

BOOK

The End of Big: How the Internet Makes David the New Goliath

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PUBLISHER

St. Martin's Press

PUBLICATION DATE

April 2013

SYNOPSIS [From the publisher]

How seemingly innocuous technologies are unsettling the balance of power by putting it in the hands of the masses - and what a world without "big" will mean for all of us. In *The End of Big*, social media pioneer, political and business strategist, and Harvard Kennedy School faculty member Nicco Mele offers a fascinating, sometimes frightening look at how our ability to stay connected - constantly, instantly, and globally - is dramatically changing our world.

Governments are being upended by individuals relying only on social media. Major political parties are seeing their power eroded by grassroots forces through online fund-raising. Universities are scrambling to preserve their student populations in the face of less expensive, more accessible online courses. Print and broadcast news outlets are struggling to compete with citizen journalists and bloggers. Our traditional institutions are being disrupted in revolutionary ways, some for the better. But, as Nicco Mele argues, the benefits of new technology come with unintended consequences.

"Radical connectivity – our breathtaking ability to send vast amounts of data instantly, constantly, and globally – has all but transformed politics, business, and culture, bringing about the upheaval of traditional 'big' institutions and the empowerment of upstarts and renegades."

"You might ask, isn't the destruction of old institutions potentially a pretty good thing? Many traditional, big institutions are deeply flawed and even corrupt – they deserve to die . . . our institutions have in fact failed us."

"Authority and expertise are already being displaced in the corridors of academia . . . the ability to publish anything at anytime to any audience at virtually no cost has led to an explosion of educational and research-based resources online, radically democratizing the creation, consumption, and dissemination of knowledge."

"Neither faculties nor their deans and presidents feel especially pressed to search continuously for new and better ways of educating their students." Derek Bok, former Harvard President

"Radical connectivity – the ability to reach anyone, anywhere, with high quality video, at

practically zero cost – is leading to an unbundling of the university education . . . in the unbundling of the university, all your classes and professors are available individually."

"Universities have long enabled students to 'learn stuff that they couldn't learn elsewhere – to be certified by those experts as having actually learned said stuff.' Now that universities are losing control . . . how much longer [will they] determine authoritatively who among us is recognized as having mastered and assimilated that knowledge[?]"

"A number of things contribute to the market value of an institutionally granted credential for individual students, including the institution's reputation and excellence. Not only can students now find proxies for these functions outside academia, but new ways of building reputations entirely beyond credentialing are also taking hold – things like maintaining a subject area or making significant contributions to Wikipedia over time, building an online reputation."

"Another reason to go to college – beyond credentialing and reputation – is networking. Before radical connectivity, institutions of higher education helped students build and maintain relationships."

"Critics now perceive the whole system as out of date. In our age of instantaneous global communication, peer review's slow pace seems to hold back scientific process . . . peer review may provide accountability, but it is in many ways deeply flawed and inadequate in the digital age."

"For traditional academic authorities, the diversity wrought by radical connectivity may prove a rather scary thing. We've entered a brave new world in which anyone, theoretically, can contribute to intellectual debates, regardless of their degrees, publications, conference presentations, or other educational accomplishments. The result is an erosion of professional authority, a trend visible in other professional fields."

"Rote memorization as a part of classroom instruction has mostly departed from our curriculum."

"Technology empowers the individual. The power that used to be very institutional is now more diffuse. When power is more diffuse, it doesn't completely level the playing field, but a significant leveling occurs. Over a decade of going after Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda, we spent somewhere in the neighborhood of \$3 trillion, maybe even \$4 trillion. The most aggressive estimate by those who study this is that Al Qaeda in the same time period spent something like \$5 million."

"In some ways, size and complexity becomes an impediment to success. It's not that when you're big you can't be successful, but it used to be that being big was always an asset. When you were big, you could dictate all kinds of things. Scale was inherently more valuable and that's not true anymore."