the table. We had no idea that that would eventually, it was only when we got into total war. And Lincoln finally said, given the scale of the casualties, we have to do anything possible to weaken the South. We're going to declare slavery contraband. And so any slave who wants to come over, they will be freed forever, because that will weaken the South. But then of course, the radicals, the radical Republicans and Congress were jubilant because they knew that that policy, if the union won the war, would make the total eradication of slavery in the South. So in a sense, we adopted the abolition of slavery as a wartime measure. And Lincoln made it very clear that he was not in favor in abstract of abolition of slavery, because he wanted to make sure that his conservatives, Republicans were on board and his Democrats wouldn't abandon them. He's the border states, always. Yeah, he wanted to keep them in the war. But and so time and again, we see that these huge, long-term, permanent decisions are made in the heat of crisis. And this is a point I bring up. I think it's in the fourth turning of the social process. I think it's chapter, I don't know, pretty good at remembering these things. I think it's chapter eight. But I talk about

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social processes. And one of the most amazing and some paradoxical things about our history is that if you asked people when we'd be the best time to make huge, permanent, long-term decisions about changing our constitution or doing everything better again, everyone would sort of say, well, the best time would be when we're all prosperous, happy. We have plenty of resources to spare to make peace dividend. It's 1993. This is good. Yeah, 1993, 1997, when we wrote for it, it wouldn't have been a perfect time. We actually forced, we had the balance budget, the Cold War was over. We had all these extra resources. History says, in other words, a sunny day, right? Wait for that sunny day and we'll make these long-term decisions. But history, that may be the rational thing to do. But history says it's absolutely not what we do, actually do. We do the opposite. We wait for the rainy day, the stormy day, when all of our backs are against the wall, where we face the existential decisions about whether our nation and community will last at all, near-term problems, immediate problems, about we're facing defeat in the base. And suddenly we make long-term decisions. It is paradoxical, right? And we do it again and again. We did it with the Constitution. We did it with these enormous decisions and domestic policy during the Civil War. Everything from the original Yosemite grant from the National Parks, Chaskot and the railroad, the regulation of the money, supply, income, time. I could go through all the things we did. And similarly with the new DLA in World War II. And so that's paradoxical. But again, it shows it how when people think about the climax of a fourth turning, which I think we are drifting toward, we're in the fourth turning of an era, but we're drifting toward the climax, that we fear it because we know that that's going to be the rest. It's going to be painful. It's going to be hardship. And it likely to involve organized conflict. But on the other hand, we should realize that that's nature's way of bringing about a creative destruction of institutional life and rejuvenating who we are as a republic. And we do that periodically in our nation's existence. We sometimes even call it. In fact, it's not our department's story as a political scientist calling, but the first republic after the second republic after the civil war, the third republic after the New Deal, we're heading toward our fourth republic after the climax of this fourth turning. And it will involve, probably, a consummate and decisive realignment politically. Oh, there you go. Right to the name of your show. But all of that will happen. And we will make long-term decisions the exact nature of which still, even now, we can only begin to imagine what those might be. I mean, look, we all know what big problems we have, big public policy challenges. And you could talk about all of them from kind of sclerotic, non-competitive economy, which is failing to really generate the living standard growth and the productivity growth that we once experienced to things such as climate change, problems such as climate change, the inability to balance the budget, the inability just to tilt the entire playing field of this nation's economy toward the young and toward the future. Instead, it's all tilted to rewarding older people into consumption. All of those things get resolved at the same time, right? You come out of the fourth turning suddenly with a long-term orientation toward long-term goals. Suddenly, and of course, who represents the future? Who represents the long-term? Kids, young people, so there's a huge emphasis on investing on them, just like we did after World War II. Suddenly, it passed the GI Bill, and education was free, higher education, but in some terms, levitational, you create a new kind of living. This gets to a big question that I have, not just as an interviewer or production as a reader. You have this concept of these precursor

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events, and this is a very key thing. So in the middle of these turnings, in the middle of the cycle, you have World War I. That's a precursor, specifically in the fall season, in the third turning before the fourth turning. So these are all of the third turning events, and it's also 9-11. 9-11 is another example then. 9-11 was, again, a third turning. It occurred late in the third turning, not long before the fourth turning started. So what I want to know then is, because this is where we get to the explaining the generational archetypes, hero, millennial, artist, Gen Z, profits, those are the styling challenge.

No, those are boomers. Boomers? Yeah, frappe would be boomer, and the silent generation would be the

artist's archetype. So then the way to understand this then, do precursor events not lead to what's a resolution of, because oftentimes the precursor events will presage in many ways the actual crises of the fourth turning. So World War I, obviously, you've got a lot of domestic strife and all might try being an anti-war progressive during that period. You have the red scare. You've got, obviously, the external. What's the word order look like? That very much rhymes before World War II. Same thing, you have 9-11, Generation, Unity, etc. Do they not lead to resolution? Because the generation in charge does not constitutionally have the ability to conclude it, right? So can Woodrow Wilson not do something that FDR can?

Every generation lives in the long place, right? And in other words, there is such a thing as a fourth turning constellation. When you finally get the prophet archetype well into old age, Gen X is totally in charge of institutions, you know, admirals, generals, CEOs, and so on. The Euro archetype, well, you know, totally in control of young adulthood, you know, extending all the way into the mid 40s, right? And that's when you have the maximum out of the world creative potential, right? Because the doers are young, the community organizers, and the people who actually want to do things, the left-brained organization, things about how do we create these big new word forms are young, they're actually great things, and the values oriented people are old, right? So, and then you've got the pragmatic generation in between, who just knows how to get stuff done, right? I mean, they sort of break rules, break ads, do whatever you want to make sure it's done. You get the, you know, more Bradley's and Dwight Eisenhower's and the George Pattons, right? They're all in that mid-life space. So, that's the maximum potential for changing the world. On the other hand, think about another, think about another set of positions. Let's say you have the prophet archetype, young adults. So, the Benjamin Valerius was all among the young, and then you've got the elder generation as the doers, you know, the rationalists, the doers of people who believe in the community.

And then you have sort of a, which you watch a generation between, we'll just call the, you know, Michael Luke Cawke's generation of silent, right? That's like maximum dysfunction, right? So, you have the older, the people who believe in values, they know it's right and wrong. They're young, and they're giving orders to the older people who are running the world. Do you see how it works? That's basically the late sixties. Hell no, I won't go, you know. And then you've got the older generation believing that as a nation, we need to have all of this community, we need to have all these long-term obligations. You have a young generation just saying this, right? And you actually saw that evidence of that during the pandemic, during the pandemic. Interestingly, people then remark on that a little bit. The generation, the youth generation

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was the most likely to want to actually follow the rules, you know, like put on face masks and actually, you know, follow the rules when it comes to controlling the pandemic, even though they were the, by far the least at risk, right? The older generation, most at risk were the ones who railed against all these regulations, right? And the reason why I bring that up was that if you had gone back to the 1970s, let's imagine we had had a pandemic, you know, like, I don't know, 1972, would have been the opposite. You do what I have older people saying, okay, let's get on our uniforms now, it's time to go to work again. And younger people would have been saying, hell no, what are you talking about? And the key thing here, just to make this super clear, just within your, because this is the perfect setup in the sense that imagine Richard Nixon's government America telling baby boomers to do X, Y and Z versus even the millennial generation, Donald Trump is president. And they're still doing the thing. Donald Trump, even as president, he's still an outsider, he's railing against his own administration, is still the deep state, is still the enemies everywhere, even within his own organization. One of the fascinating things about Donald Trump is he was never only in charge, you know, I mean, even as president, his own government was almost his opponent, right? The problem with Donald Trump is being a populist is it's very hard for him to be in charge of it, I think, because that means he's responsible. So it has to rail against, you know, federal bureaucracies or Congress or people forcing me to do this and that, right? And I think the idea of being in charge and feeling responsible for what happens is not really in the boomers DNA. Remember, the whole, it's so interesting, but the boomers whole mission was to change the culture. It was not to build infrastructure, design a new constitution, it was to free your mind instead. You remember the old Beatles' wet album, right? Free your mind, right? Not to be aggressive, but does this explain why boomers are obsessed with conspiracy theories? In the sense that, in the sense that, like, you know, think of not to get over-critical, but, like, RFK Jr., right? RFK Jr. seems to be incapable. I could see the attraction. If you are in constitution, we're incapable of being in charge. Conspiracy theories and this and that seems to be a logical thing. Right. You just always want to keep people inflamed and, you know, mobilized almost in a chaotic fashion to mobilize them with a purpose to actually change the world, but then you have to take responsibility for it, right? It's interesting that boomers are aware of the charge that millennials offer and level against them, that, you know, they're a do as I'm saying, not as I do generation, right? And, you know, boomers are always talking about high values. Bill Clinton came to the president saying, you're really the most ethical presidency in American history. And you look at even conservatives, the CPAP doctrine is, you know, culture is upstream from politics. Whatever you look at, boomers, right? Culture has always come first and actual policies come later. Its intentions come first, right? That's not all awakening fire, right? The pure heart comes first and the inside comes first. And if that's pure, everything else follows, right? But being responsible for consequences, which is what follows is something boomers have a hard time with. And when they're faced with these accusations that they don't really take charge and are only responsible for how they run these institutions, I think boomers are responses. We never really tried to run the institutions. Our whole purpose in life has been to change aspirations and ideals. Here's an interesting way to look at it.

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A phrase came into being a hugely increasing in popularity through the 1950s as the GI generation was gaining power, taking over America as the CEOs and ultimately by the end of the decade as president, right? The JFK. And that was coined by C. Wright Mills, who was called the power elite, and the GI generation loved that power elite. Yeah, we're the power. We're taking over. We've got longer strides in Kennedy said, we're going to take power. We're going to actually change and then LBJ came with the Civil Rights Act and you came with them. We're going to put a man

on the moon and then we're going to, we were a nation that would just going to do huge things, the great society. And we really did, you know, do big things during that period.

Another phrase became very popular skyrocketing popularity during the 1990s when boomers were taking over. It wasn't the power elite. And it was coined by, I think Newsweek magazine, was a phrase called the cultural elite. That says it all, doesn't it? The power elite, the cultural elite, boomers have always been fixated in the culture. And what they were going to do was they were going to be in charge of the culture. They were going to change the culture because if you change the culture, everything else will eventually automatically follow. And in fact, in a long-term sense, they're right because they lead America straight into the fourth turning, and you know, the up to millennials to actually change the world. So in some long-term sense, there's wisdom to that. But obviously, boomers are not a generation which has taken responsibility either as CEOs or as political leaders for what they've done. I mean, all these market-to-market buyout scenes and all these incredible things that boomers do, which are so obviously self-serving and their lack of a long-term time horizon. But given how they came of age, celebrating the present, celebrating Lyft for today, title of a famous song, by the way, why would we expect them to have a long-term orientation when it comes to how they actually manage their lives? Where boomers will become very interesting, I think, is when all we know about them is their values because their values are actually very demanding and very unforgiving. And when you look at just the boomer values themselves, truth versus falsehood, good versus evil, and you have a younger generation of doers actuating those, then suddenly you have a society that can really move. That's why it really matters where boomers are in their phase of life. And I think one thing that's a little bit counterintuitive about our book is that we claim that boomers, when they finally completely in old age, will not be the pro-consumption lobby that we associate with ADHP and senior citizens. That boomers will go along with sacrifice for everyone in America. Much as earlier artists and proper architects have done in their old age, been in favor of the individual's sacrificing and behavior in favor of the community and in favor of younger people. And that would be a very surprising feature of the late fourth turning that we are going to see. And in fact, I already see it. If you interview most boomers, you know, about social security and Medicare, yeah, they'll say, yeah, I don't want those things changed, but their heart isn't in it. I mean, they know that they didn't, you know, they, they didn't say in the same way that the GI generation did. Exactly. They were never senior citizens. They weren't, you know, they didn't do any of that stuff. And they, I've been involved in looking at this for a long time. I was writing books about, you know, the generational inequity and the federal budget even back in the 1980s. And I remember how the GI generation looked at it. And it was, I paid my dues, you know, I splashed the surrogate Normandy at Okinawa, you know, Tyrell, you know, and, and that's a good argument too. I built this country.

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And, and I want my dunes back. I mean, everything you see around you, we built. And you guys are just playing with it, right? And there was no response to that argument. And basically what happened in the 1970s, when the entire Vietnam fiscal dividend went to seniors, you know, that was after we expanded the eligibility for some security, we put it on colas, we did a whole bunch of things to hugely shift the budget during that period to seniors. Boomers went along with that. Boomers did not object at all to bearing a much bigger fiscal burden for the GI generation turned senior citizen. Interesting, isn't it that the same generation that we called junior citizens during World War II was the first generation of seniors to be called senior citizens in the late sixties, right? In other words, that same image just aged with them. Well, no one is going to cut benefits to senior citizens, right? And, and so, so there was a trade. What happened was is that the trade was this. Okay, you got Nixon and Watergate generation really, no one cares about you anymore. So we're going to do this. You're going to get all your benefits. We're going to pile them on. You're going to let us have the culture. And that's what happened in the mid seventies until by the time Reagan came into the White House or playing beach boys, that was a big thing. I know I'm sorry for you and I understand that, but that was actually a big thing, right? Yeah. Beach boys at the White House. Whoa. Well, that was Nancy Reagan's. He told Ronnie that was okay. Now you can play beach boys. Ronald Reagan's okay with that. But my point is the boomers took over the culture and that was the exchange. You give us the culture. Let us do what we want in the culture. You guys get your benefits. As we move further into the fourth turning, the exchange is going to be the reverse. So the reverse is that boomers will say, we're going to give up our benefits. This is a time of archip. I mean, imagine what we've been doing in this country. We suddenly had to truly mobilize for some national emergency. We're going to give up those benefits. But in return, we're going to ask more from young people culturally, right? They've got a certain country, right? That's going to be the difference. And that's going to be actually a huge slingshot for the millennial generation, right? Because that will empower them to remake the world.

I want to ask one last quick question because I know we're hitting your time limit here. The New York Times did a good write up last week about your book and how it's actually pervaded into pop culture. But the thing that I've really actually kind of objected to in their level was that, and by the way, the writer doesn't choose the headlines, but it referred to your work as like a doomsday theory. And I just kind of want to say honestly, this doesn't feel a doomsday. This feels very empowering if I'm a millennial in the sense that like, they feel like you're totally alone right now, but actually what your cohort members, you guys can do big things again. So I just want you to respond to whether or not this is a pessimistic or I think this kills pessimistic against the 90s. But I think now that we're into it, this feels optimistic to me. I think it is optimistic. First of all, I'm incredibly optimistic about America. I mean, I really believe in America, I believe in this country. And I think actually the fourth turning is a solution, you know, more than it is a problem. It's a huge challenge, and it will demand the most from all of us. But long term, it is a solution. It's a way to solve all of the problems. And we all think of as insialbe, and it's a way to empower the younger generation again. I think, in other words, I'm very positive about where this nation comes out of the fourth turning. And you were right, you know what you said. Writers do not choose the

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ad line, since you well know. And I've had many examples of op-eds, and I just went when I see the ad line. Oh, God, I didn't say that, you know, and it was something that all viewers should understand. When you write something for a newspaper like an op-ed, editors insist on being able to choose a headline for you, which may completely misconstrue what it is. And the fact is, is that the writer of that article, which is actually interesting, it was in the style section piece in the article, did not say that in his article. But, you know, the New York Times, you want to put it in a safe box. Oh, this is that, you know what I mean? It's a doom. It's obviously not a doom say or bang to anyone who's read the book.

Yeah, and so my closing thought is, and this, I think once again, to your point, it's not optimistic. It's not pessimistic, because it's a solution. You read a book about, you know, you read with these like heavier, gothic books about what went wrong in the 2000s, and they say things like, how did we not come together after September 11th? We had all this opportunity. Why did George J. Bush tell us to go shopping instead of do national service? This book explains why that was the thing. We don't have to think that this is all crazy, like this is a solution to that. It does explain why. And that's a precursor then, as you said, and that's typical of rica. So it's kind of like a little of our wires, like the Mexican-American work. I will say this, that in one way, I think is great positive is that the book gives a really interesting and important role for each of today's generations, you know, over the next 15 years. And that is, boomers to suddenly become, they fulfill their purpose as a generation of vision and values in a good way, right?

Not necessarily with managing institutions, which they don't do very well, but to be that kind of elder cultural arbiter and providing kind of a guidepost for younger generations.

It's a way for Gen X to suddenly see themselves not as terminal losers. I mean, this was a generation that was castigated and criticized ever since they were kids. I mean, we've never had a generation so heavily dumped with negativity by the media ever since they were born, even as kids. These were the child's double horror movie kids. The worst educated kids in American history, I mean, they're really about Gen X and sort of, you know, garbage, worthless, end of history, you know, nothing to them, nothing to contribute. And I think by contrast, Gen Xers will be at the full come as midlife leaders in what happens. They will make the difference, right? As midlife leaders, for better or for worse. And then for millennials, this was a launching pad, right? This was a launching pad for the rest of their lives.

And whatever is created will be identified with them, much as the Republican generation, you know, who largely, you know, wrote the Federalist Bakers, wrote the Constitution, right?

It's associated with them. I mean, this patriotic Republican generation, they were the ones who were elevated by this event, and they were able to create something long term for this country's future. This is empowering every generation alive today, in a very special way, either because it helps them realize a better future, or it allows them to bring to bear a better side of themselves in this period to come. And it's necessarily been what they've been contributing in the past.

That is an excellent place to leave it. Neil, this has been really great. Once again, I recommend all of your books, and I hope folks continue to dive into it. Thanks for joining me on the realignment. Great. Thank you, Martians. It's been a pleasure.

I hope you enjoyed this episode. If you learned something like this sort of mission, or want to access our subscriber exclusive Q&A, bonus episodes and more,

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