



WHAT IS A TURNING POINT?

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A turning point is recognized as an event, or more likely a series of closely related events, that causes an important shift or change. The changes are historically significant and lasting and can be positive or negative for the human condition.

Turning points occur at different levels within human society. Significant turning points occur at the individual, group, community, state, and global levels. Identifying a turning point requires mapping clearly within a chronological framework a specific human condition, such as bondage, over a long period. Then the task is to recognize the shifts that take place regarding that condition, such as indentureship to slavery. Finally, the job of the historian is to identify the cause-and-effect relationship of events that led to the shift in human condition.

Some turning points often mentioned in history are the occurrence of the Black Death, the invention of the cotton gin or the clock, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the Battle of Saratoga. It is difficult if not impossible to know when the world has encountered a turning point ... only later, when everything is put into a long-term context, can we know if significant and long-lasting changes have occurred. One can argue whether or not an event or series of events (like a Revolution) was a turning point for all people or only for some. Sometimes it's just a great question to discuss!