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The Hunger Games and the Gen Z Revolution

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The Hunger Games and the Gen Z Revolution

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Introduction

Gen Z kids are not doing well. A virus has virtually shut down the entire globe, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, and trust in the government is less than ever. And yet, Gen Z is supposed to be the ones to fix it. It all feels like a dystopian novel, one that happened to be popular with Gen Z kids, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. The series sold over 65 million copies and was the first in a years long trend of YA dystopian novels. But the trilogy (*The Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire*, and *Mockingjay*) has impacted the youth of America more than just as a new favorite novel; it lit a spark of revolutionary ideas in them, like fighting for the rights of minorities like the poor, calling out dishonesty in authority, and being authentic over approval from the powerful. It's impacted this generation so much that some are calling Gen Z, "Generation K", after Katniss Everdeen, the main character of the series. But is all of this true, or is it just kids being "sensitive"?



What is Gen Z?

- Generation Z is children born from 1997-2012¹
- Gen Z kids are known for being particularly more left leaning than generations before them¹
- Gen Z is the most racially diverse generation yet¹
- Gen Z and Millennials accumulate just 6.3% of US wealth, while Baby Boomers at their age had 13.2%²

Synopsis

The Hunger Games follows Katniss Everdeen, a teenage girl from Panem, a country that now occupies what once was North America. The Capitol every year randomly chooses 24 12-18 year olds to compete in a fight to the death until one remains. Katniss volunteers in her sister's place, winning in the process with her star-crossed lover Peeta, after threatening to commit suicide if they both weren't allowed to win. This act sparks a revolution in the people of the districts of Panem, Katniss becoming their symbol and leading them to fight against the oppressive government.

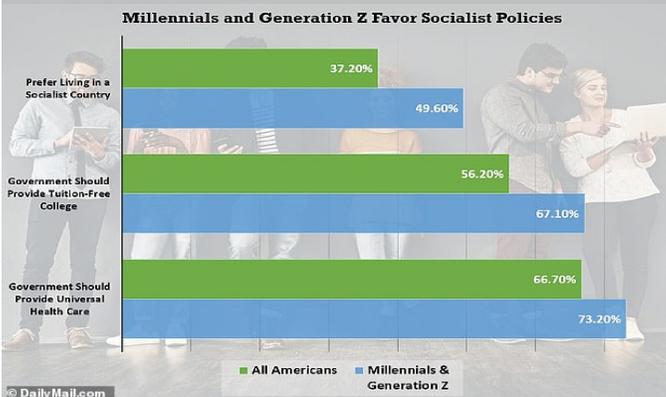
Class Inequality

The main struggle for Katniss/the districts is in class disparity. The white rich own 99% of the wealth, while the non-white poor get 1%.

- Poorest districts described as mainly non-white, while wealthier ones are mostly white (THG 8)
- Dissonance between Capitol and districts; Effie shames last year's tributes for eating "like savages", Katniss knows they were starving (THG 44-45)
- Poor people > to be reaped for the games, they take tesserae, a system where a child gets food in exchange for putting their name in more times (THG 13)
- Wealthy districts cheat/train their kids, consistently winning more than others, receiving more money and food, so it cycles (THG 94, CF 7, 31)

Gen Z particularly struggles with income inequality and is active in trying to fight it.

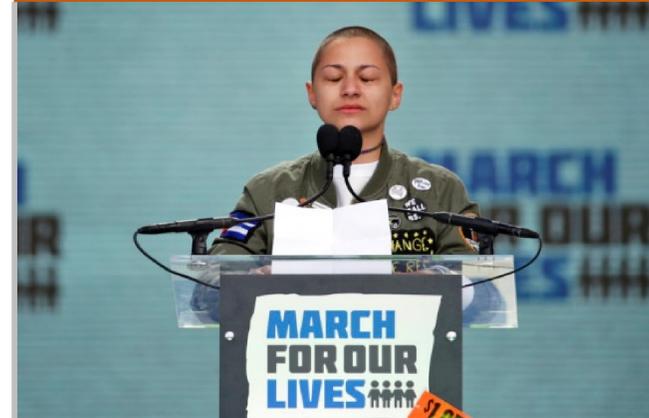
- Gen Z and Millennials have higher opinion of socialism than other generations, more in favor of free healthcare, free college³, and raising taxes on rich⁷



Credit to the Daily Mail. "Half of young Americans would rather live in a socialist country, survey finds"

- POCs > to live in poverty, due to cycle of not getting same level of opportunity/education as white people⁴
- Neoliberalism is pervasive in US, running on idea of paying workers as little as they'll take and forcing them to pay as much as they will for basic needs like healthcare/housing or risk dying, because there's "no alternative"⁵
- A popular phrase from young people is "Eat the Rich", from socialist theorist Jacques Rousseau⁶

Performance and Propaganda



Panem is run on manipulation, fear-mongering, and the show of the Games. Katniss/the districts see right through it, following authentic, honest leaders.

- Every year, Reaping starts with speech about history of Panem and how Capitol had mercy on districts, who tried to rebel 74 years ago, the games being punishment. (THG 18)
- Katniss' mentors advise her to pretend to like Capitol as a strategy to stay alive. Katniss struggles to follow this, as she openly despises Capitol. (THG 117-118)
- Capitol citizens believed Katniss and Peeta's love story while people in districts didn't, seeing their near-suicide as an act of rebellion (CF 21)
- Capitol recycles old footage of District 13 to make districts think it's still destroyed when it's really where rebellion is building (CF 146, 163 M 18)
- Katniss does terrible at filming scripted propaganda for rebels, but when put in action and off-the-cuff, she thrives (M 74-76)
- Katniss is constantly searches for others' ulterior motives, like President Coin being simply power-hungry (M 378)

Gen Z kids were born in the social media age with a huge exposure to news every day

- Gen Z prefers authenticity over performance, wanting people in their life to be themselves rather than fake⁸
- Gen Z more distrusting of authority than past generations⁹
- Gen Z is good at spotting inauthenticity, like Emma Gonzalez's "We Call BS" speech in 2018¹⁰
- America is guilty of using fear-based tactics when covering the Iraq War, a war that many are calling unnecessary¹¹

Conclusion

There are stories that we read and watch that stick with us for the rest of our lives. Whether it be that we put our Hogwarts house in our twitter biography, or keep the hardbacks on our shelves well into adulthood, art changes us and shapes us into the humans we become. But only once in a lifetime does a work of art impact and shape an entire generation into fighting for causes that they believe in. Only one in a lifetime does a work of art inspire an entire generation to stand up and say, "I won't take this anymore. I refuse to live like this." Collins's trilogy is a cultural landmark that will be talked about for years and will be looked back on as the match that lit a fire within an entire generation.

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