

Millennials

A Generation Born in Captivity

Josefine W.W. Parker (Voyager)

2018

a review of

Kids These Days: Human Capital and the Making of Millennials. Little, Brown and Company 2017

In 2002, my girlfriend and I communicated entirely online over AOL Instant Messenger. We shared seventh grade classes and lived two blocks away, yet we hardly spoke in person, let alone hung out.

I cringe when I'm described as Millennial, yet these teenage details remind me, this is my generation.

In *Kids These Days: Human Capital and the Making of Millennials*, Malcolm Harris describes my generation and our labor. From schooling to social media to athletics, the colossal amount of work we did from childhood through college is not seen as work but as learning. Harris peels back this pedagogical mask and exposes how schools are factories that produce human capital.

He analyzes the economic and social institutions that shape the Millennial generation, a way to view them as a class. Human capital, the value of a worker in the present to potentially make money in the future, is the rationale for all this education. It hasn't made us more money and has left us indebted. It's also a way Millennials have shouldered the cost of skill training, dually cutting corporate costs and growing the government's largest financial asset, student debt.

Harris tears apart the illusion of the Internet as democratic forum and lays out the reality of social media as corporations, how these platforms are our bosses, how we do a litany of unpaid labor for them. As creators, we are workers, and Internet labor has barely organized itself to negotiate collectively.

From parenting to policing, Millennials were "born in captivity" and are "cagey and anxious, as befits the most policed modern generation." Mass incarceration and captivity shape the core of our generation; Black, Native, and Latinx persecution is central.

Human capital isn't the only thing schools build. Through profiling and disciplinary measures, schools are producing more prisoners. Centering the rise of mass incarceration in the story of the Millennial places black resistance and the abolition of slavery at the heart of our generation.

It's an intellectually honest book with a strong analysis. Harris is at a loss as to what resistance to this system looks like, and he says so. He calls how authors end bleak analysis with weak resistance strategies, "Bop It Solutions." Instead of twisting, pulling, or bopping the toy, authors often ask us the readers to "Buy It! Vote It! Give It! Protest It!"

Harris puts forward a politics of refusal and says it's best not to bother with this hollow circle of ordained resistance. He asks Millennials to negate ourselves as a class and to "cut the knot of trend lines that defines our collectivity."

While this book lays out a useful analysis, other ways of resistance are necessary to get us out of this mess. Any revolution is still a continuation of conquest and colonization if we seek for European culture to flourish, anarchism

included. Thorough decolonization is needed of both social media and the technologies that enable it. They are violations of peoples and our obligation to land.

I can't ignore the increasing scale of "dead labor," all the brutality to peoples and land it takes to make these technologies. Whether online communication dominates people through social media or facilitates resistance, these means are colonizer ways jazzed up as revolution.

Harris has offered a crucial text to understand the Millennial generation, our labor and how it fits into society. It is a foundation to begin to conceive of our resistance. He isn't calling for us to get back wages from AOL on the data mined from our teenage relationships.

He calls for revolt, and revolt is a creature that requires diffuse, strange ways to thrive.

Josefine is a writer and performer living in rural Tennessee. She is working on a manuscript to offer new strategies in trans and women's liberation to dream the surgery and medicine we need. jww-parker.com

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