

[CHAPTER TWO]

America's Ascent and Decline



Perhaps now is the time to hark back to the period when America's social fabric began to unravel. Understanding better how we reached these depths may give you a truer grasp of the forces that brought you to your preeminence. In its decline, the United States has repeated the ten-generation, 250-year cycle of earlier great civilizations, a sequence described by Machiavelli:

. . . usually provinces go most of the time, in the changes they make, from order to disorder and then pass again from disorder to order, for worldly things are not allowed by nature to stand still. As soon as they reach their ultimate perfection, having no further to rise, they must descend, and similarly, once they have descended and through their disorders arrived at the ultimate depth, since they cannot descend further, of necessity they must rise. Thus they are always descending from good to bad and rising from bad to good. For virtue gives birth to quiet, quiet to leisure, leisure to disorder, disorder to ruin; and similarly, from ruin, order is born; from order, virtue; and from virtue, glory and good fortune.

Past dynasties, civilizations, and progressive societies follow closely the historically recurrent pattern of ten-generation cycles.

No matter the advances in communications, technology, and weaponry, each takes the same course: Outburst to Conquest to Commerce to Affluence to Intellect to Decadence. Some disappear, as did Assyria and Etruria, while others, such as Egypt, Greece, Italy, Spain, and England, become backwater countries drawing tourists to view relics of their former glory.

The first accounting of ten-generation cycles appears in the Bible. Genesis 5:1 begins, "This is the book of the generations of Adam." The following thirty-one verses present the generational outline of Adam through Noah. This selective list of ten generations is recorded for the purpose of tracing the ancestry of Abraham. Thus, Genesis 11:10 begins, "These are the generations of Shem" and continues through Genesis 11:26 for another ten generations, ending with Abram (Abraham).

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During America's Age of Decadence, I chronicled in *Mothers, Leadership, and Success, Book Two* an account of the United States from its humble beginning in 1763 to the year 1989. I will not tire you with statistics related to the nation's ascent and decline during those 226 years. The following tables, which summarize America's first ten-generation cycle, will acquaint you with the adherence of the Republic of the United States to this historical pattern. But first, a starting date is needed to analyze America's ten-generation cycle.

1776? That year of the signing of the Declaration of Independence represents the nation's political birth. The fight for independence, however, had begun at Lexington and Concord in 1775, and the First Continental Congress had already convened at Philadelphia in 1774. But early demonstrations against British control, including the Boston Massacre in 1770 and the Boston Tea Party in 1773, indicate that the social and cultural makeup of the United States was firmly established before any of these dates. So what is the earliest date for American society as it currently exists?

The year 1763 is a logical beginning date for the United States as a nation. Two events that year precipitated a change in perspective concerning the thirteen colonies by both the British crown and the colonists themselves.

In 1763 the Treaty of Paris ended the French and Indian War, an extension of the European Seven Years' War in which the colonists fought on behalf of Great Britain — the last stand taken by the colonists for the British. Also, the British Proclamation of 1763 drew an absolute, map-marked boundary beyond which any further westward movement by British subjects was prohibited. The colonies had been individually created and colonized through royal grants and each was subject to royal rule. In most cases, they had been treated as separate entities by British political and private agencies. By setting forth one boundary for all, the Proclamation of 1763 recognized and treated the thirteen colonies as a single unit.

Thus I consider 1763 to be the date of origin of the country as we know it today. Table 1 sets forth the Ages of the Republic of the United States.

Table 2 presents the birth generations for the United States since 1763. (A twenty-five-year span is used to denote a generation and to distinguish each birth generation of individuals growing up at the same time. Twenty-five years is the most accepted period to determine the length of a generation.)

With 1763 as the de facto beginning of the United States, 1998 became the tenth year of its tenth birth generation. Table 3 summarizes the seventh through the tenth birth generations and the ninth and tenth accomplishing generations, completing a ten-generation period (250 years) for the United States. Since the accomplishing age of individuals can also be termed a generation, an accomplishing generation is the twenty-five-year span during which the group members are ages thirty-six through sixty. This age group consistently makes the greatest contributions to a country's growth, improvement, well-being, and change. There are exceptions of course (certainly contributions are made by individuals under thirty-six and over sixty); nonetheless, the most changes, good or bad, in any given twenty-five-year period come from the thirty-six-through-sixty age group.

Table 4, which identifies U.S. presidents by accomplishing generations, indicates, often dramatically, differences in national priorities and the quality of presidential leadership from the first of one to the first of the next accomplishing generation, as found be-

[TABLE 1]

The Republic of the United States of America

Age of Outburst	1763–1890
Age of Conquest	1846–1933
Age of Commerce	1874–1971
Age of Affluence	1946–ca. 2000
Age of Intellect	1964–ca. 2006
Age of Decadence	1964–ca. 2012

[TABLE 2]

Birth Generations

Born	Generation
1738–1762	last British colonial
1763–1787	First
1788–1812	Second
1813–1837	Third
1838–1862	Fourth
1863–1887	Fifth
1888–1912	Sixth
1913–1937	Seventh
1938–1962	Eighth
1963–1987	Ninth
1988–2012	Tenth

[TABLE 3]

Birth and Accomplishing Generations

Birth Generation	Years of Birth
Tenth	1988–2012
Ninth	1963–1987
Eighth	1938–1962
Seventh	1913–1937

Accomplishing Generation	Years of Birth
Tenth (Generation X)	1952–1976
Ninth	1927–1951

[TABLE 4]

Presidents of the United States

Accomplishing Generation	Born	Presidents
First	1727–1751	George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison
Second	1752–1776	James Monroe, John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren (b. 1782), William Harrison
Third	1777–1801	John Tyler, James Polk, Zachary Taylor, Millard Fillmore, Franklin Pierce (b. 1804), James Buchanan
Fourth	1802–1826	Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, Ulysses Grant, Rutherford Hayes
Fifth	1827–1851	James Garfield, Chester Arthur, Grover Cleveland, Benjamin Harrison, Grover Cleveland (2nd term), William McKinley
Sixth	1852–1876	Theodore Roosevelt, William Taft, Woodrow Wilson, Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover
Seventh	1877–1901	Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower
Eighth	1902–1926	John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, James Carter, Ronald Reagan, George Bush
Ninth	1927–1951	William Clinton
Tenth	1952–1976	

tween Abraham Lincoln and James Garfield. Significant differences also appear between the administrations that begin and end each presidential accomplishing generation, such as between John Tyler and James Buchanan, Theodore Roosevelt and Herbert Hoover, and John Kennedy and George Bush. Perhaps the differences result more from cyclical timing and changing public values than quality of leadership.

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It is the tenth generation that merits your attention most. Before people understood the ten-generation cycles of civilizations, mystery shrouded the events of the twenty-five years of the tenth generation that ended each epoch. Famines, floods, hurricanes, blizzards, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, outbreaks of disease, and other natural catastrophes seemed to bring about each era's end. Since decadence characterizes each tenth generation, many contemporaries believed that this or that god was using nature to punish the country for its evil ways. Even in my time, more than a few embrace this belief.

During the tenth generation of each advanced society, nature's assaults are little different than during each of the previous nine generations. When the society is young and vigorous, natural catastrophes are taken in stride; the people are resilient and able to overcome hardships. For instance, the 1900 hurricane that hit Galveston, Texas, took some six thousand lives and destroyed the city. With Red Cross assistance and private charity, the survivors endured. The found dead were buried and the city was rebuilt without federal funds. By contrast, since 1988, the first year of our nation's tenth generation, Americans have shown little self-reliance or ability to cope with natural disasters. On August 23, 1992, a 140-mile-per-hour-winds hurricane struck south Dade County, Florida, centering on Homestead. Inhabitants, paralyzed by inertia, waited for the federal government and the state of Florida to provide sustenance and shelter. Although unprecedented funds poured into rebuilding the devastated area, hurricane victims became angry and frustrated when the federal government took four days to respond.

President George Bush visited Homestead the following month and, a few days later, so did Vice President Dan Quayle. A year later, President William Clinton made the same journey to Homestead. Each promised more assistance and more money. Further, even though only nine lives were lost, the thousands of "survivors" were praised for their courage and their forbearance of the federal government's slowness in providing for their comfort — in

[TABLE 5]

The Great Civilizations' Tenth Generations

Civilization	Rise and Fall	Duration in Years	Tenth Generation
Assyria	859–612 B.C.	247	637–612 B.C.
Persia: Cyrus and his descendants	538–330 B.C.	208	355–330 B.C.
Greece: Alexander and his successors	331–100 B.C.	231	125–100 B.C.
Roman Republic	260–27 B.C.	233	52–27 B.C.
Roman Empire	27 B.C.–A.D. 180	207	A.D. 155–180
Arab Empire	634–880	246	855–880
Mameluke Empire	1250–1517	267	1492–1517
Ottoman Empire	1320–1570	250	1545–1570
Japan: Muromachi (or Ashikago) Shogunate	1333–1600	267	1575–1600
China: Ming Dynasty	1368–1644	276	1619–1644
Spain	1500–1750	250	1725–1750
Japan: Tokugawa Shogunate	1600–1867	267	1842–1867
China: Ch'ing (Manchu) Dynasty	1644–1911	267	1886–1911
Romanov Russia	1682–1916	234	1891–1916
British Empire	1700–1950	250	1925–1950
United States of America	1763–ca. 2012	ca. 250	1988–ca. 2012

providing for those who would not fend for themselves or move on to other areas for employment. A cynic could compare the 1900 Galveston and the 1992 Homestead hurricanes and conclude that more deaths mean fewer destitute survivors needing relief and help in rebuilding.

During the tenth generation, nothing high-minded remains of the civilization's vigorous and boundless beginning. Civilizations in decline are not unlike the elderly, ravaged by the same bacterial infections or viral invasions that their immune systems easily vanquished in their youth. Troubles, travails, tragedies mark the end of each great epoch. Corrupt and decadent leaders squabble over the remains of the rotting corpse of society. Good and honest men suffer intolerable experiences during the end of each era, their losses measured only in degree — livelihood or life.

This generation invariably spawns movements to make changes within the existing regime. Led by late-awakening people and a few politicians, these advocates advance reform, not revolution. The Ch'ing (Manchu) Dynasty, for example, ruled China for ten generations, from 1644 to 1911. On June 11, 1898, Emperor Kuang Hsu issued his first reform decree, which began the Hundred Days Reform. Over the next 102 days, the emperor issued some fifty reform edicts affecting government administration, military development, industry, education, and international relations. The Hundred Days Reform of 1898 failed; the dynasty collapsed thirteen years later. Similarly, for ten generations, from 1600 to 1867, the Tokugawa shogunate controlled Japan. Massive reforms were implemented by the chief senior councillor, Tadakuni, from 1841 to 1843. The cure failed, as did the Tokugawa shogunate a generation later.

And during the ten-generation reign of the Romanov tsars over Russia, from 1682 to 1916, liberal *zemstvos* attempted unsuccessfully to deliver relief from the laws of the tsar. But it was not until the tenth generation that reformers brought the then-split *zemstvo* factions into a coherent movement that in 1906 produced a *duma*. The legislative body, however, was ineffective. Although hated by the tsar, the reformers continued their efforts to effect change and retain the monarch. Romanov Russia failed eleven years later. The reform leaders, along with the tsar, left the land of the living when Lenin, Russia's "man on horseback," prevailed.

America's tenth-generation voters also clamored for major social changes in 1994. Copying Manchu emperor Kuang Hsu's Hundred Days Reform, cautious conservatives led the 1995 congressional reform movement under the banner of a "One Hundred Day Con-

tract with America." The cry of Republican politicians for change inspired hope among domestic and foreign investors, which helped keep the cork in the financial bottle for several years. At the same time, political debate provoked a violent backlash from liberals who viewed the reforms as dangerous to their existence. The reforms, never delivered, followed history's well-worn path. They failed. Too little, too late.

Throughout history, without exception, tenth-generation reform fails. Reformers fail because all misdiagnose the illness. Each group sees a cancer that can be treated with reform, but none realizes that the cancer has metastasized.

Late-twentieth-century American reformers hoped to save the population of the United States as a whole, but the country was too disobedient, degenerate, and violent for salvation. And as all failed civilizations contained some good and honest people at the end, so too did the United States of America — its middle class being the last bastion of virtue, talent, learning, and religion. Only the middle class was respectable. But as the two extremes of American society — the corrupt and the violent — continue to expand, the middle class shrinks.

The righteous remnant of the middle class, the true America-within-America, realized, finally, that the nation as a whole could not be saved. This moral minority eventually became more concerned with building a new America than with the fate of the doomed majority. And it supported you to reverse the course of our stricken nation.

So as with all great nations, our country has repeated the historical, worldwide law of ten generations and thus made your emergence real. America's second ten-generation cycle, Empire, begins with your advent.

THE decline of the nation to the sad condition that you must now redress began in 1946 with the onset of the Age of Affluence. How did the United States stand as a nation in 1945? It stood alone at the top in wealth, power, and fame. The government owned 60 percent of the total gold held by world governments. The country had a military-industrial complex second to none and was the world's major oil exporter. It was the sole owner of the most pow-

erful weapon in history, the atomic bomb. The work force had power; 36 percent of American workers belonged to unions. Business failures numbered only four per ten thousand firms, the lowest in American history. (The failure rate in 1932 was 154 per ten thousand companies; in 1985, 114 per ten thousand.)

In 1945, citizens, on the whole, were honest, moral, ethical, and law abiding. Good manners were expected; wholesale rudeness had not begun. Discipline and integrity were practiced and respected. A man's word was better than a contract. Borrowers and lenders expected loans to be repaid and almost all were. Buyers were treated as customers not as consumers. Personal savings were in; bankruptcy was a humiliation. Heroes were everywhere. Stealing or moral turpitude or plagiarism were called wrong, not a mistake. Criminals received little sympathy. "Malpractice" was a seldom-used word; "deferred adjudication" was a little-known phrase in criminal justice proceedings.

Perhaps 1945 was the true "high noon" of the United States. With the lifting of controls at the war's end, prices skyrocketed. People wanted to buy; they had money available from savings, but goods were scarce. The lean war years coming on the heels of the Great Depression and the money saved during the war welcomed in the Age of Affluence.

For the next seventeen years, 1946–1963, the descent from greatness was imperceptible. Indeed, the years from 1946 through 1963 were truly golden for the United States. But those seeds of affluence planted in 1946 sprouted in 1964.

One of the most visible ills of affluence was the kudzu-like spread of extreme obesity and anorexic thinness after 1964. While one group gorged, the other starved itself. Both were expressions of the same problem. Neither the grossly overweight nor the fleshless were concerned with real achievements in their lives. Affluence, low self-esteem, and an absence of physical labor in primarily nonachieving people brought about strange human configurations. In almost all earlier successful civilizations, overweight people were considered attractive. Plumpness indicated wealth, success, good temper, eminence for men, and sexuality and fertility for women. Even then, however, extreme obesity and abnormal thinness were considered freakish.

During my childhood in the 1930s, extreme obesity was rare. Good manners dictated that one not stare, as such a person was afflicted with a "glandular" problem. Carnivals provided a place to view those who were different. "Geeks," often alcoholics, were dressed in animal skins and gainfully employed to shriek, babble, and bite the heads off live chickens as a means of enticing the crowd to the ticket booth. For a small coin one could view the "fat lady" and the living "human skeleton" without being rude. "Anorexia" and "bulimia" were foreign terms in this era. By the 1990s, however, no one would pay to see a "fat lady" or a "human skeleton," as the grossly misproportioned were commonplace. Children no longer stared at the extremely obese; since, little different than their parents, they were accustomed to seeing such people.

Entrepreneurs capitalized on this American phenomenon. "All you can eat" restaurants became "troughs" of choice for the fast-growing corpulent consumers of calories. Virtually unbreakable chairs, designed to support a quarter of a ton, prevented many a lawsuit. With round, serious faces and plates towering with eatables, the gross worked hard to extend their skin. Already the body's largest organ, it was stretched further to cover bizarre positioning of globs of new fat. (In one establishment, I saw a man and woman each use two chairs to support their bulk, which would have dangerously overlapped a single chair.) The most unusual portion of this immense partaking of food was not in the thousands of calories consumed or the strange seating arrangement; it was that no one paid them a whit of attention, not even ill-mannered children seated nearby.

The United States government dictated that employers hire these food-driven people without discrimination. The excessively obese and painfully thin joined the indolent and mentally dull, fully protected from the needs of government and business to hire the most competent employees. Public school systems were ordered to hire these types. They became the examples for schoolchildren to follow, and they did.

Lawmakers, quacks, and television programs transformed self-indulgent social behavior into diseases and genetic "predisposition to" disorders, thus removing personal responsibility. Individual ac-

accountability for gorging on high-fat foods was ignored and replaced by a *Tillandsia usneoides* (Spanish moss) mentality — that is, growing from airborne particles and water alone. It was decided that one's genes predisposed one to obesity, not the number of calories consumed. Similarly, anorexia and bulimia were viewed solely as eating disorders, divorced from personal accountability and an unwillingness to work. While many acutely obese humans lard themselves to the extent that their locomotive abilities are impaired, self-starved human beings do not have the energy to work.

But the meandering of these overfed and underfed people into America's mainstream is only coincidental to the most important social change that took place during the Age of Affluence — dominant, achieving women avoiding procreation and child rearing.