

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The Politics of the Millennial Generation

Oklahoma Political Science Association

November 10, 2011

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Let me say thank you for that kind introduction, John.

And also if I may take this opportunity to thank McGraw-Hill, who has sponsored my trip here, especially Gregg Moore, my publisher's representative, who is here today and has been indispensable in arranging my visit. So thank you Gregg.

As John mentioned, I have written an American Government text, *American Democracy Now*. I wanted to talk to you this evening not so much about the book, but rather a little about the paradigm shift that I saw that informed the premise of the book, and compelled me to write *American Democracy Now*. I'd like to tell you a bit about the story behind the book.

I teach at a state university. It is the second largest state university in New Jersey. When I started there in 1994, it had about 10,000 students; today it is bursting at the seams with 23,000. We are not an open enrollment institution, but because of our increasing size, we do face some of the same challenges that open enrollment institutions face

in terms of student-preparedness, the range of student abilities, and John and I and Monique and I have talked about this in great detail over the years.

The campus is located on the top of a mountain (hence the name Montclair), and outside my office is a spot called The Ridge that offers a beautiful view of the New York City skyline, and it was there on the morning of September 11, 2001 that I watched the second tower fall. This is my first visit to Oklahoma City, and today I went to honor the 168 victims of terrorism in the United States at the Oklahoma City National Memorial site. And as I looked out over The Field of Empty Chairs, it occurred to me that perhaps similarities in our personal experiences – if you were here in Oklahoma City in 1995. But you needn't to have been there – or here – to share in the feeling that those events happened to you.

In Montclair in 2001, everyone knew someone; some of us knew too many people who had perished. And so not only the faculty, the administrators, but also our students were faced with losing parents, losing spouses, losing friends, and neighbors. But it was not until I was asked to give a convocation address to the graduating class of 2005 – the students who had started their academic careers with us one week before the tragedy – that I started thinking about the enormous differences between these students and seven or eight years hence.

Despite a multi-front war, despite a polarizing president and a very divided country, the students that I saw emerging were different kinds of students. These were young people who had been transformed in a post-September 11th world. And it turns out that it wasn't just my students, it was yours too. Young people – the Millennial Generation, born between 1980 and 1995 – are a unique population nationally. They were shaped by a post-September 11th socialization process in their crucial formative years, and had not lived through the cynicism-producing events of the 1970s – the war in Vietnam, the Pentagon Papers, and Watergate – that had eroded so much of the confidence Americans had in their government.

After September 11th, 70 percent of Americans say that the attacks were the most memorable event of their lives.¹ Nationally, their impact

¹ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/4909/Terrorism-United-States.aspx>.

would be felt most strongly by young people, the Millennial Generation.

In fact, John Della Volpe, a pollster who helped Harvard University students construct a national poll of young people's views noted that "The attacks of 9/11 . . . changed the way the Millennial Generation thinks about politics. Overnight, their attitudes were more like [those of] the Greatest Generation [the generation of Americans who lived through the Great Depression and World War II]".²

In the aftermath of September 11th, suddenly 60 percent of college students trusted the government to do the right thing.³

Ninety-two percent considered themselves patriotic. ⁴

After September 11th, more than 70 percent of college students gave blood, donated money, or volunteered in relief efforts.⁵

Nearly 70 percent volunteered in their communities (up from 60 percent in 2000).⁶

And Eighty-six percent believed their generation was ready to lead the United State into the future.⁷

Today, there remain significant differences in the political outlook of Millennials compared to other generations. While they are more susceptible to concerns about economic uncertainty, while they acknowledge their personal economic outlook may be bleak, they also are more likely to believe that the government should do more to solve problems. They are more likely to support an "activist government"

² Carl M. Cannon. 2007. "Generation 'We:' The Awakened Giant," *National Journal*. March 9.

³ Institute of Politics at Harvard University. "Attitudes Towards Politics and Public Service: A National Survey of College Undergraduates." April 11-20, 2000. <http://www.iop.harvard.edu/pdfs/survey/2000.pdf>, accessed August 16, 2007.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Op. Cit. Canon.

than older generations with 53 percent of Millennials thinking the government should do more to solve problems, compared with 43 percent of Baby Boomers.⁸

While their opinions of President Obama have declined with the rest of the country, they still rate him more favorably than older generations: President Obama's favorability rating stands at 57 percent.⁹

Though they are still slightly more likely to identify as Independents (38 percent), Millennials nationally are much more likely to be Democrats (37 percent) than Republicans (22 percent).¹⁰

Millennials are more diverse than older Americans. Today, 61 percent of those aged under 30 identify themselves as white, compared with 70 percent of those over 30. They are much more likely to be Hispanic, and much more likely to be of more than one race.¹¹

But today's minority youth are different from their older counterparts: increasing proportions of them are voting, even when you compare 2010's mid-term election, which saw a four percent increase in African American youth turnout when compared to 2006's mid-terms. In the 2008 elections, African American youth had the highest percentage of votes of any youth racial or ethnic group since 1972.¹²

And more Hispanic young people are voting too: 15 percent of young voters in the 2010 mid-term elections were Hispanic, whereas only 7 percent of voters over 30 were.¹³

⁸ Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next. Pew Research Center. February 2010. Chapter 8: Politics, Ideology and Social Engagement. <http://pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/10/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau. Current Population Survey 2009.

¹² The Youth Vote in 2010: Final Estimates Based on Census Data. CIRCLE. Page 4. <http://www.civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/The-CPS-youth-vote-2010-FS-FINAL1.pdf>.

¹³ Young Voters in 2010 Election. CIRCLE. Page 2.

<http://www.civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/2010-Exit-Poll-Fact-Sheet.-corrected-Nov-10.pdf> Young voters: 66 percent white, 14 percent black, 15percent Hispanic, 3percent Asian, 2percent "all others". Also, 7

So, what we know is that Millennials are a bit different than older Americans. As a whole, they are a bit more liberal. They are more diverse. They are more patriotic.

But these differences are more than abstract ideas.

In fact, Millennials are a different type of American citizen, not just in their thoughts, but also in their deeds.

Many of them were part of the first generation to be required to undertake some form of community service as part of their high school or college career. Today, they are the most likely age group to have volunteered in the past 12 months,¹⁴ and 85 percent of them believe that volunteering for community service is an effective way to solve the nation's problems.

Between 2008 and 2010, nearly 11 million Millennials volunteered with an organization and over a quarter of them had donated more than \$25 to charity.¹⁵

Peace Corps applications have increased more than 50 percent in the past five years.¹⁶

Millennials use their purchasing power – whether through their own income or their parents' dollars that they spend – to express their commitments to social and political ideals. Fifty-three percent of them

percent said they were gay, lesbian or bisexual. Voters 30 and older: 80 percent white, 10 percent Black, 7 percent Hispanic, 1 percent Asian, 2 percent "all others". Also, 4 percent were gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

¹⁴ Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next. Pew Research Center. February 2010. Chapter 8: Politics, Ideology and Social Engagement.

<http://pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/10/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf>. 57 percent of Millennials say they had volunteered in the last 12 months (going back from Feb 2010). 54 percent of Gen Xers said they had, 52 percent of Baby Boomers, and 39 percent of Silent Generation.

¹⁵ Civic Life of Millennials. Civic Life in America- Data on the Civic Health of America. <http://civic.serve.gov/special/Millennials>.

¹⁶ Millennial Momentum: How a New Generation Is Remaking America. Morley Winograd, Michael D. Hais (page 262). Applications jumped 40percent in 2009 after a 16percent increase in 2008.

have bought a product that supports a cause this year (compared to the overall average of 41 percent).¹⁷

Now while all of these characteristics – these changed attitudes, these different actions -- may be interesting, we know that many of these characteristics have been shared with previous generations – the Baby Boom generation in particular.

Socialized by their Greatest Generation parents, the Baby Boomers optimistically sought to change the world. And they did, through the social movements they shaped and through the sheer size of their demographic which has rendered them a political *tour de force* – a determinant of American politics. But that optimism, that idealism, was beaten out of many Boomers by the pervasive cynicism of the scandals of the 1970s that caused a dramatic and what would appear to be irrevocable decline in the trust of public institutions – in Congress, the President, and the Courts.¹⁸

But I would argue to you that the patriotism, the activism, and the optimism of the Millennial Generation represents an enormous potential not so much because of the uniqueness of their views but because of the intersection – the kismet, if you will, between having the political optimism of their generation, a generation socialized to participation, which is sitting on the threshold of a transformative moment where unique tools are newly available to them to articulate and actualize their viewpoints

My friends, in my view we are standing on the threshold of a Gutenberg Moment. It is 1439, and we are witnessing an unstoppable transformation in how people learn. Technology is the Johannes Gutenberg's movable type of the new millennium. And like the mid-1400s, that transformation in the way information was disseminated meant a transformation in how people learned. Then, changing how people learn – and importantly the number of people who are empowered to learn – spawned the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, paving the way for the Reformation, the ideals of which

¹⁷ 2010 Cone Cause Evolution Study. Pages 12-13

<http://www.coneinc.com/files/2010-Cone-Cause-Evolution-Study.pdf>.

¹⁸ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/28795/Low-Trust-Federal-Government-Rivals-Watergate-Era-Levels.aspx>.

fostered the notion that people -- rather than those ordained by divine right -- could rule.

The transformative nature that technology is having on our everyday lives and its residual effect on our scientific community, on our world of art, and on political lives makes for this Gutenberg Moment. Until mass-produced movable type, the printed word was an elite commodity available to the select few so that knowledge itself was determined by assets.

Today, we see that the widespread availability of technology -- its decreasing price point, its portability --mean it has the potential to become the great equalizer.

Today, authoritarian governments that attempt to control the flow of information to limit their citizens' availability to communicate and to organize are overthrown on Facebook.

Or even Match.com.

One of my favorite stories of the transformative potential of technology in the political sphere was the story of Omar Mahmoudi, the Libyan businessman who helped organize a revolution by posting coded messages on the Muslim dating site Mawada, to avoid detection by Libyan secret police, who monitored Facebook and Twitter.¹⁹

We all know the role that technology is playing in organizing, mobilizing and fundraising for the Occupy movement; and we know that that strategy will be replicated by other protest organizations in the future.

But technology need not be revolutionary to be transformative.

In New York City, you can use a smart-phone app to pay your water bill, geo-tag a photo of a pothole, or even complain to the mayor. He may respond on YouTube.²⁰

¹⁹ <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/muslim-dating-site-madawi-seeds-libyan-revolution/story?id=12981938>.

²⁰ Adam Green. 2011. Tech Savvy. *Vogue*. November: 156.

Using Facebook and Flickr, Twitter and Tumblr, cities and states can use technology to communicate with residents during natural disasters, oftentimes even when residents are lacking electrical power. And residents can ask questions of government officials, and get specific answers quickly.

Eventually we will use Foursquare, a location-based social networking site, to check out the health department ratings of nearby restaurants on your smartphone.²¹

One of the largest (and perhaps most interesting area) that will be effected by technological change is in absentee balloting, in which service members and expatriates living throughout the world will be enfranchised using technology. This will prove increasingly important for countries with high numbers of educated citizens living abroad, including India and Turkey and other Diaspora. It is anticipated that technology will enable citizens living abroad to vote using ATM machines by 2014.²²

And of course the role that technology is playing in our own electoral politics is enormous. One of its most important democratizing effects is taking campaigns off of television, and moving them into the less-expensive, more available digital world.

Today, micro-targeting enables campaigns to target specific individuals for a variety of purposes, including votes, fund raising, and grassroots organizing.

For example, E-motive enables a canvasser for a candidate, party, or interest group to load a walk list into a smart phone, integrated with Google maps. The canvasser can enter residents' survey responses into smartphone or I-Pad, where they also can access to already-prescribed talking points or even compelling videos. Canvassers can immediately sign residents up for text or email subscriptions. Once back at headquarters, phone syncs with data bases. Smart phones apps will

²¹ Ibid.

²² Noah Rothman. 2010. "Absentee Voting: A Global Challenge," *Campaigns and Elections Magazine*. Nov 12.
<http://www.campaignsandelections.com/campaign-insider/171782/absentee-voting-a-global-challenge-thtml>.

continue to facilitate increasingly sophisticated targeting operations, and may change how every aspect of politics (from how voter registration to grassroots organizing and fundraising is done).²³

Vote IQ uses algorithms like those on match.com to connect individuals with candidates throughout the country who share viewpoints and ideologies; provides candidates with a potential fundraising source.

Google “remarketing” tracks visit to candidate or issue sites, then advertises membership or solicits funds on a page with Google ads – so for example, you visit Rick Perry’s campaign website and then go to read the newspaper on-line, where a Google ad soliciting donations for Romney’s campaign appears.

And we know how candidates and governments are using Facebook and other social networking sites enable groups or individuals direct communication with “friends” or constituents.

Twitter and other micro-blogging sites enable short communication, oftentimes specifically targeted at on-the-move audiences) or empowering individuals to collect information at opposition events.

QR codes enable individuals who seek information direct access to targeted websites sponsored by political entities.

Microsoft Cloud for Politics may drastically alter the post-2012 political arena by providing one-stop shopping for groups to manage communications; build a Web and social network presence, raise money online; advertise through phone, e-mail, text and organize get-out-the-vote activities.

Having said all this, it is time to tell you what you know. The Millennial Generation is hard-wired to rely on technology. I have three children at home, who are 16, 10, and 8. Though I purportedly have a one-hour of screen time per day rule, it is not unusual to walk in and find my 16-year-old daughter simultaneously working on an assignment on her lap-

²³ <http://www.campaignsandelections.com/campaign-insider/172647/the-politics-online-conference-2010.shtml>.

top, listening to her iPod, collaborating on an assignment with friends via text messaging. I am not even sure how to count the screens.

But what I know is that she, that my students, that your students, are hard-wired to technology in ways previous generations are not.

More than a quarter of Millennials believe that using social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter have *more impact* than in-person advocacy in terms of political campaigning, another quarter thinks it has the same impact.²⁴

More than two-thirds of Americans under 30 use a news aggregation service, some relying on human-determined content like *The Drudge Report* or the *Huffington Post*.²⁵ Others are relying on computer-algorithm generated clustered news found on sites like Google news.

Americans under 30 are twice as likely as older Americans to get political updates via cellphone.²⁶

Three quarters of them have social networking pages, and the majority of them believe that the use of technology brings them closer to their friends and family rather than making them more isolated.²⁷

And so if we now add up the sum of these parts – the differences in political outlook, spawned in the wake of a national tragedy, the predisposition to activism, shaped in a context that values political activism, and add to that the revolutionary news means available to convey those values in a medium in which there are the most comfortable...

²⁴ Harvard Biannual Political Survey- Press Release.
<http://www.iop.harvard.edu/Research-Publications/Survey/Spring-2011-Survey>.

²⁵ <http://isedb.com/20100319-3365.php>.

²⁶ <http://www.rbr.com/tv-cable/20151.html>. 18% of Americans get political updates via phone/mobile device. 18-29 year-olds are twice as likely to do so than those 65 and older.

²⁷ Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next. Pew Research Center. February 2010. Chapter 4 <http://pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/10/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf>.

Someone recently posted a video on my Facebook that depicted a little baby about a year old, sitting on a patio, touching the pages of her mother's magazine. As she touched and she poked, she became increasingly frustrated. "It doesn't work," she said. Inside, yet another magazine: more pincher grasps, more poking, but still, "it doesn't work." Finally in front of an iPad, the baby poked, the screen lit up, she swooped, the screen changed. "This one works."²⁸

That is her experience; that will be how she learned to turn pages.

Just as novice students of 1450 learned to turn pages of a book printed using mechanical type; just as Gutenberg transformed learning, and science, and religion, and politics.

And like in the mid-15th century, there are those in the discipline today who question the legitimacy of those new forms of learning.

Though written before technology revolutionized learning and politics, Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*, which bemoans the decline in social capital in the United States as witness by decreased participation in civic organizations (including bowling leagues),²⁹ misses the transformed and transforming nature of social connections, of civic participation, of the new currency of social capital.

As political scientists, I believe it is imperative that we refrain from acting like the monks of Gutenberg's day, who turned their noses up at movable type books, who sought to protect the status quo because their lives revolved around the hand-written word.

As teachers, I think it is imperative that we recognize that the coalescence of the values of a generation, their strong inclination toward public service, and the transformative means by which they can participate in politics will mean the creation of a new knowledge-based economy, a new Renaissance, if you will.

As both scholars and teachers, I believe that that it is our obligation to recognize the potential transformative value of this coalescence, and

²⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXV-yaFmQNk>.

²⁹ Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Touchstone.

that we include this as part of our research agenda—that we analyze and understand the importance and the value of new forms of political participation.

It is also my view that as teachers, in nurturing the potentiality of a civically engaged citizenry sitting in our classes, we convey to them, instruct them, in the invaluable tools that they can use to shape political life in their community, in their state, and in their country.

And so that... is the story of the book.