

Video 2

What is a Renaissance?

Part One

Hello! I am very glad you are with us today. Our classroom reaches all the way around the world, so you are in very good company.

The title of our talk today is **What is a Renaissance?** A Renaissance. Part One.

During our first talk, I said to you, “Young people of the world, you have a choice, between unprecedented catastrophe, or unprecedented progress.” I would like to talk with you today about that progress. We are still early in the 21st century. You are still early in your lives. In a way, you and the 21st century are growing up together.

Your generation has the extraordinary opportunity to design and build a global Renaissance. In fact, we are already in the early years of a global Renaissance, but this new epoch is still fragile, and the progress we have made so far could easily be devastated by the ravages of climate change, or war, or both.

Yes, the title of our talk today is **What is a Renaissance?** A Renaissance is a new way of thinking. The first Renaissance began in Italy around the year 1500, then it spread through Europe during the 1500s, or the 16th Century. Very briefly, the great thinkers of the time—the artists, the writers, the philosophers, the inventors, the scientists—turned their attention away from God and religion, which had been the focus during the Middle Ages, and now focused increasingly on man himself, and to a much lesser extent, women. Leonardo da Vinci painted a Madonna holding the Christ child, but he also painted Mona Lisa and her mysterious smile. Leonardo da Vinci made drawings of human dissections as he studied our internal organs. Michelangelo sculpted David, who was not a deity, not a saint, but a shepherd. Michelangelo painted, on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, a portrait of God about to touch his finger to the finger of Adam, giving life to this human creature. During the Renaissance of the 16th Century, the human creature stood in the spotlight at the center of the stage.

The next period of fervent intellectual growth was the **Enlightenment**, which began in Paris, with contributions from other parts of Europe. During the 1700s, or

the 18th Century—which the French called “Le Siècle des Lumières”, the century of lights—a new way of thinking spread not only throughout Europe, but as far as the British colonies in the New World. Political writers examined an entirely new concept, the human rights of every individual. When Thomas Jefferson wrote, in 1775 (1776!), that “All men are created equal”, he expressed the spirit of the Enlightenment. The newborn American republic was based on the concept of Democracy (although neither women nor slaves could vote). The French Revolution of 1789, based on the trinity of “liberté, égalité, fraternité”, “liberty, equality, fraternity”, was the ultimate but violent flowering of the spirit of the Enlightenment.

The 16th Century, the Renaissance, the 18th Century, the Enlightenment, and so, maintaining that pattern of every two centuries, shouldn't we have another epoch of new thinking in the 20th Century? No, we did not. Instead, we had a century which launched, in 1914, the most horrible war in human history, followed, in 1939, by a war which was even worse. Followed, through the second half of the 20th Century, by the Cold War, during which nuclear weapons threatened to destroy human civilization, and perhaps all of life, on planet Earth.

We *can* say that during the 20th Century, the concept of non-violent protest was born, first in India with Gandhi's leadership, and then in America with the leadership of Martin Luther King. But as King's civil rights marchers were walking peacefully through the streets of America, American bombs were crashing down on innocent civilians in Vietnam. No, this was not a century of new thinking, but an unrelenting repeat of all the evils of previous centuries.

Now, with much of the 21st Century still ahead of us, we could rightly say that the time has come for another **Renaissance**. And the people most able to design and build that Renaissance are the young people in countries around the world, *you*—the First Global Generation in Human History—*you*, with your energy, with your clear sense of right and wrong, with your global communication, and with your shared understanding—your shared understanding—that unless you rise up together to meet the great challenges of global warming, and war, you are doomed. You are doomed to be the end of our long human journey.

Your Global Generation can work with scientists around the world—such as the thousands of scientists who for the past forty years have contributed to the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the IPCC, which during the past

several decades has worked to provide *the truth* about climate change. Students and scientists, combining professional wisdom with youthful determination: together, you can heal our ailing Earth. Your global team will of course include experts in the clean energy industry, engineers and visionaries who are already building the foundation for the **Renaissance of the 21st Century**.

This global team—a team unprecedented in all of human history—will include indigenous peoples from around the world, experts at living in harmony with nature for far longer than the recording of human history. By the time Michelangelo painted the two fingers about to touch each other, the Sami in northern Europe had been herding their reindeer on the tundra for thousands of years.

Young people of the world, *you*, the long human journey—which began in Africa three million years ago, and which has taken us, with our telephones and jet planes and heart surgery and global internet, to every corner of the planet—now stands at the brink of climate catastrophes that could end our human journey within this century. You might well hold your grandchild in your arms as the world burns around you, and the final human voices that you hear are screams of anguish.

But you have a choice, *you* have a choice, to replace the coal and oil with sunshine and wind. And to replace the hideous *business* of war with an intelligent, just, and long-lasting peace.

You can decide that your children and grandchildren will live on an increasingly healthy planet, and that they will continue our long human journey in a world where *all life* is considered sacred.

That is what we are talking about today. Your choice. As a teacher, I believe in you deeply. I know that you have it in you . . . to design and build the Renaissance of the 21st Century.

Thank you.

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