

The _____
Revolution
Generation



HOW
MILLENNIALS
CAN SAVE
AMERICA
AND THE WORLD
(BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE)

JOSH TICKELL

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Certain names and identifying characteristics have been changed.

Revolutio

Latin root word for “revolution.”

Original meaning:

“rotation, revolving, or turning.”

DISCLAIMER: If you picked up this book hoping for the latest how-to-sell-more-garbage-to-young-people guide, then I'm going to save you some time. Stop reading here. There is an ever-growing stack of books about how to market to Millennials. This isn't one of them.

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The Revolution Generation

INTRODUCTION

Millennials, I have bad news and good news.

The bad news is, according to the media, you are the most lazy, narcissistic, entitled, self-absorbed generation ever to walk the earth.

The good news?

This entire book is about you.

But here's why it's different from everything else you've probably read.

The vast majority of what is published about your generation is an overt or covert attempt to teach people older than you how to hack your brain to make you do something, sell you something, or convert you into some form of belief system. I know this because I've surveyed literally thousands of articles, books, websites, and blogs on Millennials. And it's safe to say, Millennials, that you have been strategically targeted by the largest corporate-controlled media manipulation machine in history.

And that is just the beginning.

Even the established frame of reference for you, Millennials, the one in which you are lazy, narcissistic, entitled, and self-absorbed, is a purpose-driven creation. Behind its rinse-lather-repeat retelling by the media machine is an insidious goal—to disenfranchise, disempower, and shut you down before you even walk through the door.

That's why this book is a deviation from the mountains of regurgitated clickbait about you. Instead, it's a formula for how you accelerate, amplify, and strengthen what you are consciously and unconsciously doing: disrupting the world we once knew.

THE GREAT MILLENNIAL AWAKENING

By the time these words are printed, *all the members of your generation will have crossed the threshold into voting age*. By 2020, when the next

On the morning of November 9, 2016, one thing came into sharp focus: our democracy is an illusion.

US presidential election takes place, along with hundreds of state and local elections and the redrawing of countless voting districts, you, Millennials, will be the largest voting bloc in the United States.

For Millennials and people of all generations living in the United States, the 2016

US presidential election was a clarion call for action. On the morning of November 9, 2016, one thing came into sharp focus: our democracy is an illusion.

In our republic, and the money for which it stands, there are approximately four hundred registered lobbyists for every member of the House and Senate.¹ A seat in the House costs about \$1 million. The Senate is around \$40 million,² and the presidency? Well, that will set you back \$1 billion.³

Thus, in 2016, the popular vote, also known as the will of the people, was ignored. Whether you love her, hate her, or are indifferent, the fact remains that Hillary Clinton received over 2.5 million more votes than her opponent. But the woman Americans elected by popular vote did not become their president. Instead, a real estate mogul named Donald Trump was placed in the White House by a rigged system.

But the powers that be didn't count on one thing: they didn't realize that in rigging an election, they would awaken a sleeping leviathan.

More than any other group of people, your generation holds the power to determine the future.

With so much responsibility and so much at stake in our world, there are signs that a Great Millennial Awakening is under way. Inside of this awakening, more and more of you are finding your passion and marrying it with educations and jobs in which you are actively altering the structures of power. For millions of others, who find yourselves either unemployed or in a gig or job that doesn't change the world, you are engaging in online platforms from Change.org to Facebook initiatives.

This is why your Millennial Awakening is totally different from that of your parents', the people known as the Baby Boomer generation. In contrast to the Boomers, whose movements tended to be confrontational, the pragmatic optimism that runs strong in the veins of your generation finds many of you blending into the systems of power you wish to alter. So much of your civic tsunami is a silent and powerful undercurrent. Like one of those puzzle pictures, you can see it only when you know what to look for.

Your generation is taking over the world. In so doing, you are already revolutionizing old systems. But your biggest revolution is yet to materialize. I'm talking about the one in which you use your power to change the political course of history.

On the whole, the Millennial political activists, a number of whom

you will meet in the coming pages, are equal parts pragmatists, team players, builders of things, and idealists. If it is to take place, your Millennial revolution will be based in the practical, in compromise, in tangible solutions, and in bold new models. That's a good thing, because there has never been a greater need for compassionate, large-scale change than now.

For all you interlopers reading this—i.e., Baby Boomers and Gen Xers who are still trying to figure out Millennials—get ready to get woke. This is the story of an underdog generation that is dealing with collective trauma, catharsis, and empowerment and, most important, one that is about to pull its sword from the stone.

Steven Olikara, a first-generation Indian American Millennial, heads up the Millennial Action Project (millennialaction.org), a bipartisan group of about five hundred young elected officials at every level of office across the country. Says Olikara, “The definition of leadership involves bringing up people behind you. So, if you're a Baby Boomer or Gen Xer, one of the great legacies you can leave is to build the next generation of leadership: mentor, advise, cultivate, invest in the next generation of leaders.”

After all, a positive future for you, Millennials, is a positive future for our country and quite possibly our civilization.

All futures being possible, the opposite pathway is also plausible. As our world hurtles toward what the United Nations tells us will be ten billion souls by 2050, you could turn out to be a generation that unveils, through a combination of action and inaction, unimaginable darkness for humanity.

But let's not do that, okay?

Due to your connectivity, Millennials, you can move quickly, en masse, and in a completely unexpected direction. This may prove to be your single most important tactical advantage.

To make the most of that advantage, especially in the thousands of pivotal city, state, and federal elections that will happen in the upcoming months and couple of years, which collectively may decide how we deal with the future of life as we know it, it is important to understand a few fundamentals of structural change.

STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Think of this book as your training manual for how to make structural change.

Structural change is a term borrowed from economics that refers to bringing about a new order that forces businesses and the market itself to change. It often happens through politics when a new regime takes over or when major overhauls are made to laws that regulate business.⁴

The type of structural change of which I will speak in this book refers to deep, lasting change that alters the very structure of society itself. It's the kind of change that happened when the US Constitution was ratified and when the French Revolution took place.

On a foundational level, the structure of a society is its immutable commandments, core truths, inalienable rights, given norms, acceptable behaviors, allowable violations, and consequences for transgression of its rules. To be more specific, most societies, and especially modern societies, operate on three primary levels of structure.

1. The underlying culture—the beliefs, ideologies, language(s), religion(s), iconography, fashions, memes, and traditions
2. The political structures—the laws, governance, judicial system, punishment system, rules of business, and organization of commerce

3. The infrastructure—the energy systems, transportation systems, agricultural systems, cities, bridges, freeways, schools, etc.

Each layer builds upon the previous one. A freeway, for instance, can be built only when sanctioned by a law that is, in turn, driven by the collective belief that we must have a way to move our cars. To build on that example, the energy system and pipelines that deliver fossil fuel to gas stations to fuel those cars, can operate only with laws that give it power in a society that demands automobile transportation, regardless of the environmental or sociological impact. Infrastructure needs political power, which needs shared belief.

Now, here's the important part: to accomplish structural change, you must change all three layers.

Much of the Millennial Awakening has thus far failed to accomplish structural change because its change makers have targeted only the top layer, i.e., beliefs. This is the trap of many recent movements (think Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring, etc.). These and other widespread hearts-and-minds campaigns often begin with social media and engage tens and sometimes hundreds of millions of people. They bring to light dire injustices. They create petitions, there are protests, and they demand action. Yet, when all that collectivism alters neither the political landscape nor the social infrastructure, there is no structural change.

A telling example of this stagnation is America's gun control issue. It is unconscionable that, with all our technological wizardry in the second decade of the twenty-first century, we live in a society that willingly and knowingly puts semiautomatic weapons in the hands of unstable people who walk into our schools and shoot our children. The new conservative solution of putting guns into teachers' hands is symptomatic of a political leadership that has so wholly prostituted itself to special interests that our leaders are willing to sentence innocent

children to die. It's also desperate, reckless, idiotic, barbaric, and . . . I could go on.

Meanwhile, recent polls show the majority of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents support stricter gun control.⁵ So where are the laws, the codification, the infrastructure? How many years of congressional hearings, protests, and high school shootings do we need to live through before this issue is under control? How many more body bags filled with the dead bodies of our precious children will pile up, how many lives will be destroyed, and how many communities will be terrorized before the reasonable and sane and, let's just say it, *no-brainer* solution of genuine gun control is enacted?

My heart aches for the bereaved families and friends of the youth who have fallen at the hands of those who, in a functional democracy, would never have had access to guns in the first place. The politicians who ensure near-universal gun access are unpardonable and should be held to account. But inside the pain, the suffering, the fear, and the anger, there is a critical takeaway: we must no longer expect outcry alone to change policy.

Beliefs will not, by themselves, alter *policies*. Clicking is not voting—not yet, anyway. Tweeting is not engaging in the political process. Hashtagging is not running for office. Posting is not engaging voters in meaningful conversation. The Internet and smartphones are not the same as political reality. They are merely tools, and more often than not, they are tools of distraction.

And being distracted is exactly how the powers that be want you, Millennials. That way, they can keep vaporizing your votes, shutting you up, and shutting you down.

This is truth: politics trumps everything.

**Clicking is not
voting—not yet,
anyway. Tweeting is
not engaging in the
political process.
Hashtagging is not
running for office.**

(Yes, there's a pun in there somewhere.) No matter how loudly and how many you engage, or how intensely and how viscerally you demand change, our current version of paid-for democracy will only work against you until you take control of it, recode it, and reboot it.

The real question is not: When will our current flock of pay-to-play politicians work for the people? After all, puppets dance only for their masters. The real question is: How long are you, Millennials, going to wait before your revolution begins?

I say *you* because, as the largest voting bloc and the most Independent-registered generation at 50 percent, you are the change makers. Baby Boomers and Gen Xers who are also woke will champion you, coach you, mentor you, and support you. But there's no cavalry coming.

The revolution is wholly, completely, and 100 percent up to you.

Not only is the revolution up to you, but you are at an apex moment in history. With so much of our world in flux and with so much crisis, a critical window of opportunity is opening. All futures are possible right now. Everything is on the table. But mark my words, this open window won't last long.

I should know, because I've been doing my best to lay a little groundwork for your revolution my whole life.

SO, WHO AM I, ANYWAY?

Glad you asked . . .

I grew up in Louisiana in the shadow of the 150 oil refineries that dot the landscape of that swampy state. Those refineries form a "cancer alley" where pollution is so intense that cancer rates there are up to seven hundred times the national average.⁶ As a young boy, I watched members of my family get sick and die from pollution-related illness.

It was during my first high school science project that I initially saw the power of corrupt policy to hurt people. I tested the quality of local waterways only to find high levels of arsenic, lead, and other heavy poisons. But at the Louisiana State Science and Engineering Fair, a local EPA official, acting as one of the judges, disqualified my project because the results were “impossible.”

The official who judged my project was part of a state organization that was, and still is, funded by the very industries it is supposed to police. It’s no wonder that the data it had published on waterway pollution was a farce.

From there, I went to a very liberal liberal-arts school: New College of Florida. At the time, it was known for its lack of grades (pass/fail only) and its similar lack of clothes. I studied economics. But I became disillusioned when I learned that Adam Smith, the father of modern economics and the first theorist of capitalism, based his thesis on three deeply flawed assumptions: that slavery will always exist, that infinite consumption of resources is the basis for a healthy economy, and that greed is the central human motivation in a society.⁷ Instead of becoming an economic hit man, I graduated with a degree in sustainable living.

The year was 1997, the Gulf War was still a topic of hot debate, and the issue of global warming was just heating up. I wanted to show that, instead of going to war for oil and baking the planet, perhaps there was another way to make fuel. If you were watching TV in the late '90s, you might have glimpsed a funny-looking, skinny kid driving a spray-painted Winnebago called the Veggie Van around the country, picking up used french fry oil from Kentucky Fried Chicken dumpsters and turning it into biodiesel. Yep, that was me.

The Veggie Van turned into a lecture tour, which turned into making films about environmental topics. To date, my wife, Rebecca,

and I have made seven major documentaries on issues that have to do with the environment.

By the way, the book you're reading is also a documentary by the same name: *The Revolution Generation*, which you can see at RevolutionGeneration.us. Whereas the book gives you detail beyond what is possible in a film, the film opens a window into the lives of many of the key characters in this book. I encourage you to watch it.

Over the course of my twenty years working as a journalist, researcher, and environmental advocate, I've spent more than ten thousand hours interviewing experts in the fields of poverty, water, climate, agriculture, sustainability, energy, environmental justice, political history, and policy. I've met with President Bill Clinton and have been in a meeting with President George W. Bush. I've spent time with military units and four-star generals. I've traveled deep into the jungles of Central America and Nigeria. I've walked the halls of Congress speaking to and interviewing countless senators and representatives, including one of the truly good ones, Representative Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI), who happens to be a Millennial and is interviewed in this book.

After all this, one thing is clear: the challenges we face are interconnected, and so are the solutions.

Christin "Cici" Battle, the director of People for the American Way Foundation's Young People For (YoungPeopleFor.org), a national youth leadership training program, says, "As a black woman in this country, my survival is tied to reproductive justice. My survival is tied to climate justice. My survival is tied to immigration reform, and access to education, and access to fair housing and so on." Cici maintains that she and many other Millennials share an urgency around these issues, not only because they are tied together, but because they are questions of life and death.

If there is one set of demands that unifies the Millennial leaders

with whom I've spoken, it's to treat all humans—regardless of race, age, gender, creed, or origin—with dignity and respect, while at the same time ensuring that the planet that sustains us is protected and that greed and lust for profit are kept in check.

As the starting place for a true turning around or revolution, these demands give me great hope.

READY? SET? GO!

Millennials, this book might depress you temporarily, shock you at least a little, infuriate you a lot, and, I hope, ultimately inspire you to great action.

While the term *youth culture* has existed for some time, never before has a generation had such universality in its connectedness. Unlike former generations, Millennials, you have your own faiths, iconography, linguistics, behaviors, communications systems, and social strata. Because a culture shares distinct forms of organization, language, and identity, and you, as Millennials, have these systems unto yourselves, I believe that you represent the first true global youth culture.

Your generation has so many powerful emerging leaders that one could write many books about them and still only scratch the surface. However, it is important to note that this is not an inspirational book *about* visionary Millennial leaders. Rather, this is a training manual *for* visionary young leaders. And as such, it contains a critical element that I believe was taken from your generation: your past. Let me explain.

The powerful leaders I've met—both in the

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Millennial generation and among those who are older—have a nearly universal trait: they have a firm command of history. I believe that the instrument of true historical perspective, especially the actual events of the recent takeover of the American political system by corporate-backed interests, is the single biggest missing asset in the Great Millennial Awakening. Thus, this book unveils a largely covert sequence of political, social, and economic events that led to the current economic crisis in which you live. After all, in order to formulate an effective revolution, you must first understand how the current self-destructive economic and political models were created.

Your intense collectivism gives you a type of new youth power—power to heal, power to create, and power to destroy. It is possible, likely even, that your legacy will be to alter society so that it is unrecognizable to itself.

On a spiritual level, this book is an investigation into the soul of your generation. The French philosopher Voltaire wrote: “Each player must accept the cards life deals him or her: but once they are in hand, he or she alone must decide how to play the cards in order to win the game.” In the game of history each generation begins its journey with unique advantages and disadvantages, faces perils far greater than those that came before, must grapple with its demons and ultimately, must forge the future into existence.

Millennials, before you can collectively play your hand on the world stage, you will have to come to terms with the depth of your generation’s flaws and the enormity of the stakes of the game you are about to play.

If you were born on or after 1980, you stand at the precipice of an historical sea change in the course of our civilization. If you were born before 1980, this is your chance to support a generation that, by no fault of its own, has been shouldered with enormous social,

economic, and environmental burdens. Millennials, in a very short time, the choices you make will determine the course of billions of human lives and quite possibly, whether or not the next millennium of human history is one of abundance or apocalypse. It is my hope that in some tiny way, this book contributes to your creating the good kind of future.

Regardless of the direction you choose, I am convinced, now more than ever, that you, the Millennials, are the generation that will forever change our world.

