

The following is an excerpt from the book...

Liu, Eric. *You're More Powerful Than You Think: A Citizen's Guide to Making Change Happen*. Public Affairs New York, 2017. Print.

Definitions for Paragraphs 1-4

- **Begat: gives "birth" to**
- **Populism: politics that strives to appeal to ordinary people who feel that their concerns are disregarded by established elite groups.**
- **Libertarians: citizens that believe that government should not be powerful and should not overly control people's lives**

(1) Here is what people have been doing the last few years.

The Arab Spring, the Orange Revolution, the Maidan protests, the Green Revolution, the Cedar Revolution, the indignados, the Umbrella Revolution, the Brexit, anti-government protests in Iceland, Poland, South Korea, Ethiopia, Hungary, Thailand, Brazil. In the United States, we've had Occupy Wall Street, the Tea Party, the Dreamers, Black Lives Matter, \$15 Now, Standing Rock, Feel the Bern, and then, of course, the Trump Train.

(2) Not every one of these movements has, in a conventional sense, "succeeded." In fact, most have not (yet). But they're all connected. And they're still coming. Occupy begat We Are the 99% begat Fast Food Forward begat \$15 Now begat the Bernie Sanders campaign. The Tea Party harnessed a radical anti-establishment spirit that seized and then consumed the Republican Party, fueled Donald Trump's election, unleashed a new populism, and created a "none-of-the-above" opening for libertarians.

(3) This is a moment of citizen power. And that is nowhere more visible than in the turbulence of American political and civic life.

(4) The coming-out of undocumented immigrants; the gradual then sudden triumph of marriage equality activists; the counteroffensive for religious liberty; demonstrations against racial inequity; demonstrations for free speech; the rising voices of sexual assault survivors; the emergence of moms for gun responsibility; the unadorned anger of nativists and white nationalists; the rise of Native American environmental activism; the obliteration of elite gatekeepers in party politics, consumer markets, mass media, pop culture—all are evidence of the same bewildering reality.

Question #1: What do you need clarified about the preceding paragraphs? Where do you fit in the descriptions of the preceding paragraphs? Why do you fit these? If you don't fit any of these descriptions, explain why you don't.

(5) The old deal is dead. There is no new deal yet.

Question #2: Do you have ideas for a "new deal"? Why or why not?

Definitions for Paragraphs 6-8:

- **Utopian: a perfect world**
- **Social Contracts: The ways citizens understand how society works**
- **Commons: Our society as shared by all**
- **“Goes to seed...”: isn’t used, disappears (kind of...)**

(6)Citizens today no longer have to accept the bundles—the one-size-fits-all packages—that the monopolies of politics and business have long forced upon us. Unbundling is everywhere, from how we get the news to how we listen to music or watch television to how we catch a ride across town to how we label ourselves by party, gender, or race.

(7)There is an upbeat, utopian version of this story that's all about an explosion of individual choice. But of course the unbundling is happening to us as well, in ways that have eaten away at our cohesion, security, and dignity. Social contracts—of trust and common cause—have been unbundled by technologies that sift and sort us ever more narrowly. Collective economic arrangements—pensions, benefits, livable wages, worker safety—have been unbundled by the Uberization and globalization of work.

(8)As a result, in greater and growing numbers, we Americans no longer feel in control of our own everyday lives...As we retreat to smaller circles of kith and kin, the commons goes to seed...

Question #3: What does Liu mean that things are “unbundled”? What do you think might happen if the commons goes to seed?

(9)What's new is that this unprecedented concentration of power is now giving rise to a Great Push Back: a sprawling, disorderly effort by citizens of the right, the left, and the scrambled everywhere-else—people of every color and faith—to challenge monopolized power in all its forms and to demand a greater say in how things are run...

(10)But here's the thing: there is a gap between making demands and making them happen. It is the gap between the rhetoric of revolution and the actual changes in values, systems, habits, and skills that add up to a revolution...

Question #4: Is America experiencing a revolution? Explain your reasoning.

(11)Let's start with a simple definition: power is the capacity to ensure that others do as you would want them to do. If that sounds menacing or distasteful, or makes you feel squeamish, I understand. And I invite you to get over it...power is no more inherently good or evil than fire or physics. It just is. The only question is whether we will try to understand and harness it.

(12)If power is the capacity to ensure that others do as you would want them to do, civic power is that capacity exercised by citizens in public, whether in elections or government or in social and economic arenas. I say "ensure" rather than "compel" or "make," because power is as often about persuasion...as coercion.

Question #5: Do you believe you have power? Do you think American citizens have power? Explain your reasoning.

(13)Power in civic life takes many forms: force, wealth, state action, ideas, social norms, numbers. And it flows through many conduits: institutions, organizations, networks, laws and rules, narratives and ideologies. Map these forms and conduits against each other and you get what we think of as "the power structure."

(14)But the problem today is that too many people aren't able to draw, read, or follow such a map. Too many people are profoundly—and willfully—illiterate in power: what it is, what forms it takes, who has it, who doesn't, why that is, how it is exercised.

(15)As a result, it's become ever easier for those who do understand how power operates in civic life...of wielding disproportionate influence...

Definition for paragraph 16:

- **Sordid: dirty, distasteful**

(16)There are some young people who think the whole business is sordid and would rather do community service or direct action and exempt themselves from politics altogether...

(17)There are the naïve who believe that good things just happen, and the cynical who believe that bad things just happen: the fortunate and unfortunate alike who believe their lot is simply what happens to them, rather than the alterable result of a prior arrangement...of power...

Question #6: Would you use your power if you learned how to? Explain your reasoning.

Definition for paragraph 18:

- **Fatalism: belief that a person can't change his/her circumstances and/or society**

(18)As a result of this creeping public fatalism, we now have depressingly low levels of civic participation, knowledge, engagement, and awareness. Political life has been subcontracted out to a band of professionals—money people, message people, outreach people. The rest of us are made to feel like amateurs, as in suckers. We become demotivated to learn more about how things work. And this pervasive power illiteracy becomes, in a vicious cycle, both a cause and a consequence of the concentration of opportunity, wealth, and clout in society.

(19) This is why reimagining civics as the teaching and learning of power is so necessary—now perhaps more than at any time in the last century. If you don't learn how to practice power, someone else will do it for you—in your name, on your turf, with your voice, and often against your interests...

(20) And the core question of such power is this: Who decides?

(21) Every aspect of collective existence in a complex society is the result of countless layers of countless decisions, including decisions not to challenge long-ago decisions.

(22) Think: How did the railroad tracks get put down in my town and who decided what would be the wrong side and the right side of those tracks? Why does one employer get tax breaks and subsidies but not another? Why is this community center getting funded instead of that one? Why a new jail instead of preschool? Who decided that...?

(23) The citizen's view is by definition greater than the self because the citizen—a member of the body, a contributor to community—is by definition acting in a social context. To be sure, the citizen's view of power is not selfless. It is often quite selfish. But whereas self-help and self-advancement focus on the individual, often in isolation, citizen power is about identity and action in the collective: how we make change happen together...

Question #7: Do you agree with Liu's definition of citizen power? Why or why not?

(24) You may not like the positions or beliefs of some of the people you will meet. But a skillful citizen finds lessons everywhere...

(25) It (power) is also a matter of moral imagination... We are the very source of power. We do not just receive power as it passes through us or acts upon us. We generate it. We give it.

(26) What I am saying is that power is a gift...

Definitions for Paragraph 27

- **Secular: non-religious**
- **Civic religion: "faith" in society and its values**

(27) I happen not to have been raised in any faith tradition. But in my own secular-spiritual American brand of civic religion—based on the texts and acts of our founding creed—I believe that human dignity requires freedom and the power to make of oneself and one's world all that one can. Such power is a gift, a human birthright. Citizenship of the United States, for those of us with the dumb luck to have been born into it, wraps that universal gift in a particular form of privilege—unearned at birth, perhaps, but redeemable by a lifetime of deeds and contributions.

Question #8: Do you think power is a birthright? Why or why not?

Definitions for Paragraph 28:

- **Inalienable**

(28)...power is a gift in the sense of a talent—and more than that, an obligation to pass the talent on. When we say someone is a gifted painter or singer or runner or healer, we mean she has been given something special and precious. We also imply she has a responsibility to cultivate and to share that something special with the world. She has been endowed not only with inalienable rights but also inalienable duties....

Question #9: Do you believe in inalienable rights? Do you believe in inalienable duties? Explain your reasoning.

(29)The...most literal, and most important way that power is a gift is simply that we give it. I cannot underscore that enough. We give it. Every person and institution with power in our society today has it because we give it to them. I know it does not feel that way. Most of us don't remember actively giving power to those people and institutions. But we did. We do.

(30)...We give it away by not organizing or participating, out of a fatalistic sense that it doesn't matter, that "my vote won't count anyway." But mark well: there is no such thing as not voting. Not voting is voting—to hand power to others, whose interests may be inimical to your own. And not organizing is organizing—for the people who mean to dominate you.

Question #10: As a U.S. citizen, how do you see yourself and power? Will you use it, give it away, or something else? Explain your reasoning.

The following quote is not in Liu's book:

"People give up their power by thinking they don't have any."
Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*

Question #11: Is Walker accurate? Explain your reasoning.